The Process of Reporting Suspicions of Child Maltreatment for Teachers: A Grounded Theory

Study

by

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Abstract

Child maltreatment is widely considered a major public health and societal concern affecting numerous children worldwide (Burczycka & Conroy, 2018; Cyr, Michel, & Dumais, 2013; UNICEF, 2006). Due to their proximity to children, teachers have a legal responsibility to report their suspicions of child maltreatment (Department of Justice Canada, 2017b); however, the majority of suspected cases of child maltreatment go unreported by teachers (Gallagher-MacKay, 2014; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Campbell, 2011; Walsh & Jones, 2016). Given the detrimental impacts of maltreatment on children, developing a thorough understanding of teachers' failure to report their suspicions is crucial.

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory of the process of reporting suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence for teachers using grounded theory methodology, which later evolved to encompass child maltreatment more broadly. The participants were seven female and two male teachers who ranged in age from 26 to 65 years old (mean 40.8 years old), from diverse cultural, professional, and personal backgrounds. The data included individual interviews during which teachers discussed their experiences and perspectives related to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. From an analysis of the data, I developed seven primary processes that comprise the overall grounded theory. The primary processes include: *Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interest*, *Developing Suspicion*, *Teachers' Individual Contexts*, *Considering Teaching Context*, *Experiencing Uncertainty*, *Gathering Information*, and *Deciding Whether to Report*. The processes are interrelated, and represent the largely uphill process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. Based on the current findings, recommendations for theory, research, and practice are discussed. Findings are discussed in light of the importance of re-conceptualizing mandatory reporting to understand it in terms of a

process for teachers. Methodological and procedural challenges in mandatory reporting research are discussed, as well as the value of using qualitative approaches. Finally, implications for practice are discussed with recommendations for improvements in both the process of mandated reporting, as well as the teaching profession broadly, including the development and implementation of interventions pertaining to mandatory reporting training, reducing teacher stress, and improving workplace relationships.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Katherine Vink. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project name "The Process of Reporting Child Exposure to Domestic Violence for Teachers", No. Pro00069525, January 6, 2017.

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First, I would like to thank the teachers who participated in this study. Your perspectives and experiences are invaluable in this area of research, and I find myself constantly in awe of the commitment and passion you exude in providing children with the support and education they deserve. I hope that by sharing your experiences, we can improve the mandatory reporting process for all teachers.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Child maltreatment is widely considered a major public health and societal concern (Cyr, Michel, & Dumais, 2013; UNICEF, 2006). Worldwide, children are experiencing maltreatment as a result of domestic violence at alarmingly high rates (UNICEF, 2006), with exposure to domestic violence accounting for a significant proportion of child victimization (Trocmé et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2006). In order to reduce the negative effects of child maltreatment, it is crucial that victimized children be identified early, and that they receive appropriate support. When the majority of a child's life is spent within the education system, teachers become one of the most vital supports for children finding safety from domestic violence. Due to their proximity to children, all Canadian teachers are bound by provincial laws to report their suspicions of child maltreatment (Department of Justice Canada, 2017b). However, with the innumerable responsibilities teachers have, they are often seen as being hesitant to report what might be signs of child maltreatment, and thus, the majority of cases go unreported (Gallagher-MacKay, 2014; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Campbell, 2011; Walsh & Jones, 2016).

In the field of mandatory reporting, most researchers have strived to understand the phenomena of non-reporting by identifying specific barriers to reporting that professionals face. To date, several barriers have been identified and thoroughly researched including: ambiguity in the reporting process (Walsh, Farrell, Schweitzer, & Bridgstock, 2005; Worley & Melton, 2013), lack of knowledge and training (Falkiner, Thomson, Guadagno, & Day, 2017; Kenny, 2004; Kenny, Abreu, Helpingstine, Lopez, & Mathews, 2018; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Webster, O'Toole, O'Toole, & Lucal, 2005), concerns regarding the impact of reporting (Jones et al., 2008; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009), and negative past experiences with reporting to Child Protective Services (Kenny, 2001; Kuruppu et al., 2018;

O'Toole, Webster, O'Toole, & Lucal, 1999; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000). Although the identification of these barriers has provided valuable information pertaining to our understanding of mandatory reporting, rates of non-reporting remain alarmingly high.

In recent years, researchers have called for a change in focus from the identification of specific barriers, to the development of a broader understanding of mandatory reporting (Walsh, Bridgstock, Farrell, Rassafiani, & Schweitzer, 2008). To do so, some researchers have made efforts to categorize the barriers faced by mandated reporters (Walsh et al., 2008), as well as identify how mandated reporters balance ethics and law when deciding whether or not to report their suspicions (Feng, Chen, Fetzer, Feng, & Lin, 2012). Although these recent research efforts have provided important information regarding the complexities of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, they have fallen short of examining the entire reporting process. These gaps in the literature call for specific theory development in order to more closely examine and understand the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers.

Given the prevalence and negative impact of child maltreatment, I believe it is crucial to continue research efforts in understanding the phenomena of non-reporting. The original purpose of this study was to develop a theory of the process of reporting suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence for teachers specifically; however, as the research project progressed, the data more accurately reflected teachers' experiences reporting suspicions of all forms of child maltreatment. It is my hope that the findings of this study will provide a valuable explanation of the process of reporting for teachers that will stimulate further discussion and inquiry, and ultimately contribute to the global knowledge of effective ways to reduce child maltreatment through early identification and intervention.

General Description of Study

The original purpose of this study was to address the primary research question of: What is the process of reporting suspected cases of child exposure to domestic violence for teachers? In response to how participants described their experiences, this purpose evolved to encompass child maltreatment more broadly, as opposed to child exposure to domestic violence (CEDV) specifically. Using grounded theory methodology I developed a theory of the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers that was based on the perceptions and experiences of teachers themselves. Grounded theory is a methodology typically used when a broad explanation for a process or phenomenon is needed (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, it is most appropriate to use this methodology when existing theories do not accurately address the problem or the population of people that are being studied. In the current study, data originated from individual interviews with teachers who had prior experiences with suspicions of child maltreatment at some point during their teaching career. I utilized the Straussian grounded theory approach (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), by which I subjected the data to three rigorous stages of analysis, and ultimately developed a theory of this process. The theory provides a detailed explanation of the complex and interrelated process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers.

Overview of Contents

In the next chapter, I review existing literature related to mandatory reporting within the teaching profession. The review covers the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and child maltreatment, a description of what mandatory reporting is and the phenomena of non-reporting, the role of teachers as mandated reporters, and the barriers professional face in regard to mandatory reporting.

In chapter three I cover the methodology and procedures I used in this study. In particular this includes a discussion of the variations of grounded theory and the philosophical underpinnings, my process of selecting a grounded theory design to use, a description of the participants, data collection method, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. In this chapter I also include a discussion of my process as the researcher, including my biases and assumptions related to child maltreatment and mandatory reporting.

In chapter four I present the findings of the current study. I begin with a description of the participants as well as an analogy related to the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, which combined, provide a foundation for understanding the overall grounded theory. The grounded theory I developed consists of seven primary processes including: *Developing Suspicion, Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interest*, *Teachers' Individual Contexts, Considering Teaching Context*, *Experiencing Uncertainty*, *Gathering Information*, and *Deciding Whether to Report*, which I describe in detail in this chapter.

In the final chapter I provide a summary of the individual processes as well as my grounded theory as a whole, and discuss how the findings relate to existing literature. I then discuss the implications for theory, research, and practice. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Domestic Violence

Over the past 50 years, awareness has increased regarding the pervasiveness and detrimental impacts of domestic violence, which is now widely considered a major public health problem affecting adults, families, and children worldwide (Carlson, Voith, Brown, & Holmes, 2019; García-Moreno, Pallitto, Devries, Stöckl, Watts, & Abrahams, 2013). Domestic violence is often defined as the use of abusive behaviour to control or harm an individual in the context of a family or intimate partner relationship (Department of Justice Canada, 2017a). The most common types of domestic violence in Canada are intimate partner violence, child maltreatment, and elder abuse, all of which occur in several forms including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, and neglect. Based on police reports, there were over 90 000 victims of domestic violence in Canada in 2016 (Burczycka & Conroy, 2018). However, the number of victims is considered to be a gross underrepresentation, as many cases of domestic violence go unreported to the police (Burczycka & Conroy, 2018; Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deana, 2002; Spivak, Jenkin, VanAudenhove, Lee, Kelly, & Iskander, 2014). The negative impacts of domestic violence are detrimental on both individual and societal levels. For instance, victims of domestic violence often experience health and medical complications, psychological difficulties, and challenges related to parenting (Black, 2011; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Rusconi-Serpa, Suardi, Moser, & Schechter, 2015; Waldrop & Resick, 2004). Additionally, domestic violence makes a severe economic impact on Canada, with spousal violence alone costing approximately $7.4 billion each year (Zhang, Hoddenbagh, McDonald, & Scrim, 2012). These costs are related to the victims (e.g., medical attention, lost wages), third parties (e.g., social services, losses to employers), and the justice system (e.g., police, legal aid, court proceedings).

It is conceivable that if we were to take into account all forms of domestic violence, than the economic costs in Canada would be substantially higher than the estimate referenced above.

Children represent a particularly vulnerable population when it comes to domestic violence victimization. According to results from the 2014 Canadian General Social Survey-Victimization, nearly one third of Canadians reported experiencing some form of physical or sexual abuse during their childhood (Burczycka & Conroy, 2017). Of that one third of Canadians, 93% did not speak to the police or Child Protective Services during their childhood regarding their victimization. These rates are alarming in and of themselves; however, it is important to note that this only represents victims of two of the five main forms of maltreatment. It is likely the rates would be even higher had data been collected on all forms of maltreatment.

Child maltreatment has been recognized as a societal problem since at least the 1960s (Cyr et al., 2013), and since then, additional focus has been placed on the various subtypes of child maltreatment. Specifically, over the past two decades, child exposure to domestic violence (CEDV) has acquired global attention and is now widely recognized as a prevalent form of child maltreatment (Afifi, MacMillan, Boyle, Taillieu, Cheung, & Sareen, 2014; Cross, Mathews, Tonmyr, Scott, & Ouimet, 2012; Edleson, 1999; Henry, 2017; Nixon, Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop, & Walsh, 2007).

Child Exposure to Domestic Violence

It is estimated that as many as 275 million children worldwide are exposed to domestic violence during their childhood (UNICEF, 2006). In Canada, the most recent estimates are that 362 000 children are exposed to domestic violence each year (UNICEF, 2006). According to results from the 2014 Canadian General Social Survey-Victimization, approximately 10% of Canadians reported witnessing violence perpetrated by their parent at some point during their

childhood (Burczycka & Conroy, 2017). Of those who witnessed parental violence, 70% also reported being the victim of physical and/or sexual abuse during their childhood.

CEDV is commonly defined as being within sight or sound of violence, or becoming aware of domestic violence occurring in the home (e.g., being told about the violence, seeing the consequences of the violence) (Edleson, Ellerton, Seagren, Kirchberh, Schmidt, & Ambrose, 2007; Holden, 2003; Wathen & MacMillan, 2013). CEDV can lead to several negative immediate and long-term outcomes for children including emotional, behavioural, and social problems (Burczycka & Conroy, 2017; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Campbell, 2011; Kiesel, Piescher, & Edleson, 2016; King & Scott, 2014; McTavish, MacGregor, Wathen, & MacMillian, 2016; Vu, Jouriles, McDonald, & Rosenfield, 2016). The most common negative outcomes associated with exposure to domestic violence include: depression, anxiety, traumatic stress reactions, withdrawal, substance abuse, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, aggression toward peers, school truancy, as well as physical complaints such as headaches and tiredness (Alpert, Cohen, & Sege, 1997; Baker & Jaffe, 2006; Byrne & Taylor, 2007; Graham-Bermann, Castor, Miller, & Howell, 2012; Humphreys, 2001; Swenson & Logan, 2016; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003). Compared to children from non-violent homes, children exposed to violence in the home demonstrate higher levels of psychosocial disorders, and greater adaptive and emotional difficulties (Cortiñas, Rivera, & Martínez, 2018). Additionally, exposure to domestic violence significantly increases a child's risk of also becoming victim to physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment (Graham-Bermann et al., 2012; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Osofsky, 2003).

A considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding the warning signs and symptoms associated with exposure to domestic violence for school age children and

adolescents. In addition to the negative outcomes of CEDV discussed above, warning signs often include increased externalizing behaviours and difficulties with social relationships. In particular, CEDV is associated with increased bullying perpetration (Baldry, 2003; Holt, Kaufman, Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2009; Knous-Westfall, Ehrensaft, MacDonell, & Cohen, 2012), as well as increased teen dating violence perpetration (Ferguson, Miguel, Garza, & Jerabeck, 2012; Garrido &Taussig, 2013; Jouriles, Mueller, Rosenfield, McDonald, & Dodson, 2012; Kinsfogel, & Grych, 2004; Narayan, Englund, Carlson, & Egeland, 2014) and victimization (Choi, & Temple, 2016; Garrido &Taussig, 2013; Karlsson, Temple, Weston, & Le, 2016). Young children, ages 3 to 5, who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to be involved in conflict with peers and have increased fearful reactions to such conflict compared to non-exposed children (Cummings, Pellegrini, Notarius, & Cummings, 1989; Davies, Cicchetti, & Martin, 2012). One theory used to explain the relationship between CEDV and bullying and teen dating violence perpetration and victimization is the Intergenerational Transmission of Violence Theory (Curtis, 1963; Widom & Wilson, 2015), which is rooted in Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence Theory posits that violence is a learned behaviour, and when children are exposed to it at a young age they may develop the belief that using violence is an appropriate way to address conflict (Dardis, Dixon, Edwards, & Turchik, 2015; Widom & Wilson, 2015).

In addition to the direct and immediate effects that exposure to violence can have on children, they are also often negatively impacted by the quality of parenting they receive. In households with domestic violence, parents' capacity and ability to meet their children's needs are often compromised (Holden, 2003; Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Sousa et al., 2011). In many cases, parents experience increased stress and negative emotionality in response to

domestic violence, which in turn, has been shown to impact the quality and strength of attachment they form with their children (Holden, 2003; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, & Semel, 2002; Rikhye et al., 2008; Sousa et al., 2011; Styron & Janoff Bulman, 1997). Bowlby's (1969) Theory of Attachment highlights the important role healthy parent-child attachments play in child development. Strong, secure, and healthy parent-child attachments have been shown to correspond to positive developmental outcomes for children, whereas weak, insecure, and unhealthy parent-child attachments are often associated with poorer developmental outcomes, such as increased internalizing and externalizing difficulties, aggression, and social relationship difficulties (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Davies, 2004; Eliot & Cornell, 2009; Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; Styron & Janoff Bulman, 1997). Therefore, not only are children often negatively impacted directly from exposure to domestic violence, they are also at further risk for emotional, psychological, and behavioural difficulties due to the indirect effects domestic violence has on the family as a whole.

Although the co-occurrence of exposure to domestic violence with other forms of child maltreatment is often high (Dong et al., 2004; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2015; Hamby & Grych, 2013; Osofsky, 2003), a substantial proportion of children continue to solely experience exposure to domestic violence. According to results from the 2008 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, a single form of child maltreatment was identified in 82% of the 85 000 substantiated child maltreatment investigations, with exposure to domestic violence accounting for the largest proportion (31%) of these cases (Trocmé et al., 2010). Not only is CEDV one of the most prevalent forms of child maltreatment in Canada, the signs and symptoms of CEDV can differ from other forms of child maltreatment. The warning signs associated CEDV are often more covert in comparison to those associated with other forms

of child maltreatment, particularly physical abuse. Children who experience physical abuse are often considered easier to identify as a result of the observable signs and symptoms (e.g., cuts, bruises) (Goebbels, Nicholson, Walsh, & De Vries, 2008; Kenny, 2001; Walsh, K., Mathews, B., Rassafiani, M., Farrell, A., & Butler, 2012). However, children who are exposed to domestic violence are often more difficult to identify as the signs and symptoms associated with this form of maltreatment tend to be emotional, psychological, and behavioural in nature; changes that can also be the result of various developmental and life experiences (e.g., trauma, parental divorce) (Cook et al., 2017; Van der Koll; Weaver, J. M., & Schofield, 2015). This demonstrates the importance of focusing research and intervention efforts on specific subtypes of child maltreatment, in addition to child maltreatment as a whole.

In order to reduce the negative effects of exposure to domestic violence, it is crucial that victimized children be identified early. Unfortunately, however, the suspected rate of exposure to domestic violence far exceeds estimates referenced above, as the majority of cases go unreported to Child Protective Services and the police (Burczycka & Conroy, 2018; Gilligan, 1998; Jaffe et al., 2011; Kenny & McEachern 2002; UNICEF, 2006).

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting, also known as *duty to report*, is the legal duty for adults and certain professionals in Canada to report their suspicions of child maltreatment to their local Child Protective Services (Department of Justice Canada, 2017b). Mandatory reporting legislation is governed provincially; however, the procedures remain largely consistent across provinces and territories. Specifically, Canadian adults and certain professionals are required to report their suspicions of child maltreatment directly to their local Child Protective Services, which are either provincially regulated or provincially run agencies. These provincial agencies assess the reported

situations and utilize a comprehensive set of guidelines to determine the level of risk posed to the child, which in turn, informs investigation and intervention efforts (e.g., Government of Alberta, 2016; Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2018).

Canadian provinces began enacting mandatory reporting legislation in the 1960s (e.g., Ontario in 1965, Alberta in 1966), and since then, every province and territory has implemented some form of legislation (Department of Justice Canada, 2017b). Countries and provinces across the world began enacting mandatory reporting legislation in response to the increased awareness of the prevalence and negative impact of child maltreatment (Mathews & Kenny, 2008; Tonmyr, Mathews, Shields, Hovdestad, & Afifi, 2018). Mandatory reporting legislation reflects the belief that society has a responsibility to help protect vulnerable populations, most notably, children (Gilbert et al., 2009; Mathews & Kenny, 2008).

In regard to CEDV, some provinces explicitly reference it in their legislation, where others include it under emotional abuse or neglect. For example, Nova Scotia's *Children and Family Services Act* (2015) states: "a child is in need of protective services where the child has been exposed to, or has been made aware of, violence by or towards a parent or guardian, or another person residing with the child" (pp. 17-18). Alternatively, Alberta's *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* (2000) addresses exposure to domestic violence when referencing emotional injury: "a child is emotionally injured if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the emotional injury is the result of exposure to domestic violence or severe domestic disharmony" (p. 11). Currently, all Canadian provinces and territories, with the exception of New Brunswick and Ontario, explicitly include exposure to domestic violence in their mandatory reporting legislation.

In addition to mandatory reporting being a duty for all Canadian adults, it is also a specific responsibility for certain professionals. Due to their proximity to and interaction with children, those working in professions such as medicine, allied health, mental health, and education are required by law and their profession to report their suspicions of child maltreatment to their local Child Protective Services (Gilbert et al., 2009; Mathews & Kenny, 2008). Unlike average Canadians adults, these professionals can be held liable if they do not report their suspicions; however, if a suspicion is reported in 'good faith' there are no legal repercussions in Canada (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2000; Mathews & Kenny, 2008). Since the enactment of mandatory reporting legislation in Canada, there has been a substantial increase in the number of reports made to Child Protective Services across Canada (Tonmyr et al., 2018), but despite this increase, many cases continue to go unreported by professionals (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Burczycka & Conroy, 2018; Felson et al., 2002; Spivak et al., 2014).

Teachers as Mandated Reporters

When the majority of a child's life is spent within the education system, teachers become one of the most vital supports for children finding safety from domestic violence. Due to their direct work with children, teachers are in a unique position of being able to notice warning signs and changes in behaviour associated with exposure to domestic violence (Byrne & Taylor, 2007). Moreover, given the prevalence of CEDV and their frequency of contact with children, it is highly likely that teachers will come into contact with victims at some point during their career. Optimistically, my Master's thesis concluded that the majority of pre-service teachers are aware of their duty to report, and have strong intentions to report suspected cases of CEDV (Vink & Jaffe, 2014). However, despite their good intentions, we have also found that one in five

practicing teachers are not familiar with their school's reporting procedures (Vink & Daniels, 2015). Not only do teachers lack familiarity, they are often seen as being hesitant to report what might be signs of exposure to violence (Gallagher-MacKay, 2014; Walsh & Jones, 2016). As a result, the majority of suspected cases of child maltreatment go unreported by teachers (Gallagher-MacKay, 2014; Gracia, 1995; Greytak, 2009; Jaffe et al., 2011; Kesner & Robinson, 2002). This trend goes against what many contemporary theories of motivation suggest, which is that intention is often the strongest predictor of action (Ajzen, 1991), and implies that a different approach is need to understand what happens between the intention to report and action, or lack thereof.

Barriers to Mandatory Reporting

Several barriers that influence mandatory reporting for professionals have been identified and well researched. Although a variety of barriers have been identified, I will present those that have been observed most frequently and consistently throughout the literature, including: ambiguity in reporting, lack of knowledge, concern regarding the impact of reporting, and negative experiences with Child Protective Services. When exploring barriers to mandatory reporting, researchers have often studied them across professions; therefore, the barriers included in this section are those that have been identified for many different types of mandated professionals. However, I have included a specific focus on how the barriers present for teachers when literature was available.

Ambiguity in reporting. Many mandated reporters have argued that the ambiguity of the reporting policies makes it difficult for them to discern when to report (Worley & Melton, 2013; Walsh et al., 2005). Specifically, most policies require mandated reporters to report to Child Protective Services when they have *reasonable suspicion* that a child has been harmed or is at

risk of harm. This ambiguity is twofold in that it leaves mandated reporters in a position of 1)

detecting child maltreatment, and 2) deciding whether or not their suspicions reach the threshold

of *reasonable suspicion* (Egu & Weiss, 2003; Levi, Crowell, Walsh, & Dellasega, 2015; Walsh

et al., 2008). Mandated reporters must first become aware of child maltreatment, which may be

dependent on their *reasonable suspicion* threshold, and then they must decide whether or not it

constitutes a *reasonable suspicion*. Unfortunately, mandated reporters often decide what the

threshold of *reasonable suspicion* is on their own, as they are offered little guidance in regard to

what *reasonable suspicion* looks like practically (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Levi & Crowell, 2011).

Moreover, researchers have found that there is little consensus regarding what defines

reasonable suspicion both within and across professions (de Haan, Joy, Beddoe, & Iam, 2018;

Crowell & Levi, 2012; Levi & Brown, 2005; Levi & Crowell, 2011; Levi et al., 2015; Richards,

2017). For instance, childcare providers often set a significantly higher threshold for *reasonable*

suspicion than social workers, law enforcement, and school counsellors (Crowell & Levi, 2012),

but there is also significant variability in thresholds for *reasonable suspicion* between childcare

providers (Levi et al., 2015). Levi and colleagues (2015) argued that without a standard

interpretation of what constitutes *reasonable suspicion*, mandated reporters are especially

susceptible to their pre-existing biases and beliefs, which can ultimately undermine their duty to

report. For instance, a professional may be biased based on their knowledge or previous

experience with the child and family, or by their beliefs regarding domestic violence in general

(Berger, McDaniel, & Paxson, 2005; Levi et al., 2015). However, some researchers and

lawmakers argue that it is crucial for the policy to be vague in order to maximize the detection of

child maltreatment (Coleman, Dodge, & Campbell, 2010; Mathews & Kenny, 2008). Although

maximizing detection is important, this may only be effective if mandated professionals have the

knowledge to accurately identify child maltreatment, and also have a threshold for *reasonable suspicion* that is evidence-based.

Bias and personal beliefs have been found to have a significant impact on mandated reporters' likelihood to report suspicions of child maltreatment (Krase, 2013, 2015; Levi et al., 2015). Krase and colleagues (2013) categorized three forms of bias that have been shown to impact professionals' likelihood to report suspicions of child maltreatment including visibility/exposure bias, labeling bias, and reporting bias. Visibility/exposure bias refers to instances in which certain children and families are more identifiable by professionals based on their familial circumstances. For instance, families living in poverty may be more likely to utilize social services, thus increasing the frequency of which they interact with professionals. Based on this increased frequency of interactions, children living in poverty who are also experiencing maltreatment may be more likely to be identified than children experiencing maltreatment who are not living in poverty (Ards, Myers, Malkis, Sugrue, & Zhou, 2003).

Labeling bias refers to instances in which mandated reporters have a tendency to seek out and/or label child maltreatment amongst certain population groups. In particular, some researchers have found that professionals may be more likely to suspect child maltreatment when there are differences in parenting styles or cultural differences in child rearing between them and the child's parents (Ards, Chung, Myers, 1998; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004). Conversely, Ibanez, Borrego, Pemberton, and Terao (2006) found that mandated reporters who fostered a strong ethnic identity were less likely to report suspicions of child maltreatment for children of their same ethnicity. Ibanez and colleagues (2006) argued that this difference in likelihood to report might be related to the tendency for individuals to have more positive attitudes towards people of their same ethnicity. This aligns closely with the barrier of ambiguity

in reporting as it demonstrates the propensity for mandated reporters to be influenced by their

biases regarding culture, population groups, and families when determining what constitutes

reasonable suspicion (Berger, McDaniel, & Paxson, 2005; Levi et al., 2015).

Reporting bias refers to instances in which bias results in differences in reporting

behaviours in otherwise similar cases. Children and families of racial and ethnic minorities are

disproportionately represented in the child protection system (Ards et al., 2003; Krase, 2013,

2015; Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon, & MacLaurin, 2013; Trocmé et al., 2004). Researchers have been

working to understand this disparity, commonly by exploring reporting bias in relation to racial

and cultural biases, which has largely produced inconsistent findings (Ards et al., 2003; Ibanez et

al., 2006; Krase, 2013). Some researchers who examined case files found that the race of the

child and their family influenced professionals' likelihood of reporting suspected maltreatment

(Lane, Rubin, Monteith, & Christian, 2002; Lu et al., 2004), whereas several other researchers

who used vignettes found that race did not significantly influence reporting behaviour (Egu &

Weiss, 2003; Webster et al., 2005). Researchers who have examined the influence of bias and

personal beliefs on reporting behaviour have often experienced methodological limitations in

their studies. Specifically, some researchers argue that vignettes may not accurately represent

real life scenarios, and that participants may respond in a socially desirable manner given the

sensitive nature of child maltreatment (Ibanez et al., 2006; Krase, 2013, 2015). Despite the

methodological limitations, many researchers argue that bias is present in professionals' decision

making regarding reporting suspicions of child maltreatment.

When exploring school administrators' thresholds for *reasonable suspicion* and reporting,

de Haan and colleagues (2018) found that reporting suspicions encompassed more than meeting

one threshold. Instead, they claimed that reporting suspicions is actually a process in which

several thresholds must be met in succession. These thresholds include stages such as forming a

suspicion, building a rationale for reporting, and compiling evidence, all of which are influenced

by individual and systemic factors, such as administrator's beliefs and school culture. As a result

of this, they argued that the development of an operational definition of *reasonable suspicion*

might not be feasible, as it would not be able to account for the diversity in the individual and

systemic factors. This demonstrates the complexity of mandatory reporting, and the importance

of looking at reporting behaviour holistically. Although de Haan and colleagues (2018) present

compelling findings regarding reporting behaviour, it is important to consider that educators in

New Zealand are not legally mandated to report their suspicions of child maltreatment.

Therefore, given their duty to report, it is possible that educators in Canada experience different

thresholds for *reasonable suspicion* and reporting than those in New Zealand. Additionally, the

study conducted by de Haan and colleagues (2018) only focused on the experiences of

administrators, which may be quite different than the experiences of teachers.

  Lack of knowledge. Mandated reporters from various fields have consistently expressed

their perceived lack of knowledge and understanding regarding their duty to report (Bjørknes,

Iversen, Nordrehaug Åstrøm, & Vaksdal Brattabø, 2018; Falkiner, Thomson, Guadagno, & Day,

2017; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Kimber, McTavish, Luo, Couturier, Dimitropoloulos, &

MacMillan, 2019; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Sethi, Bellis, Hughes,

Gilbert, Mitis, & Galea, 2013; Webster et al., 2005). This lack of knowledge is partially

impacted by the minimal training professionals receive regarding mandatory reporting policies

and procedures. Many professionals express a desire to receive additional training specific to

mandatory reporting, as they feel unprepared to address this obligation of their profession

(Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Kimber et al., 2019; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Sethi, et al.,

2013; Webster et al., 2005). Moreover, lack of training regarding reporting procedures often also extends to a lack of training regarding how to recognize the signs and symptoms associated with child maltreatment (Alvarez, Kenny, Donohue, & Carpin, 2004; McTavish et al., 2017; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tufford, Bogo, & Asakura, 2015). Specifically, Kuruppu, (2018) found that physicians felt they lacked appropriate education on how to properly identify signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, and expressed a desire for further training. Counselors, mental health professionals, nurses, and teachers have consistently expressed similar concerns regarding lack of knowledge and training (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Bryant & Baldwin, 2010; Kenny, 2004; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Orelove, Hollahan, & Myles, 2000; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009). In Canada, Ward, Bennett, Plint, King, Jabbour, and Gaboury (2004) found that pediatric residents' competency regarding mandatory reporting was positively associated with their years of experience and number of child maltreatment cases they encountered. However, despite this increase in competency, 92% of pediatric residents felt they still needed further training regarding child maltreatment and mandatory reporting.

In their review of studies of mandatory reporting, Walsh and colleagues (2012) found that professionals are most likely to report when maltreatment is severe, observable, physical in nature, or when a child has directly disclosed maltreatment. Additionally, the vast majority of mandatory reports made by teachers involve some form of physical abuse (Kenny, 2001; Runyan et al., 2005). However, in Canada, the most common forms of child maltreatment are believed to be exposure to domestic violence and neglect (Trocmé et al., 2010). Therefore, it is conceivable that a large number of victimized children are not being identified and reported by teachers. It is possible that this lack of detection and reporting is, in part, impacted by a lack of training regarding child maltreatment.

Training programs regarding mandatory reporting have been found to improve mandated reporters' knowledge of reporting policy, ability to recognize child maltreatment, and their likelihood of reporting their suspicions (Alvarez, Donohue, Carpenter, Romero, Allen, & Cross, 2010; Bjørknes et al., 2018; Flaherty, Sege, Griffith, Price, Wasserman, & Slora, 2008; Renninger, Veach, & Bagdade, 2002). Although the benefits of additional training are evident, the support for and consistent implementation of such training appears to be lacking across professions (Alvarez et al., 2004; Bjørknes et al., 2018; Kenny, Abreu, Marchena, Helpingstine, Lopez-Griman, & Mathews, 2017). Moreover, although training is associated with increased likelihood of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, some professionals continue not to report (Flaherty et al., 2008; Rheingold et al., 2015), suggesting that other factors may be impacting their failure to report.

For decades, researchers have expressed concern regarding the lack of mandatory and consistent training for teachers regarding their duty to report (Alveraz et al., 2004; Falkiner et al., 2017; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Kimber et al., 2019; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Reiniger, Robison, & McHugh, 1995; Sethi et al., 2013; Tite, 1994; Webster et al., 2005). In Canada, the training teachers receive regarding duty to report is minimal and often varies across Bachelor of Education programs and school boards. Some Bachelor of Education programs in Canada incorporate duty to report into their curriculum; however, this typically only includes a portion of a lecture that is embedded within a larger course, such as the University of Western Ontario's (2019) *Safe and Accepting Schools* course. The importance of teachers' duty to report has been recognized by professional teaching associations in Canada, who have developed publications for teachers to assist them with their duty to report. These publications often include descriptions of duty to report, guidelines for how to recognize child maltreatment,

as well as procedures for reporting suspicions of child maltreatment (e.g., Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, 2011; Ontario College of Teachers, 2018). These resources are available to teachers; however, teachers are largely required to seek out these materials on their own, as they receive minimal in-service training and ongoing support regarding their duty to report. Given the lack of formal training teachers receive, it is not surprising that they express a lack of knowledge regarding mandatory reporting and feel largely ill-prepared to face this professional obligation.

Concern regarding the impact of reporting. Mandated reporting has been described as an emotional process for professionals who often experience feelings of fear, guilt, and stress regarding reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment (Jones et al., 2008; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009). Mandated reporters express that of the emotions, they most prominently and consistently experience fear when faced with their duty to report (Horwath, 2006; Jones et al., 2008; Schols, De Ruiter, & Öry, 2013). This fear is twofold in that they are (1) worried reporting will not actually help the child, and (2) worried about the legal and professional repercussions for themselves.

Concern for child. Mandated reporters across professions have consistently expressed a worry of how reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment may impact the child (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Delaronde, King, Bendel, & Reece, 2000; Falkiner, Thomson, & Day, 2017; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Schols et al., 2013). These worries are most commonly related to a fear that reporting suspicions may actually make things worse for the child. For instance, the belief that reporting may put children at additional risk for increased violence in the home if parents become aware of the report, or the fear of further traumatizing the child by involving Child Protective Services (Hawkins & McCallum, 2001; Yetman, 2007). Moreover, many mandated

reporters work in professions in which their relationship with the child and family is paramount

to the service they are providing (e.g., education, mental health, medical), and thus they worry

that reporting their suspicions may compromise the relationships they have built (Gallagher-

Mackay, 2014; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Tufford, 2016). Specifically, social workers are sometimes

seen as hesitant to report their suspicions, due to their concern over losing their client's trust and

harming the therapeutic relationship they have built (Tufford, 2016). Additionally, mandated

reporters have a fear of what may happen to both themselves and the child if they report and are

wrong about their suspicion (Delaronde et al., 2000; Goebbels et al., 2008; Goldman &

Padaychi, 2002; Kenny, 2001; Sinanan, 2011).

In regard to teachers specifically, they face some unique challenges in relation to their

fear of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. Much like other professions, teachers

describe a fear that reporting their suspicions will harm their relationship with the child

(Gallagher-Mackay, 2014). However, unlike some professions (e.g., medicine), teachers see the

children daily and often rely on their strong relationships with students to enhance children's

feelings of safety at school and to promote academic success (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Yetman,

2007). Therefore, when faced with the decision of reporting suspicions, teachers are sometimes

hesitant to do so in order to preserve their relationships with their students (Gallagher-Mackay,

2014).

Concern for self. Not only are mandated reporters fearful for the child when deciding to

report suspicions of child maltreatment, they also fear for themselves legally, professionally, and

personally. Many professionals express feeling intimidated by Child Protective Services and how

they conduct their investigations (Kenny, 2004; Kuruppu et al., 2018). This intimidation is

partially related to the common belief amongst mandated reporters that they could be personally

sued for reporting their suspicions (Bryant, 2009), as well as their fear of having to participate in legal proceedings as a result of their report (Horwath, 2006; Kenny, 2004; Kesner & Robinson, 2002; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Melton, 2005; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000; Webster et al., 2005). Additionally, although the identity of mandated reporters is kept confidential, many professionals fear the potential consequences of a parent identifying them as the reporter (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Kuruppu et al., 2018). Specifically, physicians and teachers expressed a fear of retaliation or revenge from parents, which they felt could compromise their career and personal safety (Horwath, 2006; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Yetman, 2007).

Mandated reporters also express the emotional toll reporting suspicions of child maltreatment takes on them (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Blaskett & Taylor, 2003; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009). They experience a range of emotions including, guilt, fear, dread, and stress when faced with their duty to report. Specifically, physicians and teachers have expressed that the emotional burden of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment to Child Protective Services has contributed to their failure to report their suspicions in the past (Blaskett & Taylor, 2003; Demirçin, Tütüncüler, Aslan, Güney, Atılgan, & Gülkesen, 2017). It is evident that the concern regarding the impact of reporting suspicions is multifaceted, and it places mandated reporters in the position of having to balance the needs of their clients and themselves, while also obliging their professional, legal, and moral responsibility to protect children from harm.

Negative experiences with Child Protective Services. For decades, mandated reporters have expressed distrust and frustration with Child Protective Services (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Horwath, 2006; Kenny, 2001; Kuruppu et al., 2018; O'Toole et al., 1999; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000). Melton (2005) argues that this longstanding tension

between mandated reporters and Child Protective Services is the result of the discrepancy

between the amount of services Child Protective Services is able to provide and the number of

children and families that are being reported to them. Many mandated reporters express feeling

frustrated when they report their suspicions, believing a child is in need of protection, and Child

Protective Services decides not to formally investigate (Kenny, 2001; Francis et al., 2012; Piltz

& Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994). In turn, this has contributed to school counselors' feeling as

though they often lack a certain level of evidence regarding their suspicions that would be

perceived as necessary in order for Child Protective Services to actually initiate an investigation

(Bryant & Milson, 2005; Hawkins & McCallum, 2001). This belief that there is a threshold of

evidence required likely contributes to underreporting, as mandated reporters may be

discouraged from contacting Child Protective Services unless they feel as though action will

actually be taken.

Mandated reporters also feel frustrated and discouraged regarding the minimal

communication between them and Child Protective Services following a report. Mandated

reporters often strive to seek assurances from Child Protective Services that their report is being

investigated by requesting feedback from them, which is consistently denied as Child Protective

Services is bound by limits of confidentiality (Dubowitz, Pitts, Litrownik, Cox, Runyan, &

Black, 2005; Yanowitz et al., 2003). Negative past experiences with Child Protective Services

can also exacerbate concerns for mandated reporters regarding their reporting practices

(Horwath, 2006; Kuruppu et al., 2018). Specifically, physicians often feel discouraged because

of their negative or difficult past experiences with Child Protective Services, which they state

impacts their current willingness to report (Kuruppu et al., 2018).

Overall, researchers have identified several barriers that influence professionals'

reporting behaviour and have explored them thoroughly. These barriers are complex, and appear

to truly impact the efficacy of the duty to report legislation. Although it is essential to identify

these specific and unique barriers, researchers have also argued for the importance of looking at

the barriers more broadly in order to understand how they relate to one another.

Understanding the Relationships Between Barriers

Most researchers have focused on identifying specific barriers to mandatory reporting,

although some have worked to categorize the barriers into larger themes in order to provide a

broader understanding of mandatory reporting. In their study of physician's reporting behaviour

in cases of child physical abuse, Warner and Hansen (1994) argued that factors influencing

reporting behaviour could be categorized into three classes: case, physician, or setting. These

findings were supported by Walsh and colleagues (2012) who reviewed existing literature on

teachers' mandatory reporting behaviour in cases of child physical abuse and neglect, and

categorized the factors that influence reporting behaviour into three broad domains: case

characteristics, teacher characteristics, and school environment. Case characteristics comprise the

unique variables of the individual case, such as whether or not there was a disclosure, type of

maltreatment, and severity of maltreatment. Teacher characteristics encompass the uniqueness of

the teachers themselves, including factors such as their teaching experience, training, and

knowledge. The school environment category represents the contextual factors such as school

policies and administrative support. These categories identified by Walsh and colleagues (2012)

provide a unique understanding of how barriers to reporting cluster together, including some of

the most common barriers I discussed above. Clustering together types of barriers may be helpful

in informing training and intervention efforts, as specific domains can be identified when

creating targeted interventions. However, some of the prominent barriers, such as emotions and experience with Child Protective Services, are not easily represented in the domains identified by Walsh and colleagues (2012). Moreover, these categories provide an understanding for how barriers may cluster together, but value still lies in developing an understanding of the relationships between barriers.

To gain an understanding of the interplay between some of the factors that influence reporting behaviour, Feng and colleagues (2012) conducted a study that examined the ethical and legal challenges faced by mandated reporters when reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Included in their sample of mandated reporters ($n = 18$) were social workers, physicians, nurses, and teachers. The researchers conducted individual interviews in which they asked the participants to describe their ethical and legal experiences reporting child maltreatment. The interviews were analyzed using a Straussian grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The results demonstrated the ethical complexities for reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Specifically, they found that mandated reporters experienced difficulty balancing the rights of the child with the rights of the parents, and reporting within the time requirements. Although this study provided important information regarding the complexities of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, their focus on law and ethics only explores a portion of the mandatory reporting experience. Moreover, their examination of child maltreatment in general using a broad sample ignores the unique contributing factors for teachers exclusively that may have been overlooked. The gaps in the literature call for specific theory development in order to more closely examine and understand the process of reporting suspicions of CEDV for teachers.

Present Study

Child maltreatment is an issue of global concern, one of which we have a societal responsibility to address (Cyr et al., 2013). Many countries around the world have accepted this responsibility, and have enacted mandatory reporting legislation to aid in the identification and early intervention for victimized children. Researchers have been exploring the efficacy of mandatory reporting for several decades, and despite increased knowledge regarding factors that influence professionals' reporting behaviour, many cases of suspected child maltreatment continue to go unreported (Gallagher-MacKay, 2014; Greytak, 2009; Jaffe et al., 2011; Kesner & Robinson, 2002). Researchers have worked to understand this failure to report, primarily by focusing on the identification of barriers that influence reporting behaviours. However, in conducting their studies, many researchers have included all forms of child maltreatment, as well as mandated reporters from various professions.

It is important to examine reporting suspicions of CEDV specifically, as the subtypes of maltreatment that comprise child maltreatment are not homogenous (Mathews, 2014). Although all forms of child maltreatment can lead to some similar negative outcomes (Mathews, 2014), the warning signs that contribute to suspicions may present differently, and thus, demonstrate unique processes for recognizing it and reporting it. For instance, warning signs associated with physical abuse are typically more observable (e.g., bruises, cuts) than those associated with CEDV (e.g., social, emotional, and behavioural changes) (Goebbels et al., 2008; Kenny, 2001; Walsh et al., 2012). As a result of the differences in detection of child maltreatment based on various forms of abuse, it is important to explore teachers' process of reporting suspicions of CEDV specifically in order to identify potential processes unique to this form of child maltreatment. Additionally, Mathews (2012) found that the frequency of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment varied

based on the type of mandated reporter, and by the form of child maltreatment. This demonstrates a clear need to examine reporting practices of a specific type of mandated reporter for a specific form of child maltreatment, as opposed to treating both mandated reporters and child maltreatment as homogenous groups.

Moreover, when exploring professionals' reporting of suspicions of child maltreatment, most researchers have focused specifically on the barriers mandated reporters face (Greytak, 2009; Kenny, 2001). However, valuable information also lies in the reasons or motivating factors that contribute to professionals' decisions to report their suspicions. In fact, barriers and motivators do not operate in isolation, they may both be present, thus requiring the mandated reporter to weigh all factors while making their decision of whether or not to report their suspicions. Not only do we lack an understanding of both barriers and motivating factors, we lack an understanding of how these factors influence one another, and to what extent.

As evidenced in this chapter, most of the literature regarding mandatory reporting represents a focus on reporting outcomes. Specifically, researchers have aimed to understand the behaviours of mandated professionals by exploring whether or not they report their suspicions, and the factors that directly influence those behaviours. However, few efforts have been made to understand mandatory reporting as an entire *process*, rather than a behavioural outcome (McTavish et al., 2017).

In order to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature, the purpose of this study was to examine the whole decision making process for teachers in regard to reporting suspected CEDV. To do this I proposed the following research question: what is the process of reporting suspected cases of child exposure to domestic violence for teachers? However, as data collection, analysis, and discussions with my research advisors progressed, it became clear this question was

too narrow. Teachers were not describing experiences unique to CEDV and instead did not seem

to distinguish between different forms of child maltreatment. Given that the reporting procedures

are the same regardless of the type of child maltreatment, I decided it was necessary to broaden

the scope of the research and thus offer a revised research question: what is the process of

reporting suspected cases of child maltreatment for teachers?

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Rationale for Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory is a research methodology that was developed by Anslem Strauss and

Barney Glaser in the 1960's that is used to develop new theories and hypotheses based on data

collected from participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Glaser developed grounded

theory as an alternative to the research norm of verifying and testing theories, which they argued

resulted in theory stagnation. Instead, they posited that grounded theory would provide

researchers with a systematic and rigorous method for developing theories that are directly

related to the phenomenon being studied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory

methodology allows for the inductive generation of ideas through the research process, as

opposed to using the data to confirm hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory is primarily rooted in the philosophic assumptions of *symbolic*

interactionism, which was heavily influenced by the works of George Herbert Mead (1934) and

Herbert Blumer (1969). Symbolic interactionism began with the teachings of Mead (1934), who

believed that individual development was a social process. Specifically, he argued that one's

ability to take the perspective of others has considerable influence over the development of their

own self-concept. In later years, inspired by the work of Mead, Blumer coined the term *symbolic*

interactionism (1969). Symbolic interactionism posits that there is a dynamic interaction between

oneself and the world, such that we play an active role in shaping our own world, but we are also

shaped by our social interactions. From this perspective, it is also argued that we as individuals

have the ability to interpret our social world and prescribe meaning to it based on our

understandings. It is believed that these meanings and understandings are what guide how we

act. Additionally, these meanings and understandings are considered fluid, as we are in a

continual process of reflecting on and analyzing our actions as we interact with the social world and gain new experiences. Overall, according to symbolic interactionism, how we act depends on the meaning we ascribe to certain things, but this meaning can be different for different people, and it can also change based on our personal and social experiences.

Grounded theory is a methodology designed primarily for studying social phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988). With roots in symbolic interactionism, grounded theorists often aim to gain an understanding of the complex interrelationship between the perceptions, ascribed meanings, and actions of their participants in a social world. In order to do so, grounded theorists must work to understand the world from their individual participant's perspectives to then develop an understanding of the socially-shared meaning amongst participants in regard to the phenomena being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Rennie et al., 1988).

It is recommended to use grounded theory methodology when a broad explanation for a process or phenomenon is needed (Creswell, 2012, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically, it is most appropriate to use this methodology when existing theories do not accurately address the problem or the population of people that are being studied. Grounded theory methodology allows the researcher to produce a substantive-level theory that is representative of the complexities of the problem and the uniqueness of the population and setting. Grounded theory is well suited for the study of mandatory reporting, given the current lack of theoretical understanding, as well as the socially laden nature of child maltreatment and mandatory reporting. Developing a suspicion of child maltreatment is one that typically occurs within the context of a social interaction, and the decision to report has implications at the individual and social levels. Moreover, teaching is an inherently social career that influences and is influenced

by broader social contexts (e.g., culture, politics). Through the use of grounded theory methodology I have been able to explore, in-depth, the process of mandatory reporting for teachers and develop a holistic picture of this complex dilemma.

Grounded Theory Variations

Over time, grounded theory methodology has been further developed and revised. Although Strauss and Glaser initially agreed on the core characteristics of grounded theory, they differed in their ontological and epistemological positions, thus resulting in different designs of grounded theory. Additionally, in the 1990's Cathy Charmaz argued for a third grounded theory design (Charmaz, 2006). The three main approaches to grounded theory include 1) traditional grounded theory, supported by Glaser, 2) Straussian grounded theory, supported by Strauss and Corbin, and 3) constructivist grounded theory, supported by Charmaz. The key characteristics of grounded theory are largely present in all designs; however, where they noticeably differ are in data analysis and conceptualization.

The traditional grounded theory approach emphasizes realism and the objectivity of the researcher (Glaser, 1992). Specifically, Glaser believes that one reality exists and that every individual will be able to recognize that one reality in the data and understand it in the same way. In other words, according to traditional grounded theorists, findings are considered to emerge from the data (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). The traditional grounded theory approach emphasizes the objectivity of the researcher, who aims to be a neutral observer of the data (Annells, 1996; Glaser, 1978).

The Straussian grounded theory approach is considered a pragmatic and more prescribed approach that emphasizes specific phases of data analysis (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The Straussian approach to grounded theory incorporates many characteristics of the

traditional grounded theory. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that theories do not

emerge from the data, but rather the researcher actively generates the theory from the data.

Strauss and Corbin embrace the symbolic interactionism underpinnings of grounded theory and

posit that there is an active relationship between the researcher and the data, one in which the

researcher is actively defining and interpreting meaning as data is gathered and analyzed (Corbin

& Strauss, 2008; Locke, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The Straussian grounded theory

approach is rooted in post-positivism and critical realism (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Specifically,

Strauss and Corbin argue that the purpose of social research is to work toward a representation of

reality, but that reality changes over time and grasping it is never fully achievable (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). Moreover, Strauss and Corbin argue that grounded theories are contextual and

embedded within culture and time; thus, they are pragmatic in their approach, arguing that

grounded theories can be time-limited and subject to error (Dewey, 1938; Strauss & Corbin,

1994). This approach to grounded theory does not require researchers to be objective toward the

data; instead it encourages researchers to identify their biases and develop an understanding of

how these biases may impact the ways in which they gather and analyze data (Howard-Payne,

2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The constructivist grounded theory approach emphasizes the relativism of multiple social

realities, and the mutual construction of a theory between the researcher and participants

(Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2006) argued that theories are not discovered in the data, but rather

an interpretation of the phenomenon is constructed based on the participants' experiences and the

researchers' knowledge. The constructivist grounded theory approach appreciates flexibility in

theory construction and recognizes that researchers cannot be completely objective.

Choosing a Grounded Theory Design

To appropriately choose which approach to grounded theory to use in my study, I first reflected on my personal assumptions and beliefs. For the past eight years I have been conducting research in the field of violence against women and children, with a specific focus on responses to these events by people who are mandated by law to respond. Additionally, I have been completing my graduate training in the field school and clinical child psychology. Through residency, practicum, and volunteer experiences associated with my schooling, I have provided therapeutic intervention to both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence. These experiences have provided me with a breadth of knowledge regarding the impact of domestic violence on victims, as well as the difficulties people experience in regard to reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment.

It was through my practicum placement at a school board in Ontario that led to my interest in supporting teachers in protecting children from maltreatment. During this placement, the number of teachers who were unaware of when and how to report their suspicions of child maltreatment continually surprised me. Since then, I have talked to numerous pre-service and practicing teachers who have consistently expressed both an interest and need to learn more about their role as mandated reporters. I believe that children deserve to grow up in homes free of violence, and that teachers' reporting practices must improve in order to help the children who are affected by violence. It is my hope that through continued research we will be able to identify specific areas during the reporting process for which teachers need support to help promote their reporting of suspicions.

To date, the majority of my research experience has involved quantitative research methods. However, I believe in taking a pragmatic approach to research, in that choosing which

research method to use should be based on which methodology can best answer the research question (Dewey, 1938). It is this belief that led me to conduct a research project using grounded theory methodology, despite my limited experience with qualitative research.

Given the extent of knowledge I have regarding child maltreatment, and that I am an advocate for increasing the reporting of suspicions by mandated reporters, I chose not to follow the traditional grounded theory approach and to instead use a Straussian approach. The choice between approaches was a decision to which I devoted a lot of time and thought. In reaching the decision to use a Staussian approach I weighed the different components of each approach and balanced that with the purpose of this particular project which was to produce research with practical value that will be considered a useful contribution to a practice setting (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Towards this end, despite Glaser's insistence on taking a neutral position to the data, I came to agree with McGhee and colleagues (2007) who argue that researchers who acknowledge their bias and existing knowledge of the phenomenon can develop novel theories that do not simply confirm their preconceived beliefs. Likewise, as supported by both the Straussian and constructivist grounded theory approaches, I came to appreciate the active role of the researcher. Within this, I did not relate to how the constructivist grounded theory approach emphasizes that theory is co-constructed with the participants, and instead connected with the Straussian grounded theory approach that is primarily researcher-driven and argues that the theory is generated from the data.

Straussian grounded theory has been criticized for being too prescribed; however, Strauss and Corbin believe that their approach does not force data, but instead it helps the researcher to focus on categories that participants are continually managing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I believe the phases of data analysis outlined in the Straussian approach are a reflection of the

pragmatic underpinnings of this approach. Moreover, I do not believe that the Straussian data analysis limits the researcher's creativity, but rather it provides some structure and focus to harness the creativity. Therefore, although I understand the perspective of multiple realities and the co-construction of theory as described by the constructivist grounded theory approach, I believe that conceptualizing a grounded theory from the Straussian approach best aligned with my epistemological and ontological beliefs, and was also best suited to accomplish my goals for this study. Despite the strengths and criticisms of each grounded theory approach, I believe that the following quote by Cathy Charmaz encompasses the bigger picture of grounded theory methodology quite nicely:

> Grounded theory methodologists who present one version of the method share much in common with grounded theory proponents who propose another version, although we differ on foundational assumptions shaping our studies. We may have different standpoints and conceptual agendas yet we all begin with inductive logic, subject our data to rigorous comparative analysis, aim to develop theoretical analyses, and value grounded theory studies for informing policy and practice (Charmaz, 2014, p 14).

Participants

The participants were nine teachers recruited through a major teaching conference in a large Western Canadian city and online advertising across Canada. Selection criteria included the following: (a) being a practicing teacher in Canada; (b) having had at least one suspicion of a child being exposed to domestic violence during their career; and (c) willingness to discuss their experiences of deciding whether or not to report their suspicion(s) of CEDV. The University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board approved this study.

The participants were seven females and two males who ranged in age from 26 to 65

years old (mean 40.8 years, median 41 years). The participants ranged in teaching experience

from 1 to 28 years (mean 14.7 years, median 10 years), and five participants taught at the

Elementary education level and four at the Secondary education level. Four participants had

completed Bachelor degrees and five had completed Master's degrees. Four participants were in

common-law relationships, three were married, and two were divorced. Five participants

reported having their own children and four participants did not. Four participants identified their

ethnic background as Caucasian and five participants identified with mixed ethnicity, which

included ethnic backgrounds such as Italian, Black, South Asian, French, Ukrainian, Arabic, and

German.

Data Collection

In accordance with grounded theory, rather than predetermining the entire sample, data

collection was completed using theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling in grounded theory is

a process of gathering data with the intention of explaining and developing emerging concepts

(Breckenridge & Jones, 2009; Creswell, 2012). Sampling in grounded theory begins with an

initial sample of participants from the population of interest. Data is then collected and analyzed

from this initial sample. Theoretical sampling ensues following the initial data analysis, which

reveals concepts and categories that require further empirical inquiry. Based on the categories

that emerge, the researcher seeks out data sources that will further develop the categories. In the

current study, I began by interviewing three teachers and analyzing the transcript data. Following

initial analysis, I recruited three more teachers who varied in teaching experiences (e.g., years of

experience and level of education taught) and also adjusted the interview protocol to reflect

emerging categories identified in the initial stage of data analysis. I continued this process until the categories were thoroughly developed and saturation was achieved.

In addition to the use of theoretical sampling, recruitment of a heterogeneous sample is considered highly important when building a grounded theory (Morse, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Heterogeneity in the sample is argued to provide evidence supporting the transferability of the results, as it demonstrates commonalities identified amongst a diverse set of participants (Morse, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants in this study are believed to comprise a heterogeneous sample given their diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, teaching experiences (i.e., years of experience and education level taught), and personal experiences (e.g., marital and parenting status).

Data included an individual audio-recorded interview with each participant, with interviews lasting an average of 45 minutes. Five interviews were completed face-to-face and four interviews were conducted over the telephone due to geographical distance between the participants and me. Before each interview, I reviewed with the participants the research study information sheet and consent form, including limits to confidentiality (see Appendices A and B), and I answered any further questions that they had. I asked the participants to avoid the use of specific names during the interview in order to maintain anonymity of those involved with their experience of reporting. Prior to the interview, I requested each participant complete a brief participant information sheet including demographic items and questions regarding their experience suspecting and reporting CEDV (see Appendix C).

I conducted the interviews in a conversational manner at a pace set by the participants, and included primarily open-ended questions. I used a semi-structured interview protocol comprised of a series of broad questions related to the research project to guide the interviews

(see Appendix D). The interview protocol was initially piloted with three volunteers, and adjustments were made to enhance clarity and flow. The questions in the interview protocol were intentionally broad in order to give the participants more opportunity to explain what was important or relevant to them regarding their experiences. As data analysis progressed, I refined the interview protocol to reflect the developing theory. During the interviews, I asked clarifying questions to enhance my understanding of the participants' experiences and provide them with an opportunity to further explain their processes. Given the sensitive and emotional nature of the research project, I placed a particular focus on providing a calm, open, and accepting atmosphere for the participants in order to build rapport and create safety. In addition, I attended to their verbal and nonverbal expressions, when possible, as they provided important information regarding meaning and the participant's sense of safety. As I was unable to attend to nonverbal cues during telephone interviews, I concentrated on verbal cues, including rate and tone of speech, hesitations, and pauses.

At the end of the interviews, I invited the participants to contact me to discuss the research project or any additional reflections they may have had following their participation. I also obtained consent to follow-up with the participants if necessary based on data analysis. After each interview, I completed a contact summary sheet that included the date, time, and location of the interview; recorded field notes of my observations; and wrote memos of my impressions, insights, and reflections of the interview. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcript data was de-identified. Specifically, I changed any potentially identifying information including locations and names of schools, and also assigned participants with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the procedures and techniques of Straussian grounded theory. Data analysis in Straussian grounded theory moves from lower levels of abstraction to more abstract categories through three phases of coding including, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this section I describe how I analyzed the data; however, it is important to keep in mind that data collection occurred simultaneously with analysis through my use of theoretical sampling. Additionally, throughout all phases of data analysis I used the constant comparison method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Constant comparison is the process of looking for similarities and differences between the data, codes, and categories, to ensure the categories are *grounded* in the data. This procedure is argued to aid in reducing bias, as it is helps to demonstrate that different participants say similar things regarding the phenomena being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2012). During this process, I also looked for exceptions and disconfirming evidence in the data in order to enhance the accuracy of the generated theory by ensuring the analysis was reflective of the participants' experiences. It was, in part, through the identification of exceptions and disconfirming evidence that it became apparent that teachers' experiences more accurately reflected child maltreatment broadly, instead of CEDV specifically. Data collection and analysis occurred until I reached a point that provided evidence of theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation in grounded theory is considered the point at which no new insights are obtained from data collection and analysis, and the researcher subjectively decides that further data will not provide any new information relevant to the theory development (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

Open coding. Open coding is the first phase of data analysis during which I identified meaningful categories in the data. This phase represents the initial analysis at a lower level of abstraction and a move toward higher levels of abstraction through continued analysis. To do this, I first read through the entire transcript to gain a general sense of the data. Next, I focused specifically on meaning units within the data, which are often considered a series of words, phrases, and ideas that relate to similar content and/or context (Baxter, 1991; Graneheim, & Lundman, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). While doing so, I asked myself questions such as: What is being referenced here? What are the key concepts? Based on my interpretations of the answers to these questions, I created codes that represented the meaning units. In grounded theory, codes are often considered labels that are assigned to meaning units that represent how the data was abstracted and interpreted (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2012; Graneheim, & Lundman, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, I grouped the codes into higher-order categories. Categories are considered groups of data and codes that represent a commonality, and demonstrate a move toward higher abstraction (Creswell, 2012, Krippendorff 1980). Following the identification of categories, I created subcategories and dimensionalized them. Subcategories in grounded theory are identified in order to provide additional detail about each of the higher-order categories. These subcategories are then dimensionalized, meaning that they are viewed on a continuum, and the researcher locates examples in the data that represents the extremes of the continuum (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, in the current study, I identified teachers' *Training and Knowledge* as a subcategory, and then I located examples in the data that represented teachers who had low levels of training and knowledge and those who had high levels. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that dimensionalizing categories is key to fully developing them, and understanding the relationships between categories. In grounded theory,

the process of achieving saturation continues throughout all three phases of data analysis, during which the researcher continues to gather and analyze data until each category reaches a point of saturation (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the current study, some of the categories evidenced a point of saturation before others, which for me, was the point in which new data was confirming existing categories and providing repetitive information. At that point, I adjusted my sampling procedures and interview protocol to reflect the categories that required further theoretical development.

Axial coding. Axial coding is the second phase of coding during which I identified the relationships between the categories and subcategories. This phase of coding is the process of putting the data back together by relating concepts that were broken down during open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 2008). It is termed *axial coding* because it begins with the identification of one core category (called the core phenomenon) as the *axis* of which all other categories and subcategories are related to (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I identified the core phenomenon based on factors such as frequency of occurrence, quick saturation, logical relation to all other categories, and clear relevance to the development of the theory (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once the core phenomenon was chosen, I identified the relationships between it and the other categories. During this phase of data analysis, it remained clear that the topic was broadening from CEDV to child maltreatment generally, particularly as I worked toward higher levels of abstraction. Strauss and Corbin (1990) identified four main ways to describe the relationships between the categories and the core phenomenon including: 1) *causal conditions*, factors that cause the occurrence or development of the phenomenon, 2) *strategies*, actions that are taken in response to the core phenomenon, 3) *context and intervening conditions*, narrow and broad situational factors that influence the strategies, and 4) *consequences*, intended

and unintended outcomes from using the strategies. During this phase I constructed a coding

paradigm, which is a visual diagram that displays the interrelationships of the causal conditions,

strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences.

   Selective coding. Selective coding is the final phase of coding during which I wrote a

substantive-level theory regarding the interrelationship of categories identified in the coding

paradigm. A substantive-level theory is considered a transferrable theory that can be used in

similar contexts to the one that was studied, rather than a generalizable theory (Creswell, 2013).

This theory provides an explanation of the process of reporting suspicions for teachers by

interconnecting the categories identified in the coding paradigm. During this phase I integrated

information from my memos and notes to aid in writing the theory.

   Analysis software. To assist in the organization of data I used ATLAS.ti 8.0, a

qualitative data analysis software, during my data analysis. I completed the data analysis and

interpretation myself; however, I used ATLAS.ti to store, highlight, attach codes, and organize

my data and memos.

   Evaluation of quality. Grounded theory methodology is unique in that it does not

generate factual results or interpret participants' stories like many qualitative studies. Therefore,

many researchers argue that the quality of a grounded theory study should be evaluated

differently in order to reflect its uniqueness (Cooney, 2011; Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, &

Davidson, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory studies are typically evaluated

according to their methodological and interpretive rigor, which is based on credibility,

auditability, and fittingness (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, 2008; Fossey et al., 2002; Glaser & Strauss,

1967).

In relation to grounded theory, credibility is considered how accurately the theory describes the situation (Glaser, 1978; Stern, 1985). Establishing credibility is inherent to the grounded theory method, as the use of theoretical sampling and constant comparisons act as a way of 'checking' the categories against the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, to enhance credibility, after developing the theory I sent my coding paradigm and theory to three academic colleagues for peer review.

Auditability relates to the extent to which a researcher records their methodological decisions, including sampling and analytical decisions (Beck, 1993; Cooney, 2011). This process has been termed an 'audit trail' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and is important for reviewers to be able to make judgments about the decisions made by the researcher. Throughout this study, I developed an audit trail by using detailed memos to describe my personal assumptions and methodological and analytical decisions.

Lastly, fittingness is considered the extent to which findings are applicable to contexts or people outside of those addressed in the study (Beck, 1993; Sandelowski, 1986). It is suggested that through the use of theoretical sampling and constant comparisons, the researcher is able to produce rich data that demonstrates the commonality amongst the theoretical sample (Cooney, 2011; Rennie et al., 1988; Shenton, 2004). Based on this rich data, as well as descriptions of the sample, readers are able to visualize the context from which the theory was developed and judge its applicability to their own situations (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). In order to establish fittingness I provided rich background and demographic information of the participants to establish the context of my study.

Overall, in and of itself, grounded theory is a rigorous qualitative research method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I believe that through the correct application of the methodology and

my incorporation of the techniques for enhancing quality outlined above, I was able to produce rich and trustworthy findings.

Ethical Considerations

The procedures I utilized in this study involved relatively low risks for participants, primarily because it involved individual interviews for which the participants received pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Individual participants were not identifiable at any point during the research, as the focus of my study was not on their individual stories, but rather the process of mandatory reporting at a conceptual level. Given the design of the research, ethical concerns regarding the proposed study are minimal. However, there are a few areas that required consideration because of the content rather than design of the research, including the researcher's duty to report, the sensitive nature of the topic, the time asked of participants, and the benefits for the participants.

As previously mentioned, every Canadian has a duty to report their suspicions of child maltreatment to their local Child Protective Services, and those who work professionally with children are required to do so by law. Given my position as a Canadian citizen, researcher, and psychologist-in-training this research project posed the potential for a breach of confidentiality in the event that a participant disclosed a suspicion of child maltreatment of which they did not report. In order to comply with ethical and legal standards, while also creating an atmosphere of safety for the participants, I informed them of my legal duty to report during the informed consent process. In addition, I encouraged participants to omit any identifying information while discussing their personal experiences. Fortunately, no incidents occurred in which a breach of confidentiality would have been warranted.

Domestic violence is something that many people have either experienced themselves, or have known someone who has experienced it. Given the sensitive nature of this topic, the interviews had the potential to elicit troubling feelings for some participants. Therefore, I ensured that participants were aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Additionally, I provided participants with a list of counselling resources, should they have wished to seek support following their participation.

The use of theoretical sampling in grounded theory made it difficult to initially predict the amount of time being asked of my participants to give to my study. I recognize that teaching is an inherently demanding profession and that practicing teachers have numerous responsibilities. Therefore, I ensured that my participants were aware that 1) their participation in both the initial interviews, as well as potential follow-up interviews was entirely voluntary, and 2) their participation in the study would not require any of their class teaching time.

Lastly, Creswell (2013) argues that participants should benefit from the conducted research in some way. Although the direct benefits from participation in my study were few, many participants voiced an appreciation for the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences regarding mandatory reporting, and contributing to the advancement of research in the field. To show my appreciation for the participants, I reimbursed any expenses incurred to meet and participate in the interview, and gave them each a $20 gift card to a location of their choosing (e.g., Tim Horton's, Starbucks, Indigo, etc.). Going forward, the participants will also continue to benefit indirectly from the findings of my study, as the findings will contribute to informing researchers and policy developers on how to support teachers with mandatory

reporting. Overall, despite the aforementioned ethical concerns, the study was considered low-

risk and minimally invasive for the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the participants, followed by an analogy regarding the process of mandatory reporting for teachers. These sections provide context for the remainder of the chapter, in which I present a grounded theory based on the perceptions and experiences of the participants. As mentioned, during my process of data collection and analysis it became evident that teachers struggled to differentiate between forms of child maltreatment. That is, in teachers' descriptions of their experiences reporting they demonstrated difficulty referring only to suspicions of CEDV and would often describe their experiences with all forms of child maltreatment. This propensity to reference child maltreatment in their responses demonstrated that teachers do not tend to distinguish the type of child maltreatment during their process of reporting their suspicions. In response to teachers' inclination to generalize forms of child maltreatment, I adjusted the scope of the theory to better reflect the data. Therefore, the following results represent teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment in general, as opposed to CEDV specifically, as originally proposed.

Introduction to the Participants

The nine individuals who participated in this study shared their perceptions and experiences regarding reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Although all participants experienced making the same form of decision, the diversity in their professional and personal characteristics and experiences provided breadth and depth in the understanding of this complex process. The following includes a brief introduction to the participants, including their unique characteristics and experiences as needed to contextualize the reporting process. These brief introductions include information gathered from participants through the Information Sheet, as well as personal information they voluntarily offered during the interview process.

Vicky. Vicky was a woman in her late 40s who had a Master's degree and had been teaching for over 25 years. Vicky had taught in various schools throughout her career, with the majority being at the Secondary education level in a major urban city. During her career, Vicky had encountered several students who she had suspected were victims of various forms of child maltreatment including CEDV. Vicky expressed feeling confident in her familiarity with reporting procedures. In her personal life, Vicky described herself as a mother of two teenage children.

Heather. Heather was a woman in her late 20s who was in her fourth year of teaching. In that brief time, Heather had taught at the Elementary level in two different provinces. She had experience working at both a rural school servicing primarily disadvantaged children, as well as at a school located within an affluent, close-knit community. Heather had experience with suspicions of child maltreatment in both of these vastly different teaching environments.

Kelsey. Kelsey was a woman in her mid 20s who was in her fourth year of teaching. Her experience had largely been working in a major urban city at an Elementary school located within an area that primarily serviced marginalized and disadvantaged children. Kelsey had experienced suspicions of child maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence with many of the children she had taught. Kelsey had focused her career on teaching young children in Kindergarten, which she found both professionally and personally rewarding.

Michael. Michael was a man in his mid 20s who had a Master's degree and was in his second year of teaching. His teacher training and current position were both within Secondary schools in a major urban city. Michael had experienced one suspicion of child maltreatment in his teaching career so far, and overall he felt he was lacking familiarity with mandatory reporting procedures.

Darryl. Darryl was a man in his early 40s who had a Master's degree and had been teaching for over 10 years. His teaching career included teaching Secondary school in a small city, as well as teaching Elementary school overseas. Darryl had limited experience with suspicions of child maltreatment, but felt he was familiar with mandatory reporting procedures. Darryl came from a long line of family members who were teachers, which he felt had been influential to him in his own career.

Alice. Alice was a woman in her mid 60s who had a Master's degree and had been teaching for over 25 years. Throughout her career, Alice had taught Elementary, Junior High, and Special Education students. Alice had been teaching at the same school for 28 years. She described her school as located within an affluent and close-knit community. Alice had some experiences with suspicions of child maltreatment, but described these experiences as few and far between. In her personal life, Alice was a mother to three adult children.

Sonia. Sonia was a woman in her early 30s who was in her ninth year of teaching. She had 6 years of experience teaching children enrolled in behavioural modification classrooms. Recently, Sonia had been teaching at an Elementary School in a major urban city for two years. She described her current school as demographically diverse, including a large number of refugee and immigrant families. Sonia had several experiences with suspicions of child maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence during her teaching career. In her personal life, Sonia described a childhood of growing up in a household with domestic violence.

Laurel. Laurel was a woman in her late 40s who had been teaching for over 25 years. Throughout her career she had taught at ten different Elementary schools, including a school she described as having some of the highest needs in the major urban city at the time. Laurel had several experiences with suspicions of child maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence,

and considered herself to be very familiar with mandatory reporting policies. In her personal life, Laurel was a mother of two children.

  Anna. Anna was a woman in her early 50s who had a Master's degree and had been teaching for over 25 years. She had taught in a variety of different classrooms including mainstream Junior High and High School, Learning Assistance, Special Education, and Behavioural Modification classes. Anna had spent the majority of her career teaching at the Secondary level. She described having a lot of experience with suspicions of child maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence, and felt very familiar with mandatory reporting policies. In her personal life, Anna was a mother of two teenage children.

The Analogy of Cliff Jumping

  To set the stage for understanding the grounded theory of teachers' reporting process that I developed, I offer readers the following analogy that emerged in conversation with my supervisor and labmates during the data analysis process. I believe this analogy will function as a helpful visual for the process of reporting. The process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment can be understood through the analogy of jumping off a cliff into water. The process of climbing up to the cliff to begin with is a challenging one. You must navigate the uphill trail, not knowing exactly where you are going, how long it may take, or if you have the right supplies. After a long journey, you finally reach the edge of the cliff. While standing at the edge of the cliff looking down onto the water, you start to contemplate whether or not you want to jump. You start thinking about the negative consequences of jumping, and fear begins to take over. You have never jumped off this cliff before, so you are not certain how deep the water is or what may be lurking underneath. The alternative is to turn around and walk back down, but the whole purpose of coming this far was to jump, so despite your negative perceptions, you

encourage yourself do so. You jump into the abyss, plunge into the water, and successfully come

back up for air. You survived. Later on, the opportunity to jump from the cliff again presents

itself. This time, because you have done it before, the trail does not seem as long, the cliff not as

high, and the water not as ominous. Although your heart may still be racing, you are able to jump

with more ease than before.

This analogy, although simplified, demonstrates the complicated process of reporting

suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. The process involves weighing several different

factors, all of which are influenced by various individual and systemic aspects. Although the

process of reporting is rarely considered 'easy,' with increased experience and understanding, the

process seems to become more manageable and less intimidating for teachers. The next section

will include a detailed description of the grounded theory I developed.

The Process of Reporting Suspicions of Child Maltreatment for Teachers

The original purpose of this study was to develop a theory of the process of reporting

suspected cases of CEDV for teachers, which through data collection and analysis evolved to

encompass child maltreatment more broadly. This evolution is important and highlights that

teachers, while committed to this process, do not have the nuanced perspectives regarding child

maltreatment that other professionals may have. Thus, I view this evolution of the study as a type

of result in and of itself, and an important learning that could not have been captured without the

cyclical nature afforded by grounded theory.

In the grounded theory I developed, seven primary processes represent the process of

reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. The seven primary processes include,

Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interest, *Developing Suspicion, Teachers' Individual*

Contexts, Considering Teaching Context, *Experiencing Uncertainty*, *Gathering Information*, and

Deciding Whether to Report. I created a model of the grounded theory to provide a visual

representation of the theory, which includes the seven primary processes (see Figure 1). My

grounded theory represents the progression of the largely uphill process of reporting suspicions

of child maltreatment for teachers. The process begins with a teacher developing a suspicion,

which initiates their move through remaining primary processes identified, ending with their

decision of whether or not to report. I describe the theory in detail in the remainder of this

chapter, which includes direct quotes that reflect the perceptions and experiences of the nine

participants in the study.
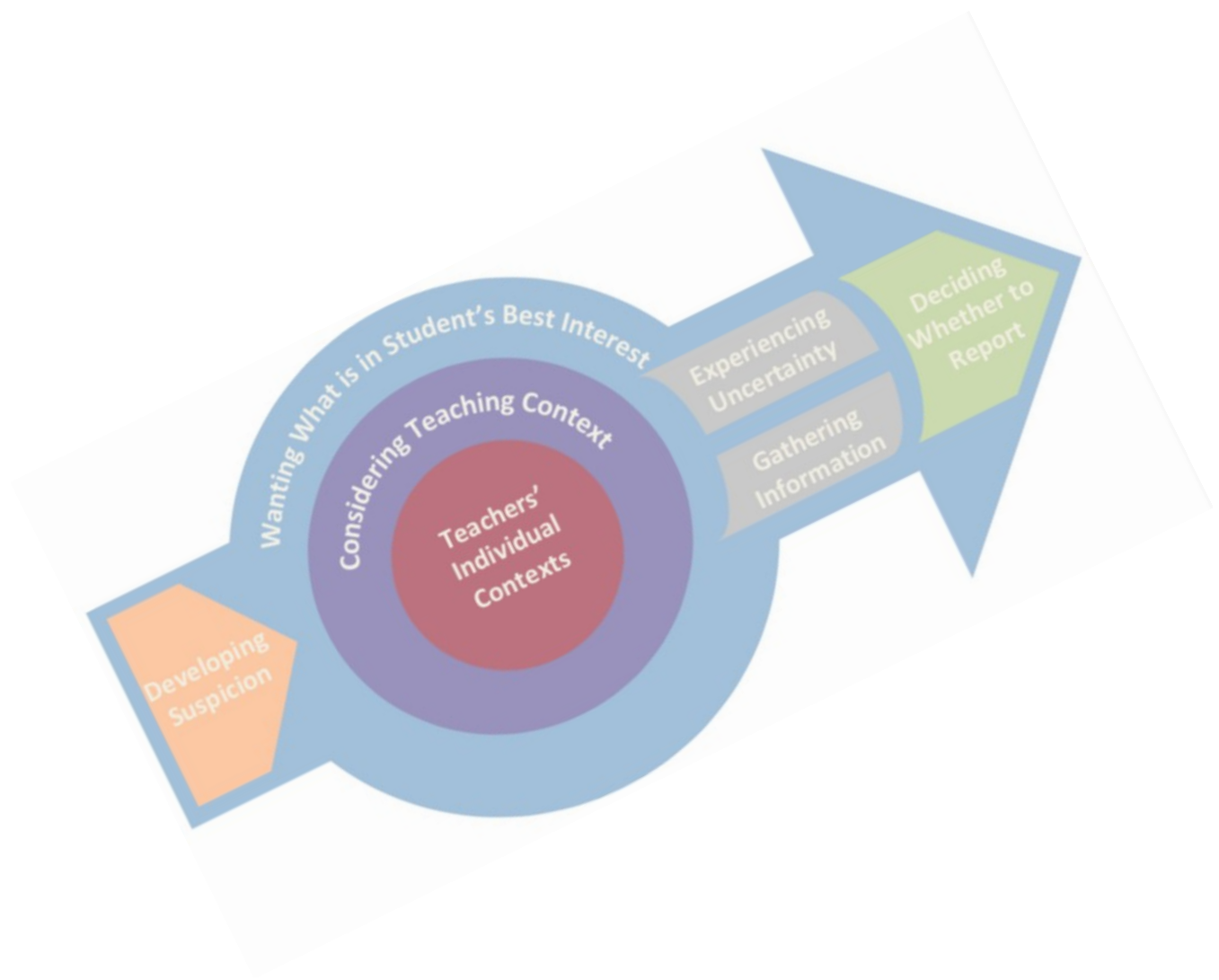
Figure 1. The process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers.

Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests

Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests represents teachers' underlying desire to want what is best for their students. This process is greatly influential in the larger process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, and it permeates the other six primary processes. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be viewed as the underlying desire to want to hike up to the cliff and the willingness to do something perceived as risky.

All teachers conveyed the sentiment that they ultimately wanted what is best for their students. Vicky shared very clearly that she wanted "to work in the best interest of the child." Anna shared that she believed the "underlying responsibility is you have to do what is best for the child." Similarly, when he spoke about his experiences with a student, Michael expressed:

> I wanted him to be both successful in school, but also just successful in his personal life, and if there's something going on there, I wanted to do whatever I could to support him and just help him out.

However, it was Heather who encapsulated the essence of this primary process, and in turn, my grounded theory as a whole, when she shared that "For me, everything circles around the child and what they need."

During the entire process of reporting, from Developing Suspicion to Deciding Whether to Report, teachers wanted what is in the best interests of their students. Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests ultimately drove teachers through the decision making process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. The participants fostered various beliefs regarding what was considered in the best interests. For instance, Laurel believed that following the law was always the best way to help children, Vicky reported her suspicions "because it's the law" but she did it "with a heavy heart and a prayer," and Kelsey believed in looking at the

situation in terms of "what does the child need?" However, regardless of what teachers believed

was in fact in the best interests of their students, the underlying desire of wanting what is best is

what acted as the driving force. In understanding my grounded theory and reading about the

remaining six primary processes, it is essential to recognize that throughout this entire process,

teachers were both considering and actively wanting what was in the best interests of their

students.

Developing Suspicion

    Developing Suspicion represents how teachers come to suspect child maltreatment

amongst their students. Developing Suspicion involves disclosures, student appearance and

demeanor, and changes in affect and behaviour that alone or combined, prompt teachers to

develop concerns of child maltreatment. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be

viewed as the individual's realization that there might be a cliff ahead.

    Developing Suspicion is a primary process that marks the beginning of teachers' process

of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. In order for teachers to move through the process

of reporting, they must first develop a suspicion that warrants concern. The process is embedded

within Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests, as it is this underlying desire that

influences teachers' feelings of concern for their students, and thus, supports their development

of suspicions. Although there are numerous potential factors and instances that could prompt a

suspicion of child maltreatment, the following represent those that were most commonly

experienced by teachers.

    Disclosures. Direct and indirect disclosures prompted teachers' development of

suspicions of child maltreatment. Teachers described how verbal and written disclosures from

students, their peers, and their parents influenced their development of suspicions. Many teachers

described instances in which children told them directly about their experiences of maltreatment. Vicky described an interaction with a student of hers that led her to develop a suspicion: "She said a few things that kind of made me wonder. She said, 'there's not always food in the house' and 'sometimes my parents fight.'" Sonia shared a similar experience and said, "There was a student who described to me domestic violence that he witnessed between his grandparents. He also told me that he was a victim of violence at home as well." Kelsey shared that most of her suspicions "come up with a conversation – something a student might say that just doesn't seem right." She also shared that many of her suspicions arose from direct interactions with parents: "Most of the things I've had to report have been explicitly with parent interactions, whether a parent has come intoxicated, or whether a parent has come and said something to the school." Anna shared that many of her suspicions formed because students shared concerning information about their peers: "Many times it's the friends that will come and say to me, 'so and so has a bruise.'… Kids will let you know if they're concerned about one of their friends."

Indirect disclosures involved circumstances in which teachers developed suspicions regarding a student based on information they received that they did not believe was intended to prompt their suspicion. Heather shared an instance in which she developed a suspicion after hearing a student share a story with his peers: "He was telling his friends he had gotten stabbed – that one of his parents stabbed him. It was a strange story he was saying, and I heard him because he was across the hall from my classroom." Teachers also described instances of developing suspicions based on concerning information children provided in their schoolwork. Vicky shared:

> I see it through pictures, because I'll say to them, 'draw your family' and then, this one child, when he drew his family, he drew a staircase, and he drew himself sitting around

the corner on the staircase, covering his ears, and in the background, his parents had

speech bubbles with abusive language towards each other. So, he told me through a

picture.

Overall, it was these various forms of disclosures that led most teachers to develop suspicions

regarding child maltreatment.

Student appearance and demeanor. Teachers described how they would develop

suspicions of child maltreatment based on concerning aspects of a student's appearance and

demeanor. They shared how concerning behavioural, emotional, and physical appearances and

demeanor of their students prompted their suspicions of child maltreatment. The most common

aspects of a student's appearance and demeanor associated with teachers' development of

suspicions of child maltreatment included: absenteeism, mental health difficulties, and

observable signs of maltreatment. Kelsey shared how children's absenteeism prompted her to

form suspicions of child maltreatment. She said:

When a child's not coming to school... Like, why? And it's tricky too because

Kindergarten is not mandatory, so we can't be like, 'you have to come to school

everyday,' but, again, what's going on that they're not coming to school everyday?

Student's mental health difficulties prompted suspicions for many teachers, including

Heather who shared that she developed a suspicion because her student "self harmed quite

frequently." Michael described a situation in which he had a concerning phone call with a parent

who presented as "aggressive" and "belligerent." He shared that following the phone call, he

began to view the child's behaviour as more concerning: "The student regularly wasn't in class

and was also really quiet. I didn't seen any signs of physical abuse, but I just recognized that

there could be potential for that, as this dad seemed very belligerent." Kelsey shared that she had

developed suspicions based on unusual behaviours and coping mechanisms children presented

with. She said, "I've experienced some different coping mechanisms that children have

exhibited, and you're just like 'what has happened that has made you revert to those

behaviours?'"

Teachers also described how observable signs of child maltreatment prompted their

suspicions, such as signs of physical abuse and neglect. Vicky described having developed

suspicions because children "have got all kinds of different bruises." She also shared that

"Neglect is a big problem… I see kids who show up at school always wearing the same dirty

clothes and they're always hungry." Kelsey shared similar experiences that led her to develop

suspicions:

> There are red flags like are they coming to school and they're not clean? Also things like,
>
> do they have what they need every morning when they come to school?... If they're not
>
> coming appropriately dressed to school every day, especially with Kindergarten – they
>
> can't do that by themselves, someone at home needs to be able to do that for them. So, if
>
> it's not happening, what's going on at home?

Teachers described how varying aspects of a child's appearance and demeanor could prompt a

suspicion of child maltreatment, and how the presence of these aspects is what prompted their

suspicions.

Changes in affect and behaviour. Changes in student affect and behaviour influenced

teachers' development of suspicions of child maltreatment. Although at first glance, changes in

affect and behaviour may appear similar to *student appearance and demeanor* it was the distinct

process of *change* in affect and behaviour that was influential in teachers' development of

suspicions. Anna described how patterns of behavioural changes in her students led her to

develop suspicions of child maltreatment:

> If a child's attendance all of a sudden changes, or if their personality changes – someone
> that's happy and cheerful and outgoing all of a sudden becomes quiet and withdrawn.
> Sometimes when there are issues that are going on at home, all of a sudden they'll often
> mimic. So they'll become kind of belligerent and defiant.

Vicky also shared that she developed suspicions when a "child's affect has changed – when all of

a sudden they don't seem as happy anymore, they kind of have a flat expression, absenteeism is a

problem, or they're not hanging out with friends as much." Similarly, Alice described that she

developed suspicions when "children that are very outgoing, become really closed in, don't talk

anymore, don't want to have anything to do with anybody else." Laurel described that in her

work with young children, developmental regression was one of the biggest warning signs that

prompted her suspicions of child maltreatment. She shared:

> I had a child in Kindergarten who was progressing normally, and then started to regress.
> So, printing became more difficult, letters became backwards… started having bathroom
> accidents – which is not unusual at that age, but it's unusual for it to be consistently right
> and then regress.

> Teachers described various instances that prompted their suspicions of child

maltreatment, and in many cases it was a combination of these instances that led to the

development of a suspicion. As a whole, Developing Suspicion represents the process by which

teachers come to suspect a child is experiencing maltreatment at home. This primary process

initiates the overall process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, as it marks the point in

which teachers consider that there is a concerning situation that may require action.

Teachers' Individual Contexts

Teachers' Individual Contexts represents the personal and individual factors that contribute to teachers' process of reporting. Teachers' Individual Contexts considers teachers' personal beliefs, their training and knowledge, and their previous experience, and how these combined factors influence and position a teacher within the process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. Teachers' Individual Contexts demonstrates how teachers both intentionally and unintentionally situate themselves within the reporting process. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be viewed as the individual's perceived ability level and preparedness, such as, their perceived physical activity level, their knowledge of cliff jumping, and the supplies they have brought for their journey.

Teachers' Individual Contexts demonstrates the importance of individuality in the reporting process. Particularly, who teachers are as individuals can influence how they understand, judge, and act throughout the reporting process. Teachers come equipped each with a unique set of personal characteristics, understandings, and experiences, which inherently influence them prior to them making decisions or taking action regarding their suspicions of child maltreatment. I demonstrate the essence of this in the grounded theory model through the placement of Teachers' Individual Contexts central and early on in the reporting process. Although there are no doubt an endless number and combination of personal factors that may influence the reporting process for teachers, the following represent the three most prominent areas described by teachers.

Personal beliefs. Personal beliefs regarding domestic violence as well as the role of the teacher influenced how teachers viewed and understood the process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. Understandings of what domestic violence is, whom it impacts, and how it

impacts them, varied greatly amongst teachers. Sonia described her personal experiences and those of her colleagues who used their own beliefs regarding domestic violence as markers for judging the severity of their suspicions:

> Sometimes teachers feel like we can judge the level of severity ourselves. So, if someone says they're getting hit at home, I think sometimes teachers might feel like we can judge, like 'oh, it's just a spanking'- like quote/unquote, 'just a spanking' versus it's real abuse.

When he shared his beliefs regarding whom domestic violence impacts and why he believed suspicions of child maltreatment did not arise often for him, Darryl stated, "In the younger levels they would encounter this perhaps more often… By the time they get to the age range that we're talking about it's been resolved, one way or another." Vicky believed that "We have the right not to be abused; we have the right to have shelter and food and to feel loved and to feel safe." All of these beliefs acted as a lens through which teachers viewed their suspicions of child maltreatment, thus demonstrating substantial variability in the interpretation of such suspicions.

Beliefs regarding the role of the teacher in general, and in relation to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, in part, laid the foundation for how teachers situated themselves within the process of reporting. For instance, Michael shared that he believed:

> As teachers, you're supposed to be model individuals, and just do what you can to help these kids succeed, and I think that, at the very end, it comes back to that. So, if any of our students are in trouble, then we're supposed to do what we can to help them out.

Similarly, Heather explained that that she felt it was her job to be "fighting for them, advocating for them, and being a voice for them."

In terms of reporting suspicions to Child Protective Services, some teachers like Vicky and Laurel believed that "reporting sometimes makes it worse," whereas Sonia believed "there's

no real downside to reporting." These beliefs, in turn, informed teachers' decisions of what they considered was their responsibility and what they deemed were appropriate actions. Overall, it was these varying personal beliefs regarding domestic violence and the role of the teacher that impacted how teachers initially interpreted and navigated the process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment.

Training and knowledge. Teachers varied greatly in the breadth, depth, and accuracy of their understanding of reporting policies. During the process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment, teachers drew on their personal knowledge of reporting policies in order to inform their decisions. The extent of training received played a critical role in teachers' understanding of their legal duty. All participants described never having received formal training on mandatory reporting policies, although Vicky recalled briefly learning some information in an Ethics course she took during her Bachelor of Education degree. However, Sonia shared "I can't even remember where I first found out about Child Services. I think I might have even just Googled it, to be honest." Michael described reporting suspicions of child maltreatment as:

> A topic that never comes up. It's not really a part of any manual that I was ever given either, and I think it's only in conversation with my academic peers that I've ever actually discussed it with anybody. At the very beginning, we're handed a huge manual with all these things, just because there are so many responsibilities, but I don't know that I've ever, in my position or in my pre-service teacher education, actually ever read or was told, 'This is what you need to do here.'

Furthermore, Michael described feeling as though his limited training had impacted his knowledge and confidence in how to handle suspicions of child maltreatment and shared that, "I

just wish I knew more formally about this situation and what to do, just so that, if I encounter it,

then I could be more definitive in how I handle the situation."

Many teachers also shared how they found the process of reporting especially difficult

because they "don't know" how Child Protective Services "works." Teachers described having a

lack of information regarding how Child Protective Services functions and the decision making

process they follow once they receive a report from a teacher. In speaking of this lack of

knowledge of how Child Protective Services responds, Kelsey shared "I don't know the logistics

of what needs to be in place to remove a child; I don't know the logistics of what needs to be in

place to get support for a family." Sonia shared similar concerns when she said:

> It feels like there's a big disconnect between the school and Child Services. I don't even
>
> feel like there's a lot of understanding about what happens when I call about a concern as
>
> a teacher. I don't know what happens on the other end.

Teachers relied on the limited training and knowledge they had, and were often unaware

of its accuracy. Many teachers believed the policy was to report suspicions to their administrator.

Laurel shared "As a teacher, I know that I don't have the final call. Administrators have the final

call." Similarly, Alice believed that if she were to have a suspicion she would "go to

administration and it's up to them to deal with it." Teachers' understanding of reporting policy

was often informed by limited training, and could make a critical difference in the outcome of

their reporting decision.

Experience. Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge regarding reporting suspicions

of child maltreatment were informed by their professional and personal experiences. Teachers

are gaining new experiences every day, meaning that their perspectives are constantly evolving.

In relation to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, these experiences were fundamental in

Teachers' Individual Contexts. Specifically, these experiences informed teachers' beliefs and knowledge regarding the reporting process. Professionally, teachers identified their general teaching experience, as well as their experience with suspicions of child maltreatment as most influential in their process of reporting. Vicky, with over 25 years of teaching experience, felt "more seasoned now." Sonia believed her confidence in the reporting process had been supported by her previous experiences: "Since I've gone through it a couple of times, now I feel pretty confident. The first time was very traumatic, but now I think I'm a little more familiar with what it looks like." Heather shared how difficult it was for her the first time she had a suspicion of child maltreatment, particularly given the lack of support and resources available in the small, rural community she was working in. However, she expressed feeling thankful for her experience, although difficult, as she felt "as though that experience will help in the future."

Teachers were also greatly influenced by their previous experiences with Child Protective Services. Vicky, for instance, reflected on a previous experience in which she reported her suspicions to Child Protective Services but felt as though they did not take the situation seriously enough. She shared "It bothers me that I didn't push further. I can't go back in time, but I can just be more diligent in the future." She went on to describe how this experience changed her overall perspective of reporting her suspicions and how such experiences had likely impacted her colleagues:

> If you've had a bad experience, that might affect your choice because, if you've had a bad experience and things were actually worse, then you might justify 'ok, I know this is against the law not to report, but I'm actually doing this kid a favour.'

Darryl had an experience in which he was hesitant to report and felt he would have acted differently if he had the knowledge and insight he had now: "Thinking about it now, yeah, I

probably would have said something. Going through that experience, I would have done way more than I did."

        In Teachers' Individual Contexts, experience goes far beyond that of which is related directly to the teaching profession. Teachers' personal experiences shape who they are as individuals, and in turn, who they are as teachers. When it came to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, the most notable personal experiences were those involving either parenting or domestic violence. Anna was a mother of two who felt her beliefs regarding reporting suspicions of child maltreatment had been shaped by her experiences as a parent. When talking about instances in which teachers' suspicions may not be accurate she shared:

> The thing is if you're wrong, then they'll find out that there's some other explanation. As a parent, I want my child to be safe, and if someone makes an error in judgment but it's because they're concerned about my child's safety, then that's forgivable.

She further expressed how having her own children provided her with new perspectives in her teaching role: "For me, it's what's best for the child, and going back to the *in loco parentis*. 'If this was my child, what would I want someone to do?'" On the other hand, Kelsey who is not a parent, felt that her understanding of appropriate parenting practices was limited, which made it difficult for her to detect signs of child maltreatment. She shared:

> There have been times where I've gone to another teacher, and I'm like 'this is what I heard or this is what I saw. Does this sound like it would be something that would be a red flag?' Obviously, I don't have kids, so I wouldn't know how to raise kids, I guess… It's way different being a teacher.

For Sonia, her personal experiences with domestic violence informed her beliefs and practices as a teacher:

There was violence going on in my own family growing up, so I think, as a kid, I had

wished that a teacher or someone would have taken an interest to follow up on that. So

that's why I feel like I don't care. If I'm wrong, then that's good, but I don't want kids to

go through what I went through.

Teachers' Individual Contexts is represented through the factors of personal beliefs,

training and knowledge, and experience, and although these factors were presented separately, it

is crucial to take into consideration the reciprocal influence they have on shaping one another.

For instance, a teacher's knowledge may shape their beliefs, and their experiences may shape

their knowledge. These factors are constantly evolving, but represent particular processes by

which we can come to understand the influence of Teachers' Individual Contexts.

Teachers ultimately wanted what is in the best interests of their students. However, what

teachers believed, what they knew, and what they experienced set the stage for how they

interpreted and acted upon what they perceived was in the students' best interests. As a whole,

Teachers' Individual Contexts represents the awareness and understanding of individuality as

both central and integral to teachers' reporting process. This stage of the process is less about

pinpointing particular influential experiences, as it is about understanding the role that

individuality in general plays in the process. Despite the individuality that is present in this

process, teachers continued to move through the remaining primary processes. It is their

experiences within and between the primary processes that reflect their unique situations.

Considering Teaching Context

Considering Teaching Context represents how teachers are influenced by factors in their

teaching environment during their process of reporting. Considering Teaching Context

demonstrates an understanding of how school demographics, student characteristics, and stress

influence the process of reporting. In this primary process, focus is placed on the importance of how teachers are both intentionally and unintentionally influenced by environmental factors during the reporting process. Particularly, factors within the teaching environment can influence how teachers understand, judge, and act throughout the reporting process. Teaching environments can vary greatly between different schools. However, this primary process represents the notion that regardless of the type of environment within which a teacher is working, they are influenced by it early on in their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be viewed as considering the features of the path itself, such as how worn, steep, and difficult it is.

Teachers' Individual Contexts and Considering Teaching Context are processes that occur simultaneously and are embedded within one another. Teachers function within their teaching environment, but who a teacher is as an individual can influence the teaching environment (e.g., how they interpret and act within it), and the teaching environment can influence whom a teacher is (e.g., their beliefs and knowledge). These processes, along with Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests set the stage and provide somewhat of a contextual understanding of how teachers proceed through the remainder of the process. Although teaching environments vary greatly, the following represent the three areas described by teachers as the most influential in their process of reporting.

School demographics. School demographics largely involved the location of the school, size of the school, and the background of the students attending (e.g., ethnic, racial, socio-economic). Teachers explained how certain school demographics could correspond to levels of parent involvement, student risk, and available supports, factors that teachers described as having influenced their suspicions of child maltreatment and their reporting process.

Teachers described how school demographics influenced the frequency of which they encountered suspicions of child maltreatment. Laurel shared "It was more when I taught Kindergarten in a very high needs area when I dealt with it the most." When she spoke about her students, Kelsey said, "I find with the population that I work with there is a high susceptibility to violence." Heather described her experiences working within a small community: "The community was very small and we lived there, so I'd say that we were more likely to just know about what was happening with the kids." These are suspicions she felt she might not have had, had she not lived and worked in such a small community and school. She went on to explain how her experiences changed over recent years from working within different schools:

> I have worked at good schools, and they have good communities. Obviously, there are always some concerns, but definitely not in a difficult neighbourhood or a lot of struggling students. Like, there are definitely some, but it's not known for being a difficult school.

When talking about the students at her school who were largely from disadvantaged families, Anna demonstrated the essence of how Considering Teaching Context is related to Teachers' Individual Contexts. Specifically, she spoke about how she had seen first hand the difficulties her students faced, but she also fostered broader beliefs and knowledge regarding domestic violence. She shared, "I think it depends on where you work, at what school, and what your population is – your demographics, although abuse happens everywhere."

Student characteristics. Certain student characteristics including their age, ability, and the amount of time they spend with their teacher influenced how teachers interacted with their students. These characteristics influenced teachers' suspicions of child maltreatment, particularly their ability and opportunity to recognize signs and symptoms associated with child

maltreatment. As Laurel shared, "The little ones show it, so it's much easier to pick up on cues that something is wrong... but I think, as they get older, they either learn to hide it or they don't want to talk about it." Conversely, Kelsey spoke about the difficulty she experienced when she had suspicions, particularly because of her students' young age. She shared "It's tough when they're so much younger. You can't have that kind of sit down and be like, 'So, how's it going at home?' with a five-year-old."

Student's ability level in communicating their experiences could impact a teacher's suspicions of child maltreatment. Specifically, some teachers found that although young children tended to be more open and forthright about their experiences, their interpretations of the world were not always accurate given their developmental ability. Sonia shared "You have to have a certain level of confidence in what the kid is saying because children, the way they see the world is very different from how adults see the world." In her experiences working with young children, she saw that, "Teachers sometimes don't take it seriously, or they kind of take whatever the kid's saying with a grain of salt." On the other hand, when speaking about his experiences teaching adolescents, Darryl shared "Given their age, they can seek out the help they need on their own, without necessarily relying on the teacher as much."

Teachers also spoke about the role that the amount of time they spend with students played in developing a suspicion of child maltreatment and the process of reporting it. For instance, Darryl shared the difficulties he experienced teaching at the secondary level:

> The other thing is, I teach four classes a day, of 80 some odd minutes, and I see each group for that long every day and that's it. It's not like elementary school, in the younger grades, where their homeroom teacher is going to see those kids all the time. That makes a big difference… You notice it far less often when you have all of that happening.

Stress. Teachers described the immense influence that the teaching environment had on their ability to cope with their role as a teacher and the demands of their career, including unanticipated responsibilities like reporting. All nine teachers spoke about their experiences with varying degrees of stress and the influence it had on them both professionally and personally. The teachers reported feeling as though they had innumerable responsibilities within their career, including their duty to report suspicions of child maltreatment. Michael felt as though "there's always so much that we need to pay attention to…It's like a fire hydrant, and you're putting your mouth over it, and you're just trying to take everything that's happening, and it's just a lot." Similarly, when she described her experiences with the responsibility of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, Kelsey shared "And that's on top of everything else I'm doing. On top of teaching and working with my kids, and assessment and planning, and all that on top of what we're already doing on a daily basis." These countless responsibilities placed substantial pressure on teachers, who were often left feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. When she spoke about teachers' experiences in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, Vicky shared "Sometimes when you're exhausted, you forget things, and so you might forget to call… or you're so exhausted that you convince yourself that really it's not that important." Teachers described experiencing varying degrees of stress as a result of their professional responsibilities. Michael described feeling particularly overwhelmed, which he related to the steep learning curve of being a newly qualified teacher. He shared, "At the beginning, we're handed a huge manual with all these things, just because there's so many responsibilities." However, Darryl described having experienced a low degree of stress regarding reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. He shared, "We get burnt out over issues, but it's not usually around things like that," which he

related to the availability of social workers in his school that supported teachers with their suspicions.

Demographics, student characteristics, and stress are three individual factors that influence Considering Teaching Context. However, much like Teachers' Individual Contexts the factors that comprise these processes also have reciprocal influences on one another. For instance, a teacher who works within a school that services a disproportionate number of disadvantaged children may experience higher work demands, more suspicions of child maltreatment, and potentiality increased stress. Subsequently, this teacher would likely have more experience with suspicions of child maltreatment, which may influence their beliefs and knowledge. This example demonstrates the noticeable influence the processes of Considering School Context and Teachers' Individual Contexts have upon one another. It is these processes, along with Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interest, that ultimately situates teachers within the reporting process.

Experiencing Uncertainty

Experiencing Uncertainty represents how being unsure of a suspicion of child maltreatment can influence teachers' process of reporting. Generally, this primary process encapsulates some of the mental, emotional, and psychological aspects of the process of reporting suspicions of maltreatment for teachers. Experiencing Uncertainty demonstrates how emotions, relationships, and confidence influence the reporting process. These factors influence how teachers cope with and respond to the uncertainty they experience. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be viewed as the stage at which the individual climbs and reaches the edge of the cliff. During this stage, the individual mentally and emotionally deals with the

uncertainty of the length and difficulty of the trail, as well as with the unknowns of what lurks beneath the water.

At this point of the process, the stage has been set with Teachers' Individual Contexts, Considering Teaching Context, and an underlying desire of Wanting What is in Student's Best Interests, and now teachers begin to actively work towards their decision of whether or not to report the suspicion they developed. Teachers grapple with their uncertainty, which has already been primed by their beliefs, training and knowledge, experience, demographics, student characteristics, and stress. Experiencing Uncertainty is a challenging process during which teachers consider and balance various factors all of which are mentally, emotionally, and psychologically taxing. Teachers identified their emotions, relationships, and confidence as the most influential factors when Experiencing Uncertainty.

Emotions. Teachers genuinely cared for their students, thus making the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment an emotional experience for them. When teachers were faced with uncertainty regarding their suspicions, they experienced emotions related to both their wellbeing and that of their students. Teachers often experienced fear and worry regarding their suspicions, particularly a fear of what would happen if they were wrong about their suspicions. Heather described how she felt during experiences of reporting when she said "You've got that nervousness, you've got that anxiety of wondering if you're doing the right thing, hoping someone will get back to you, worrying about your relationship with that student."

Laurel also shared having felt a sense of worry: "I certainly think you always have that worry, like 'am I over guessing, over thinking it?' 'Am I making too much of a big deal?'" On the other hand, Sonia described that she did not have a fear of being wrong: "I don't really feel

too worried about that because to me, if I'm wrong, then nothing's wrong, and that's a good thing."

The fears teachers experienced were particularly influenced by their beliefs regarding child maltreatment and the reporting process, as outlined in Teachers' Individual Contexts. Some teachers believed if they reported and they were wrong, then "they could lose their job." Teachers also feared making the situations worse for the child. Vicky described how teachers "just don't know the implications of making that phone call, if it's going to be more harmful or if it's the right thing to do." Heather shared "You worry about feeling worse. You worry about making the situation worse." Teachers were faced with balancing their own fears along with the wellbeing of their students. Sonia described how she found it difficult to balance those needs, but that she strived to prioritize her students:

> I'm an adult, and so I might be having fear, but it pales in comparison to the fear a child
> must have if they're being abused or neglected… So I feel we as adults have the
> responsibility to take the fear on, so that the kids don't have to feel it.

Kelsey shared the emotional weight she felt when having to decide whether or not to report her suspicions: "I love them, and so maybe it's because I have that really strong emotional attachment to my students that those things feel like big heavy decisions to make." Laurel recognized the emotional toll the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment could take on both teachers and students, and found that with the more teaching experience she gained, the better she was able to distance herself emotionally:

> When I was a young teacher, I felt more involved in the sense that I wanted to do
> something that would change everybody's life and make it better. Then you realize that
> you can't always do that, or it doesn't make things better. So I found it's much easier to

kind of disassociate and say 'okay, this is the problem and we're just going to work through the steps.' Because you realize that getting too involved in it is not actually the best either.

The emotions teachers experienced in relation to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment were complex and multi-faceted. For example, fear could act as a barrier in some instances, but as a positive driving force in others. However, these emotions were ever-present and demonstrated the complexity of the uncertainty teachers with which must grapple.

Confidence. In regard to the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers, confidence was a way of thinking and feeling that could evoke emotion and action. Such confidence involved not only teachers' confidence in their suspicion, but also their confidence in Child Protective Services as an agency. When teachers felt very confident that their suspicions were valid, they spent less time experiencing the uncertainty of the situations and tended to move through the process more quickly. When she discussed her experiences with reporting Kelsey shared "Depending on the severity, we've gone straight to calling Child Family Services emergency hotline. Usually those kind of things are very cut and dry situations, like, 'this is what we need to do.'" Michael took into consideration the degree of severity and whether or not there was "evidence to support something was definitely happening." In cases when there was evidence, Michael would quickly "escalate it to the top," meaning he reported right away.

Teachers described the most difficult suspicions to deal with were those that did not appear as obvious or have concrete evidence. For instance, Heather shared:

> If a child came right out and said something, I don't think that I have a single colleague who would be able to not report that, but the suspicion, like that wondering of, because

you know, there's also that fear of being wrong, of like 'making a mountain out of a

molehill' as people might say.

Anna shared the particular difficulty she faced in regard to child exposure to domestic violence

specifically as compared to other forms of domestic violence:

It's a little bit of a grey area. I mean, it's very black and white if you think a child is at

risk, then you report it. You see a bruise on a child, then you report it. Whereas, when

you hear about children witnessing domestic violence, it just doesn't seem to be as black

and white.

Teachers also considered how confident they felt in Child Protective Services, which was

often informed by their beliefs, knowledge, and experience, as well as the circumstances of their

current suspicion. Vicky described how past negative experiences with Child Protective Services

contributed to her lack of confidence in them. She shared that in the past she "trusted them" but

they "disappointed" her. Although Vicky continued to report her suspicions, she shared having

felt uncertain about doing so: "I still follow due diligence, but it's with a heavy heart because I

don't know what's going to happen. Sometimes it makes it worse." Heather spoke about the

difficulty she experienced even getting in contact with Child Protective Services, which left her

feeling uncertain and skeptical of the agency:

I remember it being very, very hard to get ahold of the person who I was supposed to be

contacting. It almost felt like the process was made more difficult, so I wouldn't keep

trying. Let me just say, it would be very easy for someone to give up. It'd be like, 'Oh

well, I called. My job here is done.'

Likewise, Sonia felt uncertain regarding how Child Protective Services responded when they

received a suspicion:

I don't feel like there's a lot of understanding about what happens when I call about a

concern as a teacher, I don't know what happens on the other end…You never hear back

and you don't know if it was followed up. And I understand there's privacy concerns too.

I don't know what the solution would be, but it does feel sort of, I guess, a little

defeating… It was kind of a situation where I just felt like I was calling into a void. I

didn't know what to do.

For teachers, how confident they were in their suspicion and in Child Protective Services could,

in part, dictate how much difficulty they experienced with the uncertainty of reporting their

suspicions.

      Relationships. Having relationships and feeling connected with others was quite

influential for teachers who were Experiencing Uncertainty. Teachers tended to rely on their

relationships and the support they received from them during their process of reporting

suspicions of child maltreatment. Much like confidence, when teachers felt they had strong

relationships and that others supported them, they spent less time experiencing the uncertainty of

the situations and tended to move through the process more quickly. Teachers identified

relationships with their coworkers, administrators, Child Protective Services, students, and the

student's family as impactful during the process of reporting their suspicions.

      Heather spoke to the importance of forming and maintaining relationships with

colleagues, as she believed it helped her "feel like you're not alone." She also shared that she

would often turn to her colleagues who helped "reaffirm" that "yes, this is your responsibility."

Laurel discussed the importance of relying on colleagues and learning from them because she

believed that "the best teachers are made by the teacher next door." Many teachers also spoke to

the importance of having a strong relationship with their administrator. Laurel shared that she

believed communicating with her administrator regarding the positive aspects of teaching helped

ease the uncertainty of having to speak to them regarding more difficult aspects: "Making sure

that you have some communication in a positive way, so when there's a problem you feel more

open to communicate." Alice shared how important she felt that having a positive relationship

with her administrator was in relation to the process of reporting suspicions of child

maltreatment, and also in terms of teaching in general:

> My principal was really good about it and really backed me up, and that is really
>
> important. When you have an administrator that really backs you up and is willing to
>
> help, that will make things better.

Teachers often struggled to find confidence in Child Protective Services, but Laurel shared that

she found that she was better able to develop confidence if she was able to establish relationships

with those who worked at Child Protective Services:

> What I tried to do is make a connection with social services so that I actually knew who I
>
> was talking to, rather than reporting it to somebody who was just working for social
>
> services. I would try to speak to the same person the whole time I was at a school… And
>
> so then that helped because I was reporting it, but there was some sort of connection
>
> there.

> Many teachers believed it was their responsibility to form and maintain relationships with

students as part of their role as a teacher. They also believed those relationships were often the

key to both protecting students and helping students succeed. Vicky shared "We have to be super

diligent about, you know, getting to know our students because we're the only ones who can

protect them." When dealing with suspicions of child maltreatment Michael believed that

"depending on [his] relationship with the student, that's something [he] could talk directly with

them about." Anna believed in a community of care for students and that it "comes back to a relationship thing because kids will let you know if they're concerned about one of their friends." Darryl recognized the importance of having relationships with students when it came to suspicions of child maltreatment, but spoke about the difficulty he faced when trying to form and maintain those relationships:

> And then, of course, we're also on a semestered schedule…that means that you see that many more kids coming through, because every semester the class is all changed. I think that would have a lot to do with it too. You'd notice it far less often when you have all that happening. You certainly don't get to know the kids anywhere near as well as you would if you see them all the time like the elementary teachers do.

Teachers highly valued the relationships they formed with their students, which was why Michael found Experiencing Uncertainty particularly challenging. He found himself struggling with how to do what was in the best interests of the student, while also maintaining relationships with them. He shared his experiences when deciding to report his suspicions:

> It's going to boil down to probably contacting a hotline, but just how to go about doing that and saving the relationship with the student. At the end of the day, we need to spend the whole year with these students, and we need to maintain that relationship.

> In working through their uncertainty, teachers also relied on the relationships they had built with the student's family. It was, in part, through these relationships that teachers felt they could better understand their suspicions and make judgments of what they felt was in the best interests of their student. Kelsey worked "really hard to develop relationships with the families," and when she developed a suspicion, she asked herself "is this normal to that family? Is it something that is what they experience all the time? Is it something different?" Kelsey

expressed, "It's so important to get to know your students, and to get to know the families that you're working with so you can make a more appropriate call and support them in more appropriate ways." Sonia spoke about her experiences with uncertainty and how she often found it difficult to balance her legal duty, while maintaining relationships with the family, which she believed was crucial to the "bigger picture":

> I really feel like I want the school to be a resource for the families, and I don't want there to be a punitive relationship. So if families are having trouble, I don't want them to think, 'oh, they're just going to call Child Services'… I want it to be a positive relationship as well.

Teachers believed forming and maintaining relationships with colleagues, students, and families was a major part of their role as a teacher. They relied on these relationships to not only teach academic curriculum, but to support children in succeeding in life. Teachers often found that the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment placed them in the difficult position of having to balance maintaining relationships while also doing what was best for the student.

When she spoke about her experiences reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, Heather demonstrated the complexity of Experiencing Uncertainty when she said, "You've got that nervousness, you've got that anxiety of wondering if you're doing the right thing, hoping someone will back you, worrying about your relationship with that student. Ya, you just worry." While she recognized the difficulty in Experiencing Uncertainty, Anna described the positive influence of relationships and how they could help reduce fear: "If you have that relationship, then if you do make a mistake, you're more likely to be forgiven."

Experiencing Uncertainty represents the notion that the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment is challenging and can have mental, emotional, and psychological impacts on

teachers. It is the depth and intensity of the uncertainty that ultimately influences how long this stage of the process lasts and the extent to which teachers feel the impacts of the uncertainty. Certain factors, such as the strength of and support from relationships can help to increase confidence and reduce worry. It is the intricate balance of emotions, confidence, and relationships that influence teachers' experiences with uncertainty.

Gathering Information

Gathering Information represents the process during which teachers actively seek out information to support them during their process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. This primary process demonstrates the concrete actions teachers take, which includes building their suspicion and consulting. This process occurs simultaneously and has a reciprocal relationship with Experiencing Uncertainty. When Experiencing Uncertainty, teachers will often gather information, which will, in turn, influence the extent to which they feel and experience uncertainty. The process represents a stage during which teachers often hope to gather information that will provide them with more certainty regarding their suspicion. However, in some cases, there is not enough information available to do so. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be viewed as the actions the individual takes while climbing and reaching the cliff edge. During this stage, the individual talks to others nearby who know about the cliff, and they also use the information they are able to gather based on their experiences and observations to cope with their uncertainty of the situation.

        Building suspicion. Building suspicion demonstrates how teachers would actively seek out, solicit, and record information pertaining to their suspicion of child maltreatment. For Kelsey, when she had a suspicion she was uncertain of she would "keep an extra eye on some of the students" to observe for any other warning signs that would have indicated child

maltreatment. Anna would check student records to "see if there are any log notes other teachers had written down" or would directly ask the student's homeroom teacher if they had noticed anything that would have indicated a suspicion of child maltreatment. Anna also spoke about the helpfulness of the student-teacher relationship in building the suspicion:

> With any of the kids that are having problems at home, if you develop a relationship, then they tell you what's going on, and then sometimes you just know because there's changes in behaviour, and then you ask and you follow up.

Alice shared a similar strategy that she used: "There are some students that I have really good rapport with. I will just ask them, 'what's going on?' 'Are you tired?' 'What's happening at home?'"

When teachers have a relationship with the student's family they would use what they already knew to inform their suspicion, and would also often reach out to the family directly. Anna shared that when she had a suspicion she was uncertain about, she would try to make contact with the family:

> When there are changes in a child's behaviour or their attitude and those sorts of things, well then most teachers call home. You try to find out and see kind of what's going on, making sure that the parents are aware. And sometimes that can open up conversations.

Although many teachers make great efforts to build their suspicions and mitigate uncertainty, Heather described her experiences with some teachers who chose not to go to these lengths:

> There are some people, as educators, who feel as though they just don't really say anything, and they don't ask questions, they don't pursue, they don't put themselves out there to find out what's happening with a kid, and really figuring out what you can do to help.

Some teachers discussed the act of record keeping as a helpful tool when building their suspicions. For instance, Sonia recounted experiences in which she did not feel confident in her suspicion, so she "made some notes" about her observations and suspicions at the time and then "followed up periodically" until she felt confident in the validity of her suspicion. On the other hand, some teachers, like Michael, would have liked to have kept written records but felt "there is no safe place for a teacher to write it down" because parents could have access to student records at anytime. As a result of this, many teachers relied on their communication with one another to assist in building their suspicions.

Consulting. Consulting with colleagues was considered an asset when teachers were building their suspicions. Teachers often found the expertise of their colleagues invaluable when they were working toward gaining more certainty. Consultation was considered most helpful when teachers had a pre-existing relationship with one another, as it provided a foundation of mutual trust and respect. When she discussed her process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, Vicky spoke to the importance of collaboration: "We can collaborate and share ideas because sometimes you're not quite sure, and you need somebody else to talk to."

Most teachers expressed that they were inclined to consult with their administrator. Anna shared her experiences of this:

> You might go to your assistant principal to talk about your concerns to get kind of a sober second thought. They might know some additional background. Or talk to your principal or talking to a teacher that the child connects with.

Kelsey described that she would "go to the principal quicker" in cases where she didn't "have that relationship with the families." Michael also found that administrators could be valuable resources:

I consult my school administration about it first because I have found that the

administration pays a lot of attention to what's happening in the school. So, just going to

approach them, I might actually find out that something has already moved forward

regarding the student.

Many schools also have access to school support services, including counselors, of whom

teachers relied on for consultation and support. For instance, Darryl shared that the "first thing"

he would do was "go downstairs and speak to student services." Anna expressed similar

sentiments when she shared that "If you have a school counsellor, then that's one of the first

people you go talk to."

Consultation provided teachers not only with information and expertise regarding the

situation, but also emotional support and reassurance during their process of reporting.

Ultimately Gathering Information is the process during which teachers take action to mitigate

their experiences of uncertainty. Teachers work through the processes of Experiencing

Uncertainty and Gathering Information until they reach a point of which they are ready to make a

decision regarding reporting their suspicions. The length of time teachers spend in these

processes may vary based on the extent to which they feel uncertain, as well as the availability of

information to gather.

Deciding Whether to Report

Deciding Whether to Report represents the final stage of the process during which

teachers make a decision regarding reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. The decision

signifies the culmination of their experiences throughout the aforementioned primary processes,

resulting in a decision. In relation to the analogy of cliff jumping, this might be viewed as the

stage in which the individual decides whether to jump or turn back. At this point, teachers have

gone through Developing Suspicion, Teachers' Individual Contexts, Considering Teacher

Context, Experiencing Uncertainty, Gathering Information, and are now Deciding Whether to

Report all while keeping in mind Wanting What is in Student's Best Interests. The decisions

regarding reporting made by teachers included the following: reported to Child Protective

Services, reported to their administrator, reported to student services, referred the case to

someone else, or did not report. Teachers' decisions of whether or not to report and who to make

that report to largely hinged on their personal beliefs and the accuracy of their understandings of

reporting policy.

When she reflected on her past experiences, Vicky described how her beliefs regarding

the outcomes of reporting to Child Protective Services influenced her reporting behaviour: "I

always call Child Protective Services, because it doesn't hurt to." Conversely, Alice was

unaware of her professional duty to report directly to Child Protective Services, she believed that

it was "administration that deals with getting a hold of social services." As a result of this belief,

she shared that when she was deciding whether or not to report her suspicions she would often

"gauge if it's serious enough and then [she] would go to administration and let them deal with

it." In Michael's experience, he felt his limited training and knowledge and overall uncertainty

left him feeling overwhelming uncertain of how to handle the situation on his own. Therefore, he

made the decision to "refer out to someone who knows more about it" and he "sticks by" that

decision. Anna shared that she had a suspicion of child maltreatment and felt uncertain of what

to do, so she ultimately decided to refer to "the school social worker and the school counsellor"

because she felt "they might have access to other ways of reporting." On the other hand, Sonia,

much like Vicky, was not as impacted by a lack of confidence, so she decided to "err on the side

of reporting, because there's not a real down side to reporting." Laurel described an experience

in which she felt confident in her suspicion because of the evidence of physical abuse, so she "let

the administration know, and then [they] also alerted social services together." However, she also

shared that when she had suspicions as a "young teacher" she did not feel like she had enough

experience to "evaluate the situation," so she would "share it with her administrator, then [her]

job was done." Darryl described one previous suspicion he had in which he decided not to report

as he "didn't feel like he had enough to go on" and that he "didn't feel like it was [his] place to

really, at the time, to step in and do much." That being said, in most cases, teachers decided to

take action in regard to their suspicions of child maltreatment, which typically involved some

form of reporting. It is important to note at this stage that the final decision regarding reporting

was heavily influenced by what teachers believed was the accurate policy for reporting their

suspicions. As discussed in the sections of the literature review on *beliefs* and *training and*

knowledge, teachers had limited knowledge regarding appropriate reporting practices, with some

teachers believing their legal duty was to report to their administrator. Therefore, although a

teacher may have arrived at the decision that their suspicion of child maltreatment required

reporting, unless they were aware of their legal requirement to report to Child Protective

Services, their suspicion may never have accurately been reported. Sonia highlighted how a lack

of accurate knowledge regarding reporting policy could influence reporting behaviour when she

said: "We're told that we should go with that information to our principals, and then the principal

should be the one to initiate contact with Children's Services. So, I did that."

        Although the process ends with a decision of whether or not to report, it is important to

consider the influence of the final decision, and the experience as a whole, could have on

Teachers' Individual Contexts. For instance, making a decision regarding reporting that results in

a positive outcome may, in turn, alter a teacher's individual context in the form of beliefs and experiences.

Sonia described how her experiences reporting suspicions of child maltreatment influenced her level of confidence and familiarity with the process: "Since I've gone through it a couple of times, now I feel pretty confident... The first time was very traumatic, but now I think I'm a little more familiar with what it looks like." Alternatively, Vicky expressed how she was influenced by a negative experience of hers in which she felt she was not persistent enough when reporting her suspicion to Child Protective Services, as she felt they did not take her report seriously. Vicky shared:

> I can't go back in time, but I can just be more diligent in the future… Mistakes are learning opportunities, and I learned something about my personality. I learned, and I'm more self-aware now that I am somebody who does not challenge authority. So, I keep that in mind for the future because sometimes it's morally right to challenge authority.

Overall, teachers expressed how their experiences influenced their reporting process. Indeed, each experience and each time a teacher goes through the process, it may look different depending on the influence of each of the primary processes, as well as the changes within and between each process over time and within the person.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

Summary of General Findings

The intended purpose of this study was to examine the process of reporting suspicions of CEDV for teachers; however, as the research study progressed, the purpose of the study changed to more accurately reflect the data. Therefore, the results represent teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment in general, as opposed to CEDV specifically, as originally proposed. By examining the entire process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, I was able to identify specific processes that impact and shape the overall reporting process for teachers. This study centered on nine teachers who shared their personal experiences and perceptions. The participants were diverse in their professional and personal characteristics and prior experiences; however their experiences reporting suspicions of child maltreatment all revolved around a set of core processes. The core processes are well encapsulated by the analogy of cliff jumping, which provides a visual representation of the difficulty and complexity of the process of reporting.

Based on the findings of this study, teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment involves seven inter-related primary processes, which include: *Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests, Developing Suspicion, Teachers' Individual Contexts, Considering Teaching Context, Experiencing Uncertainty, Gathering Information,* and *Deciding Whether to Report*. Teachers are ultimately Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests. This underlying desire acts as a driving force for teachers and is present throughout their entire process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. The process begins with teachers Developing Suspicion of child maltreatment, which initiates their progression through the remainder of the process of reporting. Teachers' Individual Contexts represents the influence that personal factors,

such as training and beliefs, have on teachers' process of reporting. Considering Teaching

Context involves how teachers are influenced by factors in their teaching environment during

their process of reporting. Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests, Teachers' Individual

Contexts, and Considering Teaching Context occur simultaneously and are embedded within one

another. Combined, these processes provide a contextual understanding for how teachers proceed

through the remainder of the reporting process. Experiencing Uncertainty represents how being

unsure of a suspicion of child maltreatment can influence teachers' process of reporting, and

occurs simultaneously with the process of Gathering Information, which represents how teachers

actively seek out information to support them during their process of reporting. Finally, the

process ends with Deciding Whether to Report, during which teachers make a decision regarding

reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment.

Summary and Discussion of Individual Processes

The current findings represent the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment

for teachers. However, in understanding my grounded theory as a whole, it is important to first

reflect upon the individual processes. To do so, in this section I have included a discussion of the

findings for each of the primary processes as they relate to research and practice.

Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interest. In understanding my grounded theory,

it is essential to recognize that throughout the entire process, teachers are both considering and

actively Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests of their students. It is evident that

teachers deeply care for the wellbeing of their students, and it is their desire to want what is in

the best interests of their students that acts as a driving force for teachers during their process of

reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. It is not surprising that teachers overwhelmingly

expressed their desire to want what is in the best interests of their students, as many teachers

develop strong relationships with their students due to the extensive time they spend together (Hargreaves, 1998). During their time with students and through the development of teacher-student relationships, teachers inherently experience some level of emotional investment (Hargreaves, 1998; Spilt, Kooman, & Thjis, 2011). Not only are teachers likely to develop a strong sense of caring for their students as a result of these relationships, they are also likely to act in the best interests of their students as a requirement of their profession. As developed through Canadian legal precedent, teachers in Alberta are considered to act *in loco parentis*, in place of parents (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2013a). For teachers, this means that while students are in their care, they are considered to be in the position of a caring parent and are responsible for the protection of those students. I believe it is, in part, this legal requirement combined with their emotional investment that allows their Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interests of their students to permeate their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment and likely their teaching career as a whole. However, complexity arises in regard the process of Wanting What is in the Student's Best Interest as teachers often vary in their interpretations of what is considered to be in the "best interest" of the child (Tirri & Husu, 2002).

Developing Suspicion. Developing suspicion represents the point during which teachers come to suspect a child may be experiencing maltreatment, marking the beginning of the overall process of reporting suspicions. The process of Developing Suspicion largely provides a causal and contextual understanding of the teachers' experiences, which is ultimately what the grounded theory was developed upon. Many of the instances teachers described as contributing to the development of their suspicions are also instances that have been consistently identified in the mandatory reporting literature (Walsh et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2012). In the current study,

the instances most commonly identified as contributing to suspicion development included disclosures, appearance and demeanor, and change in behaviour and affect.

Importantly, when teachers described their experiences with reporting suspected child maltreatment they rarely made reference to specific forms of maltreatment, even when describing how they came to suspect maltreatment. Instead, they shared the instances by which they came to suspect maltreatment generally, without linking such suspicions to particular forms of maltreatment. This finding suggests that teachers are not as concerned with identifying the form of maltreatment a child may be experiencing, as they are concerned with merely identifying that maltreatment is occurring at all. This finding is not surprising given the overlap between warning signs and symptoms for various forms of maltreatment. For instance, behavioural dysregulation, low mood, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms are often considered warning signs and symptoms associated with physical and sexual maltreatment, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence (Black, 2011; Knutson, DeGarmo, Koeppl, & Reid, 2005; Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, Bates, Crozier, & Kaplow, 2002; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Maniglio, 2009; Norman, Byambaa, De, Butchart, Scott, & Vos, 2012).

Disclosures. Direct and indirect disclosures prompted teachers' development of suspicions of child maltreatment. Teachers described how verbal and written disclosures from students, their peers, and their parents influenced their development of suspicions. Disclosures represent one of the most obvious and objective ways in which a mandated reporter can come to suspect child maltreatment. Although teachers described some instances in which they developed suspicions based on their interpretation of students' schoolwork, the disclosures largely hinged around instances in which they directly heard that a child was being maltreated. Direct disclosures often leave mandated reporters feeling more confident in their suspicions (Walsh et

al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2012), which according to the current findings, would result in a quicker and simpler process of reporting. Additionally, disclosures leave less room/necessity for interpretation by the mandated reporter, whereas student appearance and demeanor may prompt suspicions of child maltreatment, but could also be the result of numerous other occurrences (e.g., trauma, illness) (Hawkins & McCallum, 2001; Schols et al., 2013).

   Student appearance and demeanor. Teachers described how they would develop suspicions of child maltreatment based on concerning aspects of a student's appearance and demeanor. They shared how concerning behavioural, emotional, and physical appearances and demeanors of their students prompted their suspicions of child maltreatment. These concerning appearances and demeanors encapsulate many of the warning signs and symptoms often associated with child maltreatment (Black, 2011; Knutson et al., 2005; Lansford et al., 2002; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Maniglio, 2009; Norman et al., 2012; Wolfe et al., 2003). The current findings suggesting that concerning appearances and behaviours prompt suspicions of child maltreatment fit with existing literature in the field of mandatory reporting. Specifically, many researchers have found that mandated reporters often develop suspicions when they recognize appearances and behaviours typically associated with child maltreatment (Paavilainen & Tarkka, 2003; Schols et al., 2013; Walsh et al., 2005). Moreover, similar to the current findings, researchers have consistently found that mandated reporters often develop suspicions when they recognize signs and symptoms such as physical bruises, nutritional neglect, social withdrawal, low mood, anxiety, and behavioural dysregulation (Paavilainen & Tarkka, 2003; Schols et al., 2013; Walsh et al., 2005; Walsh et al. 2012).

   Mandated professionals have reported that their development of suspicions has been related to their ability to identify warning signs and symptoms associated with child

maltreatment (Paavilainen & Tarkka, 2003; Schols et al., 2013; Walsh et al., 2005). However, what often varies between mandated reporters is their level of knowledge regarding warning signs and symptoms, which in turn, has been shown to impact their ability to identify child maltreatment (Goebbels et al., 2008; Paavilainen, Helminen, Flinch, & Lehtomaki, 2014). Regardless of level of knowledge, many mandated reporters have stated that they have found it easier to identify overt signs of maltreatment, such as bruises and burns, as opposed to covert signs of maltreatment, such as low mood and withdrawal (Eisbach & Driessnack, 2010; Land & Barclay, 2008; Walsh et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2012). Much like the objectivity of disclosures, it is possible that mandatory reporters find it easier to identify overt signs of maltreatment because of their observable nature, which would likely require them to rely less on their subjective interpretation.

Changes in affect and behaviour. Changes in student affect and behaviour influenced teachers' development of suspicions of child maltreatment. Much like student appearance and behaviour, changes in affect and behaviour is considered a warning sign for child maltreatment (Schols et al., 2013; Walsh et al., 2012). However, teachers described how it was the distinct process of *change* in students that prompted their suspicions. Noticing changes in affect and behaviour is unique from students' general appearance and demeanor, as it relies on teachers having a depth of awareness, knowledge, or relationship with a student in order for them to even notice that a change has occurred. Alternatively, appearance and demeanour are aspects of a student's presentation that could be noticed by any teacher, regardless of how well they know the student personally. In their comprehensive review of the literature, Harding, Davison-Fischer, Bekaert, and Appleton (2019) found that school nurses have consistently shared that trust and relationships with students are crucial in helping them to identify possible child maltreatment.

Harding and colleagues (2019) argued that it is through these trusting relationships that school nurses are able get to know students well enough in order to notice distinct changes in appearance and behaviour and that students are also more likely to disclose instances of maltreatment because they have trust in the adult. The current findings also highlight the important role that student-teacher relationships play in the teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, particularly in regard to how relationships influence their opportunity and ability to develop suspicions.

Developing Suspicion represents the point at which teachers come to suspect a child may be experiencing maltreatment. This process largely provides context for the remainder of the processes, as it demonstrates not only the causal process by which teachers came to suspect child maltreatment, but also some of the specific instances in which they suspected maltreatment, which varied in maltreatment form and severity. I have highlighted the importance of this contextual understanding throughout the grounded theory and have included further discussion regarding how the context of suspicions plays a role in the function of the primary processes in the remainder of this section.

Teachers' Individual Contexts. This stage of the process represents the presence of individuality within the reporting process. Humans are individuals, and thus, there are a number of individual factors that may impact the reporting process. My grounded theory recognizes and demonstrates the space for individuality within the process of reporting. This process reflects the essence of *symbolic interactionism*, in that it demonstrates how interpretation and experience influence how someone understands the world and then acts based on those understandings (Blumer, 1969). Teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and experiences informed their interpretation and understanding of the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, which ultimately

influenced how they acted (e.g., whether or not they reported). The current findings demonstrate

that there are three key factors of the self-context that teachers identified as paramount in

influencing their process of reporting including: personal beliefs, training and knowledge, and

experience.

Personal beliefs. Personal beliefs encompass the influence that teacher's beliefs

regarding domestic violence and their role as a teacher in protecting children has on shaping

Teachers' Individual Contexts. As human beings we all have unique experiences and beliefs that

contribute to how we navigate and interpret the world. This uniqueness is what provides

individuals with different points of view, and in this case, contributes to varying decisions of

reporting suspicions of child maltreatment.

The current findings demonstrate that teachers fostered varying beliefs regarding what

domestic violence is, whom it impacts, and how it impacts them, all of which influenced their

beliefs regarding mandatory reporting. When examining the influence of attitudes toward partner

violence on reporting behaviour for the general public, Gracia and Herrero (2006) found that the

higher tolerance people had for partner violence, the more negatively they viewed the importance

of reporting it. Moreover, those who were exposed to higher levels of public discussion

regarding partner violence were more likely to have positive attitudes toward reporting. These

findings are consistent with how teachers in the current study described the influence that their

beliefs and knowledge had on their process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. In

particular, they identified their beliefs and knowledge regarding the severity and forms of abuse,

as well as the perceived vulnerability of students based on their age as more impactful.

The current findings also fit with previous literature regarding thresholds of *reasonable*

suspicion. As mandated reporters receive little guidance in regard to what *reasonable suspicion*

looks like practically, they are especially susceptible to relying on their pre-existing biases, beliefs, and knowledge when interpreting their suspicions of child maltreatment (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Levi & Crowell, 2011; Levi et al., 2015). This is particularly concerning given the lack of formal training teachers receive regarding the signs and symptoms of child maltreatment (Alvarez et al., 2004; McTavish et al., 2017; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tufford et al., 2015). Although teachers may hold biases regarding domestic violence based on their personal experiences, it is crucial that they receive formal training in order to provide them with accurate information regarding child maltreatment for them to base their judgments upon.

Training and knowledge. In the current study, teachers consistently expressed that they received minimal, if any, training regarding mandatory reporting. This finding is consistent with years of literature in which lack of training and knowledge has been repeatedly identified as a major barrier faced by mandatory reporters (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Falkiner, Thomson, Guadagno, & Day, 2017; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Kimber et al., 2019; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Sethi et al., 2013; Webster et al., 2005). My grounded theory demonstrates the true impact of the level of training and knowledge on the entire process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. Teachers' level of training and knowledge regarding child maltreatment and reporting procedures impacted how they understood and acted throughout the reporting process. Most notably, they used this knowledge to inform how they perceived their suspicions of child maltreatment, as well as what they believed was an appropriate response. Although it is encouraging to know that teachers are utilizing their training and knowledge in the process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment, it is concerning when the training and knowledge they have is limited and/or inaccurate.

One of the most concerning findings of this study is the common belief many teachers had that reporting one's suspicions means disclosing them to their administrators. This belief is in contrast to formal policies, which state that the individual who develops the suspicion must report directly to their local Child Protective Services without discussing their suspicion with anyone else (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2013a). Despite this being clearly stated in policies, researchers have recently found that many teachers believe they must report suspicions to their administrators (de Haan et al., 2018; Vink & Daniels, 2015). de Haan and colleagues (2018) found that teachers and social workers perceive administrators as the *gate keepers* in regard to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment; however, it is currently unclear why many teachers believe they must report to their administrators. These findings demonstrate the concerning impact minimal and/or inaccurate training and knowledge can have on outcomes of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Therefore, as many researchers have argued (e.g., Falkiner, Thomson, Guadagno, & Day, 2017; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Sethi et al., 2013; Webster et al., 2005), it is crucial that teachers receive additional training regarding mandatory reporting, as I believe it is unreasonable to expect teachers to complete this responsibility of their profession with efficiency and accuracy if they have not received adequate training.

Experience. Our ability to interpret and understand situations is limited by our past experiences, as those experiences provide us with a lens through which we navigate the world. The current findings demonstrate the large and influential role experience plays in teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Teachers described their years of teaching experience, as well as their experience with suspicions of child maltreatment as helpful in easing their process of reporting. These findings fit with literature regarding teaching experience, and

teaching self-efficacy and mastery. Specifically, researchers have found that within at least the first 20 years of teaching, teachers' level of self-efficacy, which is their beliefs in their own abilities as a teacher (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), increases with their years of teaching experience (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). Additionally, researchers have found that teachers who had previously made reports to Child Protective Services were more likely to make future reports than those who had never made a report (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Kenny, 2001; Walsh et al., 2005). Extensive experience with an activity has been shown to contribute to mastery, which is considered a high level of skill or performance in a certain area (Ericsson, 2006). This supports the current findings in that teachers who had extensive experience with suspicions of child maltreatment expressed having felt more equipped to address the responsibility of reporting their suspicions.

Training and supervision from experienced professionals are considered important components in the development of mastery (Ericsson, 2006). Teachers typically receive some structured supervision from experienced teachers during their pre-service education (e.g., Hughes, Laffier, Mamol, Morrison, & Petrarca, 2015). However, given the unpredictable nature of when suspicions of child maltreatment arise, it is possible that many pre-service teachers do not encounter suspicions during their education, and thus likely do not receive structured supervision regarding this teaching responsibility. In addition, limited supervision likely contributes to teachers' limited knowledge of mandatory reporting procedures. During the process of Gathering Information, teachers often relied on consultation to support their reporting process. Given the helpfulness of supervision from experienced colleagues, through the use of consultation it is likely that teachers could proceed toward a sense of mastery of mandatory reporting procedures. However, the development of true mastery hinges on teachers consulting

with experienced professionals who are familiar with accurate mandatory reporting policies and procedures, which based on the current findings, may not always occur. Increased experience and senses of self-efficacy and mastery are only truly effective in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment if teachers are familiar with accurate legal procedures.

Teachers expressed the influence their personal experiences had on their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, specifically their personal experiences as a parent or with domestic violence victimization. Existing literature regarding parental status of mandated reporters have demonstrated inconsistent findings. In fact, some researchers have found quite the opposite, in that teachers who were not parents were more likely to detect and report suspicions of child maltreatment (O'Toole, et al., 1999; Walsh et al., 2005). Inconsistency has also been observed in regard to the influence of personal experience with domestic violence victimization and mandatory reporting tendencies (Gracia & Herrero, 2006; Vink & Jaffe, 2014). It is possible that the inconsistency in the findings of personal experience is related to the complex and interrelated nature of processes identified in the current grounded theory. Therefore, this may suggest that the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers is best understood through the relationship within and between processes, as opposed to focusing on the specific and individual factors.

The current findings also suggest that teachers are greatly influenced by their previous experiences with Child Protective Services. This finding is consistent with extensive literature that has consistently exhibited mandated reporters' distrust and frustration with Child Protective Services (Kenny, 2001; Kuruppu et al., 2018; O'Toole et al., 1999; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000). Some researchers have found that mandated reporters' negative experiences with Child Protective Services contributes to a decreased likelihood of

reporting suspicions of child maltreatment (Kuruppu et al., 2018), a sentiment that was also conveyed by some of the teachers in the current study.

The current findings demonstrate the influence experience has in shaping one's beliefs. Specifically, teachers in this study who had positive experiences with Child Protective Services described having more positive beliefs regarding the efficacy of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, and vice versa. These beliefs, in turn, were used by teachers throughout the remainder of the reporting process, and ultimately informed their decision of whether or not to report; this exemplifies the complex and interrelated nature within each individual process, as well as between the processes.

The process of Teachers' Individual Contexts situates the teacher as an individual within the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. The key finding here is that individuality is present and influential in the process of reporting, specifically through the factors of *beliefs, training and knowledge,* and *experience*. Although we cannot entirely control the aforementioned factors of individuality, interventions can be developed that target some of the identified factors in order to assist teachers in feeling supported and well equipped to be positioned at the center of this process. Suggestions for targeted interventions will be discussed later in this chapter.

Considering Teaching Context. This stage of the process represents the role of the teaching environment in process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. As humans, we exist within an environment with which we are constantly interacting. My grounded theory recognizes that and demonstrates how teachers are situated within and influenced by their teaching environment. Considering Teaching Context has a reciprocal relationship with Teachers' Individual Contexts, in that changes in the teaching environment can influence

changes at an individual level (e.g, beliefs and experiences) and vice versa. These findings align with Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which posits that there is a reciprocal relationship between a child and their larger environmental systems (e.g., home, school, community) that has a profound influence on their overall development. Although not related to child development, the current findings highlight how teachers may develop and the teaching environment may alter in response to changes in either of these primary processes. The current findings suggest that factors in the teaching environment that are most impactful in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment include: school demographics, student characteristics, and stress.

   Demographics. In the current study, teachers expressed that school demographics such as the location of the school, size of the school, and the background of the students attending (e.g., ethnic, racial, socio-economic) influenced their reporting process. Most notably, teachers described that they were often more likely to encounter suspicions of child maltreatment depending on the demographics of the school they were teaching in. Certain familial demographics have been shown to be associated with increased risk for domestic violence and child maltreatment, such as poverty, parental stress, parental mental health difficulties, parental substance abuse, lack of parenting skills, and inadequate resources and support (Cavaneaugh & Gelles, 2005; Dong et al., 2004; Goldman et al., 2003; Hartley, 2002; Jaffe, Scott, Jenney, Dawson, Straatman, & Campbell, 2014; Kauppi, Kumpulainen, Karkola, Vanamo, & Merkikanto, 2010; Margolin & Gordis, 2003; Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, Von Eye, & Levendosky, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers who work in schools with a higher proportion of at-risk children may encounter suspicions of child maltreatment more frequently. These findings are also consistent with a study completed Walsh and colleagues

(2005) in which they found that teachers who worked in schools rated as having low socioeconomic status were more likely to detect and report suspicions of child physical abuse and neglect. Moreover, the current findings demonstrate how the increased frequency of encountering suspicions of child maltreatment, in turn, influenced Teachers' Individual Contexts through the factor of *experience*. However, much remains unknown regarding the multitude of specific ways in which demographics may influence the reporting process. For instance, in future research, it will be important to examine whether or not the increased frequency of suspicions influences teachers' threshold for *reasonable suspicion* or their capacity to cope professionally and personally with numerous cases.

    Student Characteristics. The current findings suggest that certain student characteristics including age, ability, and the amount of time they spend with their teacher influence teachers' mandatory reporting process. These student characteristics influenced teachers' ability and opportunity to recognize signs and symptoms associated with child maltreatment. In particular, some teachers described the challenges of encountering suspicions of child maltreatment with young children, such that although they perceived young children show signs and symptoms of child maltreatment more clearly than older children, they were sometimes hesitant to believe what young children said given their developmental abilities. This hesitancy to believe young children poses a serious concern in regard to mandatory reporting, as younger children are at greater risk of harm due to their developmental needs and increased dependency on caregivers (Bogat, DeJonghe, Levendosky, Davidson, & von Eye, 2006; Jaffe et al., 2011).

    The current finding suggesting that the amount of time teachers spend with students influences their identification and response to suspicions of child maltreatment demonstrates a factor that has received minimal, if any, attention in the literature to date. In this study teachers at

the High School level described the difficulty they experienced identifying and following up on

suspicions of child maltreatment due to the lack of time they had with each student and vice

versa for Elementary level teachers. As students age and transition from Elementary School to

High School, the time they have for relationships with teachers and the desire to have those

relationships often diminishes (Baker, 1999; Davis & Lease, 2007). This marks a time in child

development in which they often seek out and prioritize relationships with peers over

relationships with adults (Tarrant, 2002). Therefore, it is not surprising that High School teachers

experienced particular difficulty in their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment

due to the student's age and developmental ability. Although younger children are at greatest risk

of harm in regards to domestic violence victimization, adolescents still experience significant

negative consequences from experiencing maltreatment (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008;

Moylan, Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Russo, 2010). Thus, further inquiry into the

influence of student age on the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers

is warranted.

   Stress. Every teacher in the present study described how their experiences of stress

influenced their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. For decades, stress has

been associated with the teaching profession and has been the focus of many research efforts

(e.g., Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Friedman, 2000). Teachers experience varying degrees of

stress, with burnout representing the highest level of stress. Burnout stems from the perceived

gap between the expectations of successful professional performance and one's ability to meet

those expectations (Friedman, 2000). Teacher burnout is most commonly associated with

increased stress, professional dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, low professional

involvement, low self-efficacy, fatigue, and increased likelihood of leaving the teaching

profession (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Stress and burnout

permeate many aspects of teaching, and therefore, it is not surprising that it is influential in the

process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment.

Teachers experience increased demands to address numerous issues outside the realm of

academics, including children's mental and physical wellbeing (Suldo, Gormley, DuPaul, &

Anderson-Butcher, 2014). It is likely that these demands increase teachers' risk of experiencing

stress and burnout, which may compromise the time, effort, and resources they have to fully

engage in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Increased teacher stress has

been related to both physical and cognitive fatigue, which is the experience of feeling mentally

exhausted due to factors such as sleep deprivation or information overload (Bazerman & Moore,

2009). Cognitive fatigue has been found to negatively impact the time, energy, and willingness

people have to commit to duties that may seem above and beyond their job, which in some cases

may include teacher's duty to report (Hefferman, 2011; Milgram, 1970; Werhane, Hartman,

Archer, Englehardt, & Pritchard, 2013). Not only does cognitive fatigue influence one's

investment in professional duties, it has been found to decrease the likelihood of accurately

judging information salient to decision making (Bazerman & Moore, 2009; Dembe, 2009). It is

possible that with increased experiences of stress, teachers' accuracy in identifying, judging, and

acting upon their suspicions of child maltreatment may be compromised. The risk of

experiencing stress and cognitive fatigue is perhaps the highest amongst new teachers, those with

less than five years of experience, who feel particularly overwhelmed by the demands of their

work (Alberta Teacher's Association, 2013b; Friedman, 2000; Struyven, & Vanthournout, 2014).

Therefore, not only are new teachers experiencing increased difficulty addressing suspicions of

child maltreatment, as previously discussed, they are likely experiencing increased feelings of

stress and possibly burnout. The relationship between stress and teacher experience further

exemplifies the interconnectedness of the Considering Teaching Context and Teachers'

Individual Contexts processes.

The teaching profession is associated with many stress-related outcomes for teachers,

many of which stem from the emotional involvement teachers experience with their students

(Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005). Reporting suspicions of child

maltreatment has been shown to be a stressful and emotional process for mandated reporters

(Blaskett & Taylor, 2003; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009), which may be

exacerbated for teachers given their emotional investment with their students (Hargreaves, 1998;

Spilt et al., 2011). In consideration of the far-reaching effects of stress, it is reasonable to argue

that it has a strong influence on the reporting process for teachers; however, what is unclear is

the directionality of this influence. For instance, the emotional toll that reporting is observed to

take on teachers might initiate or exacerbate their experience of professional stress.

Alternatively, the level of stress teachers experience may contribute to the emotional availability

teachers have to invest in their duty to report. Most importantly, regardless of the directionality

of the influence of teacher stress on reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, intervention

efforts to reduce teacher stress must be prioritized. Intervention efforts focused on reducing

teacher stress will not only provide support and relief for teachers in their process of reporting

suspicions of child maltreatment, but will likely also improve their ability to cope with the

innumerable other responsibilities associated with the teaching profession.

Experiencing Uncertainty. This stage represents the influence that uncertainty in

suspicions has during process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Generally, this

primary process encapsulates some of the mental, emotional, and psychological aspects of the

process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. It also marks the stage at which teachers begin to take action regarding their suspicions of child maltreatment. During this process teachers are grappling with their uncertainty, which has already been primed by their beliefs, training and knowledge, experience, demographics, student characteristics, and stress. Experiencing Uncertainty demonstrates how emotions, relationships, and confidence influence the reporting process. These factors influence how teachers cope with and respond to the uncertainty they experience.

The current findings relate to existing literature identifying ambiguity in reporting as a barrier faced by mandated reporters (e.g., Worley & Melton, 2013). Ambiguity in reporting has largely been related to how mandated reporters interpret policies that state reporting is warranted in cases of *reasonable suspicion* of child maltreatment (Egu & Weiss, 2003; Levi et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2008). In the current study, teachers did not specifically reference the term *reasonable suspicion*; instead they focused on describing their experiences of coping with the uncertainty of their suspicions. Although researchers have argued for the creation of a detailed definition of *reasonable suspicion* (Crowell & Levi, 2012; Levi & Crowell, 2011; Levi et al., 2015), the current findings suggest it may be worthwhile to first explore how teachers cope with the uncertainty. By arguing for the creation of a detailed definition of *reasonable suspicion*, we are assuming that a definition would be enough to alleviate uncertainty. However, the current findings suggest that uncertainty regarding reporting suspicions of child maltreatment is complex and is influenced by more than ambiguity in the interpretation of *reasonable suspicion*. These findings are in line with those found by de Haan and colleagues (2018), who argued that there are several factors that can influence mandated reporters' interpretation of *reasonable suspicion*. Perhaps what would be most effective would be educating teachers that absolute certainty is not

required in order to report suspicions of child maltreatment, as long as those suspicions are

reported in *good faith* (Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, 2000; Mathews & Kenny,

2008). This may help relieve some of the fear of reporting and reduce the amount of time and

energy teachers spend on the part of the process.

    Emotions. The current findings suggest that when teachers are faced with uncertainty

regarding their suspicions, they experience emotions related to both their wellbeing and that of

their students. The emotional experience demonstrated in my grounded theory is consistent with

existing literature, which highlights the range of emotions mandated reporters experience in

regard to their concerns of the impact of reporting. Researchers have found that mandated

reporters experience feelings of fear, guilt, and stress regarding reporting their suspicions of

child maltreatment (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2008; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz &

Wachtel, 2009). Consistent with findings from previous literature (Bjørknes et al., 2018; Jones et

al., 2008; Schols et al., 2013), the teachers in the present study also expressed fear as one of the

most prominent emotions they experienced in regard to their duty to report.

    Teachers described experiencing fear for both the child and for themselves, which has

also been identified by researchers and explored at length (Bryant, 2009; Delaronde et al., 2000;

Falkiner, Thomson, & Day, 2017; Melton, 2005; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Kenny, 2004; Kuruppu

et al., 2018; Schols et al., 2013; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000; Webster et al., 2005). Fear

demonstrates a complex emotion in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, as

teachers in the current study described fear as both a motivator and a barrier to reporting their

suspicions. They discussed a fear of what may happen to the child if their suspicions were not

reported, which motivated them to report their suspicions. Alternatively, teachers also shared a

fear of the consequences for the child and themselves if they made an inaccurate report, as well

as a fear of making the situation more dangerous for the child and themselves if they reported.

These findings are especially concerning, as researchers have found that teachers who fear

reporting will make the situation worse for the child have a tendency to underreport their

suspicions (Webster et al., 2005).

In regard to fear for themselves, teachers described a fear of losing their job if they made

an inaccurate report, but unlike previous studies, they did not express a fear of being sued or

having to partake in legal proceedings (Bryant, 2009; Kenny, 2004; Kesner & Robinson, 2002;

Kuruppu et al., 2018; Melton, 2005; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000; Webster et al., 2005).

Moreover, similar to previous findings (e.g., Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Kuruppu et al., 2018;

Tufford, 2016) teachers identified a fear of damaging their relationship with their students in the

process of reporting their suspicions.

As previously discussed, many emotions are associated with the teaching profession,

most notably the emotional investment teachers experience with their students and the emotional

toll of experiencing stress. The current findings suggest that teachers feel the emotional weight

of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. This is consistent with existing literature that

has demonstrated the emotional toll reporting suspicions of child maltreatment has on mandated

reporters (Blaskett & Taylor, 2003; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009). However, the

current findings also suggest that with additional teaching experience, teachers feel they are

better able to cope with the emotional demands of this responsibility. This finding further

supports the argument that years of teaching experience eases the process of reporting suspicions

of child maltreatment for teachers through increased knowledge regarding mandatory reporting

and decreased experiences of stress and emotionality.

It is clear that the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment evokes a range of

emotions for teachers, with fear representing one of the most complex and prominent emotions

in this process. This fear not only increases the emotional stress they experience, but it also

appears to greatly impact their process of reporting their suspicions by acting as either a

motivator or a barrier to reporting. Fear is often fueled by teacher's beliefs, experiences and

training, in particular, a fear of the consequences of reporting. Therefore, the complexity of

emotion in the reporting process warrants further inquiry, as well as targeted intervention efforts.

For instance, training programs focused on improving teacher's understanding of child

maltreatment and demystifying outcomes of reporting may aid in the reduction of fear

experienced by teachers in their process of reporting their suspicions.

     Confidence. In my grounded theory, confidence represents a way of thinking and feeling

for teachers that evokes emotion and action. This thought and feeling of confidence involves

teachers' confidence in their suspicion, as well as their confidence in Child Protective Services

as an agency. The current findings suggest that teachers seek to attain a certain level of

confidence in their suspicion prior to proceeding to the final decision making process. Given the

variation in thresholds for *reasonable suspicion* that has been observed in previous literature (de

Haan et al., 2018; Crowell & Levi, 2012; Levi & Brown, 2005; Levi & Crowell, 2011; Levi et

al., 2015; Richards, 2017), it is likely that what is needed to increase confidence differs amongst

teachers. However, what my grounded theory ultimately aims to capture is the importance of

teachers achieving a perceived sense of confidence, regardless of what that confidence is

composed of.

     Although level of confidence varies, teachers expressed that factors such as severity and

observable harm contributed substantially to their perceived sense of confidence. This is

consistent with results of a study conducted by Walsh and colleagues (2012) who found that

professionals were most likely to report when maltreatment was severe, observable, physical in

nature, or when a child had directly disclosed maltreatment. These findings, in part, may be

influenced by beliefs regarding child maltreatment (e.g., physical is worse than emotional),

which may contribute to increased likelihood of reporting certain forms of maltreatment.

However, based on the current findings, it is also reasonable to argue that reporting suspicions is

more about one's perceived confidence in those suspicions, regardless of particular form of

maltreatment. For instance, when someone is able to see signs of physical abuse (e.g., bruises),

they likely feel more confident that it is due to child maltreatment as opposed to changes in

behaviour associated with exposure to domestic violence, which can be difficult to relate

specifically to child maltreatment. Therefore, these findings suggest that specifying the form of

abuse in research, intervention, and policies may not be as important as I originally believed.

Consistent with decades of previous literature (Kenny, 2001; Kuruppu et al., 2018;

O'Toole et al., 1999; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000), the current

findings suggest that teachers continue to express a lack of confidence in Child Protective

Services, which is largely informed by their previous negative experiences. Many teachers

described instances of failed efforts to communicate with Child Protective Services, as well as

situations in which they reported their suspicions to Child Protective Services and investigations

were not prompted. Experiences such as these have been shown to increase frustration for

mandatory reporters (Kenny, 2001; Francis et al., 2012; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994) and

contribute to tendency not to report suspicions (Kuruppu et al., 2018; Tufford & Morton, 2018).

The current findings also suggest that many teachers foster distrust in Child Protective Services

due to a lack of both collaboration and information regarding case outcomes. This is consistent

with previous literature, finding that many teachers who report never learn about the outcomes of the case, which impacts their confidence in Child Protective Services (Walsh et al., 2005). Moreover, Tufford and Morton (2018) also found that mandated reporters feel deterred from reporting due to the lack of collaboration and support they receive from Child Protective Services. However, similar to the current findings, Tufford and Morton (2018) also found that mandated reporters recognize collaboration is complicated due to limits of confidentiality.

  Relationships. Findings from the current study demonstrate that teachers tended to rely on their relationships with others during their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. These relationships provided teachers with support and feelings of connectedness, which was particularly helpful while they were coping with feelings of uncertainty. The current findings demonstrate the important role relationships with colleagues plays in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. Specifically, teachers sought emotional support and a sense of belongingness from their colleagues. Importantly, teachers who felt supported by their administrator described having felt less intimidated by and fearful of the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. This demonstrates a novel finding, as the importance of workplace relationships has received minimal, if any, attention in the mandatory reporting literature.

  As human beings, we have a natural tendency to want to belong (Baumeister, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2017); therefore, it is not surprising that workplace relationships are important in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. We typically receive comfort in knowing they we are not alone and that we have the support of others (Baumeister, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2017). For teachers, having positive relationships with their colleagues is especially important as these relationships provide them with energy and moral

support that helps them be more effective with their students (Hargreaves, 2001; Wiley, 2001).

As mandatory reporting is a complex, emotional, and sometimes a controversial process, it is

reasonable that teachers receive comfort and relief from having strong and supportive

relationships with their colleagues. The current findings suggest that through the support these

relationships offer, teachers feel less burdened by the process of reporting suspicions of child

maltreatment, and less crippled by uncertainty. The importance of these relationships also

extends to relationships with Child Protective Services. In particular, teachers described feeling

more confident in Child Protective Services when they were able to form relationships with

social workers that worked for the agency.

In the current study, teachers also described the importance of developing and

maintaining relationships with students and their families. The findings suggest that teachers rely

on these relationships when evaluating their suspicions of child maltreatment and considering

what is in the best interests of the student. Similar to findings from existing literature, the present

findings show that teachers worry about damaging their relationships with their students

(Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Kuruppu et al., 2018; Tufford, 2016). As a result of this, teachers felt

as though they had to balance maintaining relationships with keeping the child safe. Student-

teacher relationships that largely involve conflict and mistrust have been found to be associated

with poorer learning outcomes for children (Hamre & Pianta, 2001), so it is understandable that

some mandated reporters are hesitant to report their suspicions of child maltreatment in order to

preserve their relationships with the child and their family (Tufford, 2016). Prioritizing their

relationships with students may pose concerns in regard to mandatory reporting. However, it is

encouraging to see the level of thought and consideration that teacher put into protecting these

relationships, as the quality of student-teacher relationships is associated with positive outcomes

for students, including heightened academic achievement (Doumen, Verschueren, Buyse, Germeijs, Luyckx, & Soenens, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2011).

Based on the current findings, it is evident that relationships are paramount in teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. In a broader sense, the importance of these relationships extends beyond just the reporting process, as it impacts many of the responsibilities teachers take on in their careers (Hargreaves, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Wiley, 2001). In considering this, it would be worthwhile for future intervention efforts to be focused on improving workplace morale, collegiality, and positive relationships, as this will not only ease the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teacher, but likely other difficult career responsibilities of theirs as well.

Gathering Information. Gathering Information represents the process during which teachers actively seek out information to support them during their process of reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. This process occurs simultaneously with Experiencing Uncertainty, largely because during this process, teachers actively gather information pertaining to their suspicions of child maltreatment in order to mitigate their feelings of uncertainty. The current findings suggest that during this process, teachers work to build their suspicions of child maltreatment, while relying heavily on consultation. The amount of time and effort teachers spent in these processes was directly related to the level and severity of uncertainty they experienced.

To date, most researchers have focused on examining the phenomena of non-reporting through the identification of barriers to reporting (e.g., Greytak, 2009; Kenny, 2001). Although certain barriers have been identified in the current findings, the process of Gathering Information

demonstrates that teachers act upon some of those barriers. For instance, the current findings

support existing literature that has identified confidence in the suspicion as a barrier to reporting

(Delaronde et al., 2000; Goebbels et al., 2008; Goldman & Padaychi, 2002; Kenny, 2001;

Sinanan, 2011; Walsh et al., 2012). However, until now, we have lacked awareness and

understanding of how teachers actually act upon that uncertainty. This presents as a novel

finding that suggests a need to for researchers to re-conceptualize their understanding of

mandatory reporting. Specifically, researchers need to look beyond the identification of barriers

in order to understand that reporting suspicions of child maltreatment is truly an active *process*

for teachers.

    Building Suspicion. The current findings suggest that teachers actively seek out, solicit,

and record information related to their suspicions of child maltreatment in order to cope with

their feelings of uncertainty. Specifically, during this process teachers are gathering information

that will either support or refute their suspicions of child maltreatment, largely by observing and

speaking with students. These findings support the influence of relationships in the reporting

process, as teachers often relied on those relationships in order to gather information. For

instance, teachers expressed having felt better able to address their suspicions of child

maltreatment with students if they had already developed a strong relationship with them.

However, as previously discussed, relationships can also complicate the reporting process as

teachers fear damaging the relationships they have built (Gallagher-Mackay, 2014; Kuruppu et

al., 2018; Tufford, 2016). Therefore, it will be important for future researchers to further

examine the complex role of relationships in the process of reporting suspicions of child

maltreatment, with a specific focus on how relationships can be preserved.

Although all teachers described taking some form of action in Gathering Information related to their suspicions, the amount of effort they put into gathering this information varied. Although this lack of effort may occur for a number of different reasons, it is likely that one of these reasons is related to stress and burnout. Given the frequency that teachers experience stress and burnout, and the negative impact it has on their professional and personal functioning (Borg et al., 1991; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Friedman, 2000; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999), it would not be surprising if it is found to also impact their engagement in the process of Gathering Information. In fact, this would be consistent with existing literature that has identified the negative influence burnout and cognitive fatigue has on the process of ethical decision making. Specifically, researchers have found that those who experience burnout and cognitive fatigue have an increased likelihood of falling victim to confirmation bias while making ethical decisions (Dembe, 2009). Confirmation bias is the tendency for individuals to seek out information or evidence that support their preconceived beliefs (Dunham & Banaji, 2010; Nickerson, 1999). I believe that given the relationship between teacher self-efficacy, their perceived ability to identify child maltreatment, and stress, it would not be surprising if teachers who feel less confident in their ability to identify child maltreatment and are feeling stressed, are more likely to believe their suspicions are inaccurate. It will be important for future researchers to examine the relationship between Gathering Information, stress and burnout, and confirmation bias, in understanding the effort teachers put into building their suspicions.

Consulting. The current findings demonstrate the value of consultation in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. Consultation with colleagues and other professionals provided teachers with invaluable support and expertise when building their suspicions. Similar to the previously discussed processes, as well as in existing literature,

relationships appear incredibly beneficial in the process of consulting. Teachers shared that when they had pre-existing relationships with one another, it provided an added comfort of mutual trust and respect. This finding aligns with my previous discussion of the support and comfort humans receive in feeling as though they are not alone (Baumeister, 2012; Leary & Baumeister, 2017).

Many researchers have found that mandated reporters, including teachers, often prefer to consult with colleagues and their administrator prior to making any formal reports (Flaherty, Jones, Sege, & Child Abuse Recognition Experience Study Research Group, 2004; Jones et al., 2008; Vink & Jaffe, 2014). Based on the current findings, it is reasonable to argue that teachers have a desire to engage in consultation during the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, as it can influence their feelings of uncertainty. This argument is consistent with findings from a study conducted by Weinstein, Levine, Kogan, Harkavy-Friedman, and Miller (2000) who found that in their sample, 92% of mandatory reporters sought advice from at least one other source prior to reporting. They also found that when faced with uncertainty, the opinion of colleagues was one of the most prevalent factors that influenced teachers' decisions of whether or not to report their suspicions.

The function of the process of Gathering Information is largely to aid in the reduction of uncertainty. Findings in existing literature have identified several factors related to a case of suspected child maltreatment that can lead to increased confidence in the suspicion (e.g., severity, direct disclosure) (Flaherty et al., 2008; Walsh et al., 2005; Walsh et al., 2012). However, prior to the current study we have been largely unaware of 1) the role teachers play in gathering information related to their suspicion, and 2) the methods through which they gather

this information. The present findings call for a shift in research focus from identifying barriers to understanding the actions mandatory reporters take in response to such barriers.

Deciding Whether to Report. Deciding Whether to Report is the final stage of the process and represents the time during which teachers make a decision regarding reporting their suspicions of child maltreatment. This process signifies the culmination of their experiences throughout the primary processes and results in one of the following decisions: report to Child Protective Services, report to their administrator, report to student services, refer the case to someone else, or do not report. A concerning finding from the current study is that the variation in reporting decisions was largely influenced by the beliefs and knowledge teachers had regarding mandatory reporting policies and procedures at the outset of the process. For instance, a teacher may feel as though reporting their suspicion is warranted, but because they believe proper protocol is to inform their administrator of their suspicion, they do not actually report to Child Protective Services. This is concerning not only because teachers are making impactful decisions based on inaccurate knowledge, but also because the suspicion may not be reported to Child Protective Services by their administrator, leaving children at risk. Given teachers' consistent and pervasive lack of training and familiarity with mandatory reporting procedures and policies (de Haan et al., 2018; Falkiner, Thomson, Guadagno, & Day, 2017; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2018; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Sethi et al., 2013; Vink & Daniels, 2015; Webster et al., 2005), it is worrisome that despite their good intentions, a large proportion of suspicions of child maltreatment are likely not being reported correctly to Child Protective Services.

Summary and Discussion of the Grounded Theory

In the previous section I provided a detailed understanding of the individual primary processes that make up the grounded theory that I developed through this research project. Understanding the primary processes provides an appreciation for the complexity of the process, while also providing context of how the processes connect and relate to form the larger grounded theory. Now I will provide a summary and description of the developed grounded theory as a complete process, ultimately demonstrating the novel way in which it provides an understanding for the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers. When understanding my grounded theory as a whole, it is less about attuning to the individual factors and more about broadly appreciating the processes shared by teachers.

Prior research on mandated reporting has largely focused on the identification of specific barriers that influence reporting behaviour (Greytak, 2009; Kenny, 2001). The grounded theory I developed in this study demonstrates that reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers is complex and is influenced by more than just barriers. In the current study, teachers described several factors that acted as barriers in the reporting process; however, they also described how depending on the circumstances, these factors also facilitated the reporting process. In other words, based on teachers' descriptions of the reporting process, any given factor can function as either a barrier or a support to reporting. For instance, with the factor of training, when teachers had more training it acted as a supporting factor in their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment; however, with less training it acted as a barrier. These findings suggest that the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment is better understood through the identification of specific factors, which in any given situation either help or hinder teachers in the reporting process.

With a prior focus on the identification of barriers to reporting, researchers have been able to demonstrate relationships between barriers and reporting behaviour. Although this has undoubtedly been important, I believe this focus on barriers has lacked depth in providing an understanding of *how* mandatory reporting occurs. The grounded theory I developed in this study not only identifies factors pertinent to reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, but also demonstrates how they connect to form an overall *process*. The current findings represent seven primary processes that are intricately related, as changes that occur in one process have a ripple effect on the remaining processes. Moreover, my grounded theory demonstrates how teachers are active agents in the reporting process. This novel finding not only demonstrates the complexity of the reporting process, but also suggests that future research should focus on more than just the relationship between barriers and reporting behaviours and include the people engaged in the process. Until now, researchers have had little awareness and understanding of how teachers, or mandated reporters in general, act in response to barriers they face in the reporting process. Therefore, perhaps the relationship between barriers and reporting behaviour is not as direct as previously believed and is in fact influenced by the extent to which teachers 1) act upon the barriers and 2) are successful in mitigating the barriers through those actions (e.g., Gathering Information).

Recently in the literature, researchers have been calling for a focus on a broader understanding of mandatory reporting behaviours (Feng et al., 2012; McTavish et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2012). As I discussed in the literature review, in efforts to develop this broader understanding, Walsh and colleagues (2012) identified three domains of factors that influence reporting behaviour for mandated professional, including: case characteristics, teacher characteristics, and school environment. The current findings suggest that some of the factors

involved in the reporting process for teachers align with the domains identified by Walsh and colleagues (2012). Specifically, case characteristics are seen in Developing Suspicion, teacher characteristics are seen, in part, in Teachers' Individual Contexts, and school environment is seen in Considering Teaching Context. Although somewhat comparable, the domains identified by Walsh and colleagues (2012) provide a categorical understanding of factors influencing the reporting process, whereas the current findings demonstrate the interrelated nature of the factors. Moreover, when compared to the current findings, Walsh and colleagues' (2012) domains appear to represents the contextual factors in the process, but do not encompass the more active components of the process (e.g., Experiencing Uncertainty and Gathering Information).

In an effort to understand the interplay between some of the factors that influence reporting behaviour, Feng and colleagues (2012) conducted a study examining how law and ethics influence mandated reporters' decision making. Their findings provided a valuable understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of law and ethics in regard to deciding whether or not to report suspicions of child maltreatment. Factors of law and ethics are reflected in the current findings, particularly through the difficulty teachers experienced balancing their legal duty with what they considered to be in the best interests of the child. However, the current findings show that the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment is much larger than law and ethics alone. Although Feng and colleagues (2012) only focused on law and ethics, their study demonstrated a new way of thinking about mandatory reporting, in that they related it to a process of ethical decision making.

Relation to ethical decision making. For decades researchers have been working to develop understandings of ethical decision making. The current findings align closely with models of ethical decision making, as they both represent complex processes that are comprised

of several interrelated processes. Ethics are often viewed in terms of morality, and what we

should do (Mahony, 2009). However, in some cases what we should do is not always deemed the

best course of action, and thus, an ethical dilemma arises. Broadly speaking, ethical dilemmas

involve making a decision of what is most right out of a number of options that could be

considered right choices (French-Lee & Dooley, 2015). This aligns well with how teachers in the

current study described their consideration of what is in the best interests of the students. In

particular, some teachers recognized that they had a legal duty to report their suspicions, but felt

that reporting may not actually be what was best for the student. Ethical decision making can be

an uncomfortable process, as individuals are forced to play a role in a decision that may not have

positive outcome for all parties. This process often makes the decision maker feel vulnerable, as

they feel responsible for the consequences of their actions (Werhane et al., 2013). Consistent

with this description of discomfort related to ethical decision making, are the current findings in

which teachers experienced difficulty with uncertainty and coping with emotions regarding the

process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment.

In order to conceptualize the complexities of ethical decision making in education,

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) developed a model that utilizes a multiparadigm approach (see

Figure 2). This model describes the interconnectedness of multiple factors in decision making,

all centering around the best interests of the student. The factors they identify as influencing

ethical decision making include: best interests of the student, standards of the profession,

individual professional codes, personal codes of ethics, ethics of the community, and

professional code of ethics. What Shapiro and Stefkovich aimed to emphasize in their model was

the complexity educators face in balancing all of the factors. The current findings relate closely

with the Shapiro and Stefkovich model, not only because it also identifies Wanting What is in

the Student's Best Interests as primary process that permeates the overall process, but also

because it demonstrates how teachers have an active role in the process during which they are

balancing many competing factors (e.g., personal beliefs, professional responsibilities).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) developed their model primarily for educators themselves

as a tool to help guide their ethical decision making. Specifically, they believed this model would

help educators to understand the underlying factors that influence ethical dilemmas, as well as

help them to identify their own personal beliefs and biases that may be present within each of the

factors. Similarly, the current findings will also be useful for teachers, as they can use the visual

model and the detailed description of the processes to situate themselves within the process of

reporting suspicions of child maltreatment to see how the individual processes relate to their

situation, which is part of the ultimate utility of a grounded theory (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003). The

model developed by Shapiro and Stefkovich provides researchers, policy makers, and educators

with lens through which they can interpret and evaluate ethical decision making. However, their

model is broad in nature, and although it may encompass the overarching factors that could

impact educators' ethical decision making, it does not address specific factors that are unique to

different ethical dilemmas they encounter. In this respect, I believe the current findings

demonstrate a theory with more utility, as the detailed identification and description of processes

and specific factors provide individuals with a lens through which they can better understand the

process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers.
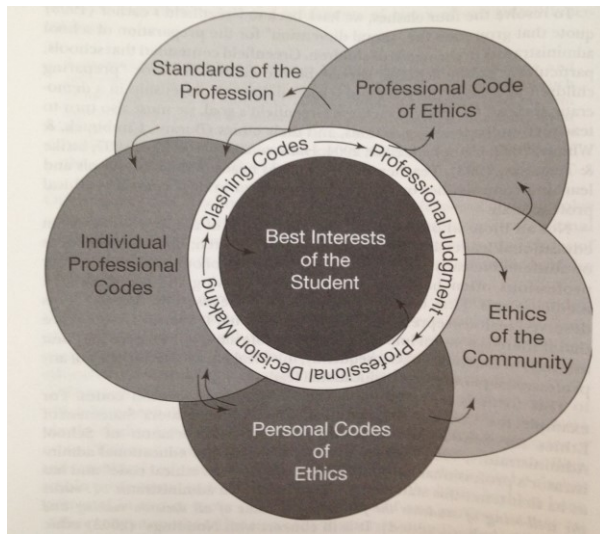
Figure 2. Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2011) Multiparadigm Approach to Ethical Decision Making in Education

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

Theory. Prior to the current study, a theory describing the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers did not exist. In fact, the present findings demonstrate one of the first grounded theories developed in regard to mandatory reporting in general. My grounded theory provides a novel understanding of the process based directly on the perspectives and experiences of the teachers themselves. For decades, researchers have been working to understand the phenomena of non-reporting by mandated professionals, and until now, research studies have come short of producing findings that provide a holistic explanation of the reporting process. The current findings support the argument that research efforts need to shift away from identification of barriers, and instead focus on understanding mandatory reporting as a process (Feng et al., 2012; McTavish et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2012). My grounded theory provides us with a lens through which we can better understand the process of reporting suspicions of child

maltreatment for teachers. Importantly, the findings can be used to inform policy and practice, as well as promote new lines of inquiry and further research.

Research. To date, most research conducted regarding mandated reporting has been quantitative in nature, and has focused on specific barriers faced when reporting suspicions of child maltreatment (Greytak, 2009; Kenny, 2001). Although these studies have provided valuable information that has contributed to our understanding of non-reporting, there has been a lack of understanding of teachers' experiences of mandatory reporting. Through the use of grounded theory methodology, I was able to develop an understanding of the reporting process from the teachers themselves. Moreover, by providing them with the opportunity to describe their experiences of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, I was able to develop a grounded theory that was directly reflective of the process of reporting as they experienced it. The current findings demonstrate the value in conducting qualitative research studies in the area of mandatory reporting, as these studies can provide a breadth of information that may otherwise not be initially captured in a quantitative study.

The current findings also suggest that teachers experience difficulty distinguishing child exposure to domestic violence (CEDV) from other forms of child maltreatment. As the initial purpose of this study was to explore CEDV specifically, I started every interview asking about CEDV directly. As the participants wandered away from CEDV in their responses to my interview questions, I reminded them of this purpose with the hope they would become more precise in their expression. However, time and time again, teachers expanded the scope of their experiences to include child maltreatment broadly, and as a result, I too expanded the scope of the resultant grounded theory. I view this broadening as a strength and not a weakness in terms of the final results and also as an important advantage of the emergent nature of grounded theory.

The difficulty teachers had in distinguishing between forms of maltreatment that resulted in the broadening of the research is likely impacted by the high rate of co-occurrence between CEDV and other forms of child maltreatment (Dong et al., 2004; Finkelhor et al., 2015; Hamby & Grych, 2013; Osofsky, 2003). Due to this, it is probable that in cases where teachers suspect CEDV, they also suspect other forms of child maltreatment. Although there is substantial co-occurrence of forms of child maltreatment, different forms of child maltreatment have been linked to different symptoms and negative outcomes (Cortiñas et al., 2018). As a result of this, findings from previous studies have been critiqued due to their examination of child maltreatment broadly (Mathews, 2012, 2014). The current findings demonstrate that a focus on specific forms of child maltreatment may not be necessary when examining teachers' process of reporting suspicions to Child Protective Services. Although there may be differences in signs and symptoms associated with various forms of child maltreatment, teachers did not focus on differentiating between forms of maltreatment in their process of reporting. Instead, they focused on whether or not child maltreatment was occurring, regardless of its form. This is not entirely surprising, given 1) the minimal training teachers receive regarding identifying signs and symptoms of child maltreatment and 2) the co-occurrence of all forms of child maltreatment. In light of these findings, I believe that it may be more beneficial for researchers to look at the process of reporting suspicions for each profession as opposed to each form of child maltreatment.

Another important implication is that researchers must cautiously use the term *report* when exploring reporting practices of mandated reporters. To researchers *report* implies correct mandatory reporting policies. However, based on the current findings, teachers vary in their understanding of mandatory reporting policies and *report* may be interpreted as a wide range of

activities. Specifically, some teachers incorrectly believed that reporting meant disclosing their suspicions to their administrator, whereas some teachers were familiar with the correct policy in that they knew they must report to Child Protective Services. Due to this variation in understanding, it is difficult to determine whether or not studies conducted to date have accurately measured reporting behaviour in the correct sense of the requirement. It is possible that the already low frequency of reporting is actually an overestimate, given that many teachers believe they reported their suspicions when they pass the information on to their administrator – an action that is not technically reporting. Going forward, it will be important for researchers to explicitly reference Child Protective Services when asking participants about their reporting behaviour.

In regard to research study design, although there was considerable diversity amongst my sample, advertising for my study may have attracted participants who were interested in child maltreatment and mandatory reporting, presenting a self-selecting bias (Olsen, 2008). Due to this bias, it is possible that important differences would have been identified in the process of reporting had teachers who had less passion to discuss their experiences with reporting child maltreatment participated. For instance, all teachers in the current study expressed a genuine desire to do what was best for their students, and thus, they took their role as a mandated reporter seriously. It is possible that teachers who are less passionate about their career or have vastly different beliefs regarding mandatory reporting would have different experiences in the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Therefore, although it may be challenging, it would be beneficial for the experiences of teachers who have low job satisfaction and negative beliefs regarding mandatory reporting to be explored.

Finally, it is possible that the completion of telephone interviews impacted the development of rapport between the participants and myself and limited my ability to read some nonverbal cues (Garbett & McCormack, 2001; Novick, 2008). Although conducting telephone interviews may not be considered the most ideal form of interviewing, by doing so I was able to include teachers who otherwise would not have been able to participate. Specifically, it was these teachers who also contributed to diversity in the overall sample, as they included teachers from rural communities. Therefore, despite the limitations of telephone interviews, these teachers provided valuable information and perspectives that proved pertinent to the overall theory development.

Practice. The current findings suggest that teachers are well intentioned and are doing the best that they can. Unfortunately, they are working within a system that has not adequately prepared them to address and cope with the responsibilities of their profession when it comes to mandatory reporting. For more than a decade, the need for teachers to receive proper training regarding mandatory reporting has been suggested by researchers (Alvarez et al., 2004; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2017; Kimber et al., 2019; McTavish et al., 2017; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Sethi, et al., 2013; Webster et al., 2005), and based on the current findings, I too, argue for the need of additional training. Most teachers do not receive any formal training regarding mandatory reporting (Falkiner, Thomson, & Day, 2017; Greytak, 2009; Kenny, 2001), and thus, the current findings suggest that teachers often rely on their own beliefs and limited knowledge when making judgments of whether or not to report their suspicions. This is extremely concerning as it puts victimized children at an unnecessary risk of not being identified. Additionally, this lack of training forces teachers to address responsibilities of their profession without adequate tools, which ultimately contributes to increased stress and likely burnout.

Although the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers is layered and complex, the pervasive influence that lack of training and knowledge has throughout the entire process, calls for specific intervention in this area.

Ideally, I recommend that training regarding mandatory reporting, including what it looks like practically, be embedded within pre-service teacher education programs (e.g., Bachelor of Education curriculum). This would provide all new teaching professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address their duty to report. Providing practicing teachers with additional training may prove slightly more difficult. Workshops regarding mandatory reporting can be made available to teachers through professional development opportunities; however, individual administrators often decide whether or not certain professional development workshops are deemed mandatory (Scribner, 1999). In order to ensure all practicing teachers receive training, it would have to be implemented on a school board-wide policy level, which would require considerable time, resources, and effort to implement. Although I recommend that training regarding duty to report be mandatory for all teachers, I recognize there are many practical and political challenges in implementation.

Alternatively, interventions that may improve not only the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, but also the teaching profession in general, may be more appealing to administrators, stakeholders, and policy advisors. For instance, stress was identified as an area of concern for teachers in regard to their reporting process. However, the negative effects of stress and burnout permeate many aspects of teaching (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Therefore, targeting efforts to reduce stress will not only improve the reporting process for teachers, but will likely improve their ability to cope with many other teaching responsibilities as well. Moreover, focusing on creating and fostering positive collegial

relationships and workplace morale, will in turn, increase teachers' sense of support and safety, which will likely have a positive influence on their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, as well as their job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Hargreaves, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Wiley, 2001). Most importantly, teachers' wellbeing is often related to the academic performance and socioemotional adjustment of their students (Hamre & Pianta, 2004; Malmberg & Hagger, 2009; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan; 2007; Spilt et al., 2011). Therefore, by reducing stress and enhancing workplace relationships, it is likely that teacher's wellbeing will improve, ultimately resulting in better outcomes for their students.

Directions for Future Research

The directions for future research in regard to mandatory reporting for teachers seem endless. I discussed various directions for future research throughout this chapter; however, I will now focus on three areas in which further research is particularly warranted. First, the current findings suggest that administrators have an influential role in teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. In particular, teachers' perceived confidence during the process of reporting was related to the strength of relationship they had with their administrator. Teachers also often conveyed the inaccurate understanding that administrators had the final say in whether or not a suspicion was reported to Child Protective Services. In light of this, it will be important for future research efforts to focus on examining administrators' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences in regard to teachers' reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. Specifically, it will be valuable for researchers to gain an understanding of 1) where the belief that teachers must report suspicions to their administrator stems from and 2) what administrators perceive their role to be in teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment.

Second, based on the current findings, it is evident that Child Protective Services also has an influential role in teachers' process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment. For instance, teachers described their past experiences with Child Protective Services, both negative and positive, and their perceived relationship with social workers who worked for Child Protective Services as factors that impacted their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for better or worse. Although the findings of several research studies have identified that mandated reporters often have negative experiences with Child Protective Services (Kenny, 2001; Kuruppu et al., 2018; O'Toole et al., 1999; Piltz & Wachtel, 2009; Tite, 1994; Vulliamy & Sullivan, 2000), little is known about the experiences social workers who work for Child Protective Services have when working with teachers. I believe it is important for future research efforts to include employees of Child Protective Services, in order to gain insight into the mandatory reporting process from their perspectives. The findings from such studies can be used to inform policy and interventions that can help to address the diminished relationship between Child Protective Services and mandated reporters.

Finally, as previously mentioned, the current findings are consistent with decades of literature that have consistently identified a lack of training and preparedness amongst mandated reporters (Alvarez et al., 2004; Kenny, 2004; Kenny et al., 2017; McTavish et al., 2017; Pietrantonio et al., 2013; Sethi, et al., 2013; Webster et al., 2005). Some research efforts have been made to evaluate the efficacy of providing mandated reporters with additional training, which have demonstrated encouraging results including increased knowledge of reporting policy, ability to recognize child maltreatment, and likelihood of reporting suspicions (Alvarez et al., 2010; Flaherty et al., 2008; Renninger et al., 2002). However, of the research studies conducted regarding training programs, few have included an exclusive sample of teachers. Based on the

current findings, I believe the process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment for teachers

demonstrates unique processes that may not be applicable to mandated reporters in other

professions (e.g., teaching context, role of administrators). Therefore, I suggest that future

research efforts focus on the development and evaluation of a mandatory reporting training

program specifically for teachers. I believe that this will provide teachers with tailored learning

experiences that will address many of the processes and unique factors that they experience when

reporting suspicions of child maltreatment.

Conclusion

In sum, when the majority of a child's life is spent within the education system, teachers

become one of the most vital supports for children finding safety from domestic violence. The

focus of this study was to develop a theory that explains the process of reporting suspicions of

child maltreatment for teachers, with the ultimate goal of contributing to understanding of the

phenomena of non-reporting. The theory I developed aligns well with much of what is already

known regarding teachers' non-reporting, while also identifying novel processes that are

involved in mandatory reporting. Theories are a work in progress, and I encourage researchers,

teachers, and policy makers to continue to expand upon, revise, and refine the theory I

developed. It is my hope that through continued theory development, we can better understand

how to support teachers in their process of reporting suspicions of child maltreatment, and

ultimately provide more children with the protection they deserve.

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APPENDIX A: Study Information Sheet

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of Study: The Process of Reporting Child Exposure to Domestic Violence for Teachers

Principal Investigator: Katherine Vink (vink@ualberta.ca)

Research/Study Coordinator: Dr. Lia Daniels (lia1@ualberta.ca)

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study? You are being asked to be in this study because you are a teacher who has had a suspicion that a child was exposed to domestic violence at home. This research is being done to gain a better understanding of the process of reporting suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence for teachers. The results of this study will be used to inform the principal investigator's doctoral dissertation.

If you have any questions about the information in this form, please contact Katherine at vink@ualberta.ca. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. Please print a copy of this form for your records.

What is the reason for doing the study? Due to the amount of time they spend with children, teachers are amongst the first people who may recognize what might be signs and symptoms of child exposure to domestic violence, and therefore, are required by law to report their suspicions. For many, the process of reporting suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence can be stressful. As a result, we think that it is important to solicit teachers' thoughts and feelings regarding the process of reporting suspicions, and would like to engage you in a discussion about your experiences. The goal of this project is to use this information to inform policy and training for teachers to better prepare them for their role as mandated reporters.

What will I be asked to do? Participation in this study will require approximately ninety minutes of your time, split between an interview and a follow up credibility check.

Semi-Structured Interview
This interview will be approximately 1-hour long, and you will be asked about your experiences with child exposure to domestic violence. More specifically, you will be asked about your process of reporting your suspicions, and the factors that contributed to your decision making. During the interview you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire that will provide more information regarding who you are and your experience with child exposure to domestic violence. At the end of this interview, we will ask permission to contact you in the coming months to verify the specific themes and categories that emerged from our interview.

Data Verification
If you have given permission, you will be contacted (via email or phone) to review the themes and categories developed during the data analysis phase of the study. The purpose of this phase is to ensure that the results remain true to the participant's intentions and meaning. It is during this phase, that you would be encouraged to make clarifications and corrections to any of the themes and categories that did not fit your experience.

What are the risks and discomforts? It is anticipated there will be no risks associated with this research study. However, at times, some people can feel a bit uncomfortable with questions about child exposure to domestic violence if questions remind them of negative life experiences. If this happens and the distress becomes problematic, I can provide referrals and/or information regarding counselling practices in the community that may be of help.

It is not possible to know all of the risks that may happen in a study, but the researchers have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to a study participant.

What are the benefits to me? Many people experience satisfaction from contributing to research that can be helpful to teachers in similar circumstances. Some people find it interesting and helpful to think about their teaching practice when answering these kinds of questions. However, you may not get any benefit from being in this research study.

Do I have to take part in the study? Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. You may also withdraw your data from this project up to two weeks after your participation, without penalty, simply by notifying the researchers.

Will I be paid to be in the research? If you choose to participate in the study, you will be given a $20.00 gift card of your choice (Tim Horton's, Starbucks or Indigo) for completing the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study during the interview, you will still receive the $20.00 gift card. We will also reimburse your parking expenses to attend the interview up to a maximum of $12.00.

Will my information be kept private? During the study we will be collecting information about your personal experiences. We will do everything we can to make sure that this data is kept private. No data relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. According to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act the researchers have a duty to report if they have reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a child is in need of intervention. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

The interviews will be audio recorded for data collection purposes. After the interview, however, the audio recordings will be converted into written transcripts, verified, and then the audio recording will be deleted. The transcripts will have all identifying information removed, will be encrypted, and password protected on my personal computer. After the study is done, we will securely store your data that was collected as part of the study. At the University of Alberta, we keep data stored for a minimum of 5 years after the end of the study.

What if I have questions? If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Katherine Vink at vink@ualberta.ca

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Ethics Board 1 at 780-492-2615. This office has no affiliation with the study investigators.

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Process of Reporting Child Exposure to Domestic Violence for Teachers

Principal Investigator: Katherine Vink   **Email:** vink@ualberta.ca
Study Coordinator: Dr. Lia Daniels   **Email:** lia1@ualberta.ca

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	☐	☐
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	☐	☐
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	☐	☐
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	☐	☐
Do you understand that you are free to leave the study at any time, without having to give a reason and without penalty?	☐	☐
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	☐	☐

Who explained this study to you? _____

I agree to take part in this study:

Signature of Research Participant _____

    (Printed Name) _____

Date:_____

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Signature of Investigator or Designee_____ Date _____

APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Participant Pseudonym: _____   Today's Date: _____

Age: _____   Gender: _____

Stream of education taught: _____

Number of years teaching: _____

Highest level of education: _____

Please rank in order the racial or ethnic background(s) you feel best describes you.
First: _____
Second: _____
Third: _____
Fourth: _____

Relationship status:
O Single
O Divorced
O Married
O Separated
O Common-law
O Widowed

Number of children: _____

Have you ever suspected a child has been exposed to domestic violence at home? (please circle one)

Yes   No   Not Sure

When you suspected exposure to domestic violence how often did you report it to child protective services? (please circle one)

Never   Some of the time   Most of the time   Every time

How familiar are you with your school's policy on reporting suspected child exposure to domestic violence? (please circle one)

Not at all familiar   Not very familiar   Neutral   Somewhat familiar   Very Familiar

APPENDIX D: Sample Interview Protocol

Initial Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:

Participant Pseudonym: _____   Date: _____
Interview Start Time: _____

1. Preamble: As you know, I am investigating the process of reporting suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence for teachers. Please remember to avoid mentioning any identifying information including names of students, colleagues or schools.
   a. As a way of getting started, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your background as a teacher.

2. *Experience with child exposure to domestic violence.*
   You said that at some point in your teaching career that you have had a suspicion that a child was being exposed to domestic violence at home.
   a. Can you describe your experience with suspicion(s) of child exposure to domestic violence in as much detail as possible?
      i. Can you talk about how you first came to suspect a child was exposed to domestic violence.
         1. Can you describe the circumstances around it?
      ii. What was it like for you when you had the suspicion?
         1. What were you thinking?
         2. How did you feel?
      iii. Did anyone or anything influence you? Tell me about these influences.

3. *Decision to report suspicions.*
   a. Can you talk about your decisions of whether or not to report your suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence?
   b. Can you walk me through your decision making process in as much detail as possible?
   c. What are some of the factors and circumstances that influenced your decision?
      i. Can you tell me about anyone or anything that influenced your decision making?
   d. What was it like for you when you were deciding to report/not report your suspicion?
      i. What were you thinking?
      ii. How did you feel?

4. *Experience with reporting*
    a. Can you share a detailed account of a specific experience you've had with reporting/not reporting suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence?
    b. What contributed to you reporting/not reporting your suspicion?
        i. What were the factors or circumstances that led to you reporting/not reporting your suspicions?
    c. What are some of the factors and circumstances that influenced your reporting/not reporting?
        i. Did anyone or anything influence you? In what way did they influence you?
    d. What was it like for you when you reported/did not report your suspicion?
        i. What were you thinking?
        ii. How did you feel?

5. *Conclusion*
    a. What are some of your thoughts and feelings as you reflect back on your process of reporting/not reporting your suspicion(s) of child exposure to domestic violence?
    b. Is there anything else you'd wish to tell me about your experience with suspicions of child exposure to domestic violence?

Interview End Time: _____   Length of Interview: _____
Interviewer's Name: _____