LIVED MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCES: REFLECTIONS OF EARLY CAREER TEACHERS' JOURNEY WITH MENTORSHIP

Aimee Wolfram

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Aimee Wolfram

Approved by:

Simmee Chung [original signature on file]

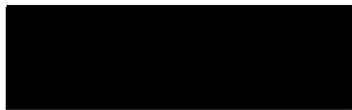
March 18, 2020

Supervisor: Simmee Chung, Ph.D. Date

Brent Bradford [original signature on file]

March 18, 2020

Second Reader: Brent Bradford, Ph.D. Date



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I dedicate this work to: Amanda S.,

my mentor and friend.

Thank you for believing in me.

Abstract

Many early career teachers leave the profession in the first five years despite the implementation of district mentorship programs. Building on Clandinin et al.'s (2015) research on teacher attrition which found that in Alberta 40% of teachers leave education in the first five years - this study defines "early career teachers" as teachers who are in their first five years of the profession. Specifically, this research study aimed to learn from the storied experiences of early career teachers who participated in mentorship programs that assign mentors to beginning teachers. Guided by a narrative inquiry methodology, two teacher participants' experiences are illuminated including: the struggles of beginning a teaching career; the role mentors are perceived to play; and hopes and visions they have for future mentorship programs. From the research and this study, it is found that mentorship programs provide emotional and professional supports that can contribute to the sustainment of early career teachers (Claycomb & Hawley, 2000, Giles, Davis & McGlamery, 2009, Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). Researchers have suggested that mentorship programs with established goals and well-matched partnerships aid in mitigating the challenges presented for early career teachers (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). Also, a finding discussed within this study includes the necessity for schools and districts to attend more closely to the lived experiences of early career teachers to sustain and retain them.

Keywords: *mentorship programs, early career teachers, beginning teachers, mentor and mentee experiences, narrative inquiry, teacher attrition*

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Narrative Beginnings

Sliding Back to My Early Educational Landscape

Dewey (1938) described how "every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves towards and into" (p. 38). All of our experiences shape and shift our landscapes. My early memories of school provided me with a unique foundation of structure, routine, and sense of independence. The first school I attended was a private school where learning was completed at an individual's own pace. Walking into my childhood classrooms, even how they were organized, differed from an ordinary classroom. At the age of 6, rather than individual school desks, we had offices. Our offices faced a wall and had a divider on each side where you could work without distractions. I never minded the offices. For me, they simply existed as a place to work.

I recall the teachers' roles as being facilitators of learning. Throughout the day, as we worked in our individual work booklets, we would place flags on the top of the office dividers to ask for assistance. The flags gave us permission to score our own work, ask clarifying questions, and to move on to new activities. There was rarely direct teaching from the front of the classroom. I remember thriving in this environment. I loved learning, setting new goals (and achieving them), and enjoyed endless hours of reading when my work was completed. This said, looking back, I have very few memories of my earliest teachers. I wonder why this is? Why are my earliest elementary school teachers absent from my memory?

Eventually in grade 5, I exited the independently focused learning environment and entered a regular classroom environment which followed a whole class instruction model. Luckily, the work ethic I gained in my early years carried me successfully through the school system for junior high and high school. The collective memory of my favourite teachers

were the ones who granted me independence, the ones who trusted me to accomplish my work, and those teachers who provided opportunities for leadership and extra-curricular activities. In many ways, my high school experience provided an ideal setting for learning. My class was small, my teachers were engaging, and I was able to insert myself in almost every extra-curricular activity from drama plays to concert band to athletic teams.

I entered university under the guise that teaching would be a great career for having a family. I envisioned a career that would eventually coincide perfectly with my future school-aged children's lives. I was prepared to make what I believed would be a simple shift from a learner to a teacher. Throughout my childhood, I was given responsibilities and seemed to have a natural knack for working with children. My mother was a preschool teacher and I would often spend professional days working alongside her. Also, I carried with me idealized narratives from childhood. School existed as the home of my success and had become a comfortable place for me. School was something I felt good at due to my academic achievements and extra-curricular opportunities. These were some of the reasons why I chose to enter the teaching profession. However, I know now that these reasons are not enough to sustain me in this profession. Teaching is much more complex and multi-faceted that I could have imagined.

Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) discussed how "the most important area is what teachers know and how their knowing is expressed in teaching" (p. 665). My experience as an independent learner shaped the lens through which I view my classroom. I have been a teacher in the elementary school classroom for 9 years and counting. Currently, I work in a specialized program that focuses on teacher-directed learning. I began working in this program during my second year of teaching and it was a natural fit with my independent learner spirit. Looking back to my first years of teaching, I began to wonder about my early beginnings. I wanted to inquire

into the teacher I was and the teacher I am today. I wonder about who I am becoming. As I have become more comfortable in my role, I have also found tensions within myself. I wonder how my lived experience has shaped my own retention. How has my own learning and teaching shifted over time and what (or who) has influenced me? As I reflected on these questions, I kept returning to stories around mentorship. In thinking more about the roles my mentors played in supporting my personal and professional growth, I began to realize how mentorship was a foundational support that has attributed to my own retention.

Sliding Back to My Experience as a Pre-service…

My first experience in the classroom was during my pre-service[1] practicum under the guidance of two mentor teachers. Originally, I was placed in a grade one classroom in a specialized faith-based program in a mid-sized urban school. On the first day, the music teacher expressed interest in taking on a student teacher, and, as a result, I began to split my time between Kindergarten through to grade three music and a grade one classroom. While both settings provided important resources for me to utilize, my experience between the two mentors differed greatly. One mentor guided me and took time to demonstrate and actively engage with me in my learning process. The other mentor appeared interested in my progress, but seemed removed from the process of engagement. Her comments were few and there was less guidance regarding my lessons. Rather, I was given resources and told to teach.

In my second practicum, my mentor teacher shaped me greatly and significantly impacted my career. She continued to support me for years to come. Little did I know that I would be teaching alongside her, but now with a classroom of my own, only a year later. As a

[1] Pre-service refers to the practicum experience teachers undergo during their formal university education training where they spend time with supervising teachers in a classroom.

mentor, she modeled her expectations and demonstrated the highest level of competence. Her confidence in me allowed me to believe and trust my own ability. As I fondly looked back at this experience, I began to wonder what qualities she possessed that made her stand apart from previous mentors.

The Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education (2006) noted that "the distinct and most significant aspect of a motivation and self-concept is the element of perceived confidence" (p. 332). As I think about this element of "perceived confidence", and my experiences during my practicum, I remember being dedicated, but my self-concept was one of apprehension and doubt. I often asked myself, *Do I really have what it takes?* Two or three weeks into my second practicum, I noticed my mentor teacher was leaving me alone more often. At first, this caused anxiety to rise within me. How would I develop without feedback? When I asked her about it, her response was glowing and supportive. As my mentor, she felt confident leaving the classroom while I was teaching her students. I remember walking away from that conversation with a newfound confidence. Her confidence allowed me to believe in myself, sparking an elevated level of motivation to continue pursuing education.

My practicum mentor teacher was someone who believed in me, gave me practical advice, and listened empathetically to me when I felt overwhelmed. Having a safe person to discuss challenging situations with allowed me to grow, develop, and walk through challenging seasons. When I became overwhelmed, my mentor was someone who could ground me and was available to walk alongside me toward a solution. I had found what Paris (2013) described as a 'critical friend', someone who would provide emotional and professional support for years to come (p. 152).

Coming to the Research Puzzle

When I first thought of the idea of mentorship, unknowingly, I glazed over my initial experiences. As I shifted from being a student to a pre-service teacher, and then an early career [1] teacher, my landscapes were constantly evolving and shifting. A once independent learner as a student/child, I was discovering a need for relationship and guidance as these landscapes shifted. I realized quickly that teaching could not occur in isolation and wholly independently but rather required collaboration in order to be successful. While I was accustomed to learning independently, the daily tasks would be too much for one new teacher to complete on their own without guidance.

Upon graduating in April, I immediately began to substitute teach. After I had applied to multiple jobs with no offers, I was feeling anxious thinking about what September would bring or not bring. I received a call in late August from a principal in a city located an hour and a half away and they requested an interview. The next day, I made the trek to the school with my mother to interview for a grade 5 and music teaching position. On the drive, I remember thinking of how I had turned down a similar job in a faraway town as I was reluctant to move away from my home community. At this point in my life, I did not know if pursuing my career in another city would be worth giving up the tremendous community support I had currently. There was much fear and apprehension in the thought of being removed from my comfortable community setting. However, the job itself appeared perfect. My last practicum was in grade 5 and my first practicum was in music. Within one week, I accepted the job, moved to a new city,

[1] In this study, I use the term early-career teacher as teachers entering the profession carry the same responsibility as later career teachers. Also, while early career teachers are just beginning their careers, they carry with them professional and practical knowledge that is valuable for schools.

and prepared for the first day of school. I was young, full of energy and spirit, but unaware of the many challenges that my first year of teaching would bring.

While I was eager, I was unprepared. Quickly, I felt what Tait (2008) described as a "dissonance" (p. 66) between my vision of teaching and the daily reality of my experience. The days were long and I was barely one step ahead of my students. I wondered if I could sustain this pace. I wondered if I could continue teaching away from home, with such a vast subject assignment? While I loved the students, I often came home exhausted and felt the loneliness of being in a new community.

One of my greatest assets that year was the principal who mentored me continually throughout the year. This was not a formal position, but rather a volunteered one. Often, she checked in on me, provided resources, and invited me for dinner. As I moved into a second year at a different school, I was assigned a mentor through a district-wide mentorship program. All these experiences became part of my story, and who I was, and am becoming. I now can see how their insights and mentorship have helped shaped my story. As I grew in my own ability and competence as a teacher, I began to desire to walk alongside early career teachers; this led me to pursue opportunities where I could be a mentor teacher. I enrolled in a district mentorship program and was assigned my first mentee[2].

My Own Mentoring Experience

After 7 years of teaching in the elementary school classroom, I was excited to shift from the role of a mentee to a mentor. In August, I was assigned to mentor an early career teacher as we both entered the two-year district-wide mentorship program. The same year, I heard that

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[2] A mentee is an early career teacher who is participating in a mentorship program and assigned a mentor to walk alongside them.

another early career teacher had abruptly decided to leave teaching in November. This early career teacher was only 2.5 months into the profession when she made her decision to leave. As I observed this, now from the role of a mentor, albeit, a mentor for another teacher that chose to stay, I felt a puzzle grow within me. Why did the other early career teacher leave teaching early? What could have made her stay? What were her experiences?

Over the next two years, I frequently returned to these questions as I watched a few more early career teachers choose to leave the profession. As I wondered how to best support my mentee, I began to explore the role I would play as a mentor and around the same time entered a master's program. Within, I felt a passion grow for supporting early career teachers as I observed my mentee begin to flourish in her role within the school.

I began to explore how "the self-act of wondering about our own practices and teaching experiences" (Murphy, 2015, p. 2) was a valuable process. The longer I taught, the more questions I had. I wondered how I could better support other teachers in the school environment. From my questions and reflections, I wondered what sustained me to stay in this profession. What aspects of my early career teaching journey supported me and encouraged me to keep returning year after year? Why do I keep choosing this profession?

Purpose of the Study

When I reflected on my own experiences, I began to wonder about the lived experiences of other early career teachers. The purpose of this study grew out of my desire to inquire into the lived experiences of teachers who have participated in school districts which currently run mentorship programs that assign mentors to early career teachers or beginning teachers.[3] While

[3] Although this study refers to "early career teachers", I recognize that some districts may use the term "beginning teachers" to describe teachers who are just starting their teaching career.

statistical data regarding attrition rates in Alberta and research regarding early career teachers exists (such as the five-year longitudinal study done by the Alberta Teacher's Association of Alberta in 2013), there is limited data and research on the lived experiences of early career teachers who have participated in mentorship programs. Established mentorship programs provide a unique opportunity to learn why and how mentorship can foster a support system that can lead to greater teacher retention (Gilles, Davis, & McGlamery, 2009).

My hope was to learn from the lived experiences of early-career teachers who have completed a mentorship program. Guided by narrative inquiry, a relational methodology, I aimed to explore how the mentorship relationship has influenced participants' teaching and impacted their intentions to remain in the profession. For example, did mentorship help create a support system? What active role did mentors play in their early teaching careers? By attending to the storied experiences of teachers who have participated in and completed a mentorship program, a fuller picture can be explored.

Literature Review

In the following literature review, I will investigate the importance of viewing early career teachers' experiences in a more holistic manner by examining some of the complexities within the teaching profession. In addition, I will explore the value mentorship programs have been cited to bring to districts, schools, and early career teachers. Finally, I will explore research which discusses the role mentorship can provide in building resiliency and support systems for early career teachers.

As noted earlier, in this study, I drew on previous research which defines an "early career teacher" as a teacher in their first five years of teaching (Clandinin et al., 2015). The initial use of 'beginning' or 'new' teacher is commonly used among many school districts. Upon

examining the existing literature, the terms "beginning" teacher or "new" teacher may not fully recognize the personal, practical, and professional knowledge (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997) that teachers already bring into the teaching profession with them. Rather, in my opinion, the term 'early career teacher' exemplifies how a teacher is still developing their identity and is 'in process' of becoming (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013) yet they often hold the same obligations and responsibilities as more experienced career teachers.

In Alberta, "approximately 40% of early career teachers exit the profession within five years" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 1). According to Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017):

> First-year teachers leave the field of education due to the lack of administrative support, inability to manage personal and professional expectations, limited teaching resources, lack of professional development, and difficulty handling behavioral problems in the classroom. (p. 265)

Many times, research into teacher attrition focuses on highlighting singular events or categorizing experiences. This fails to recognize the complex nature of human life. Clandinin et al. (2015) contended:

> While useful for understanding the factors that mediate beginning teachers' decisions to leave teaching, categorizing them as individual and contextual factors can artificially divide beginning teachers' lives into professional and personal ones, making it difficult to achieve a holistic view of the lives of beginning teachers. (p. 2)

I agree with Clandinin and et al. as I, too, believe that we need a more "holistic view" of the lives of early career or beginning teachers. Early career teachers' decisions are impacted by their past, their current context, and who they are becoming (Clandinin, 2000). All these

landscapes intertwine. This makes it difficult to analyze teacher retention apart from an individual teacher's lived experience.

Teaching is a complex profession with high demands and expectations (Paris, 2013). Hudson (2012) highlighted in his article how "universities cannot prepare pre-service teachers for the varying schools' contexts" (p. 81). Noted by Hudson, a significant portion of teacher development occurs in context over the first few years. Oliver, McConney, and Maor (2009) recognized how "few other professions have the expectation that initial training adequately prepares them to take on a full-time load of work" (p. 6). Oliver et al. (2009) share how early career teachers often have the same expectations as more experienced teachers. As Gourneau (2009) observed, "part of the challenge with teaching is because the best practices appear to be ever-changing, while the overall goal of establishing an environment conducive to learning for all students remains the same for teachers" (p. 61). Establishing an effective learning environment is an expectation for every teacher, no matter what level of teaching experience. I wonder what pressure this places on early career teachers. In my own experiences, I often felt I received mixed messages regarding best practices and struggled to find my own effective systems to foster such learning environments. Often, I felt as if I was failing early in my career, never able to live up to the changing standards.

Normore and Loughry (2006) mentioned how "without support and supervision, novice teachers often feel overwhelmed, disorientated and frustrated when they find themselves totally on their own in their classrooms" (p. 25). The transition from pre-service to the first year moves individuals from a collegial, supportive, relational environment to a place of independence and often isolation. Mentorship programs, as a result, have been created to ease the transition for early career teachers. According to research, mentorship programs and initiatives aim to provide

a "structured support system" (Normore & Loughry, 2006, p. 29) for the challenges early career teachers face.

According to Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017), "The most effective programs include mentors and mentees that are well-matched, have strong administrative support, and proper professional development" (p. 270). While this may be the goal of mentorship programs, what do teachers experience as they walk through a program? What qualities should a mentor possess?

From the research, assigning a mentor to novice teachers is known to have many benefits. Districts benefit from mentorship programs as they foster more effective pedagogical outcomes. Claycomb and Hawley (2000) found the following:

> Teachers who stay in classrooms longer than five years teach students to higher achievement levels than those with less than three years of experience. Furthermore, novice teachers who participate in effective mentoring programs move more rapidly through the stages of becoming an effective teacher (p. 20).

As evidenced by Claycomb and Hawley, mentorship programs exist as avenues to shift the focus to training teachers in order to achieve the long-term goal of creating more effective teachers which can lead to higher student achievement levels.

In addition, research has demonstrated how mentorship programs develop a teacher's individual practice and self-efficacy. Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) described a teacher having "a change of direction" (p. 270) after receiving requested support as a first-year teacher. I recall times where my mentor's thoughts and guidance provided a sense of relief and direction during stressful times of teaching. Many times, even a simple word could cause my own 'change of direction' - restoring my vision and confidence in my own ability. More research into the storied

experiences can provide first-hand information regarding how mentorship relationships affect where early career teachers are presently and their future selves. Normore and Loughry (2006) proposed that mentors "can help another to self-actualize into competent and enthusiastic practitioners" (p. 29). As early-career teachers experience this support, their teaching practices improve (Gilles, Davis, & McGlamery, 2009, Normore & Loughry, 2006).

Further research shows that teacher retention can be addressed by fostering resilience in early career teachers. As Huisman, Singer, and Catapano (2010) explained in their study:

> The ability of new teachers to reposition themselves for success is the result of careful reflection. Although resilient teachers may disengage at times, their sense of failure is temporary and they always re-engage with the situation in order to try something else. (p. 486)

Mentorship is a pathway to set teachers up for success and foster such resiliency by creating an effective support system (Normore & Loughry, 2006). Recognizing the need for personal and emotional support shifts the conversation to seeing teachers holistically. Providing relational support has been cited as the most "frequently used protective factor to counteract stressors" (Doney, 2013, p. 657). Fostering teacher resilience would enable new teachers to "stick with the situation and find ways to handle stress" (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). These studies confirm that authentic mentorship experiences can increase resiliency skills. Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) further contended "strongly forged relationships and the accompanying feelings of emotional well-being are protective factors and critical to retention" (p. 39). Although mentorship provides space for strong relationships to form, I wonder how programs can ensure such that strong relationships are forged?

Mentorship opens up opportunities to develop new teacher resilience by matching early career teachers with a critical friend who can help “identify and implement practical solutions to the challenges they encountered” (Paris, 2013, p. 152). Schlichte, Yssel and Merbler (2005) suggested that collegiality is a key variable in determining the overall success in an early career teacher. Furthermore, these authors noted that early career teachers often feel isolated and forming relationships as support systems can have a potentially powerful impact, leading to greater teacher retention (Schlichte, Yessel, & Merbler, 2005). According to Israel, Kamman, McCray, & Sindelar (2014), resilience strategies for early career teachers are combined and embedded within professional supports that mentors provide. Additionally, the support mentors can provide are immeasurable or invisible, as it is difficult to determine what would constitute as a professional and emotional support (Israel et al., 2014). Many times, the two are seen to be intertwined. This resiliency can be, in turn, a path to increase teacher retention (Doney, 2013, p. 645).

In studying the literature, I wondered what early career teachers perceive to be the most valuable supports. Do they see their mentors as a source of resiliency? However, even with mentorship, many teachers still leave the profession. By inquiring into the storied experiences of those who have remained perhaps there are identifying factors that contributed to their retention. As I pondered the questions of retention and how to support my mentee, I continued to wonder about the lived experience of teachers in Alberta. Being a mentor myself, I also began to reflect on the telling of my own experiences and how they have shaped my own retention.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) described how “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative plotlines” (p. 121). My own narrative directly influenced my research decisions to

choose a narrative inquiry methodology. Since it was as I reflected on my own story that my questions grew, I desired to have my research reflect my own journey alongside others.

Methodology

This study used a semi-structured interview process guided by a narrative inquiry methodology. Narrative inquiry recognizes how our lives are shaped by stories and provides a lens with which to view experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a teacher, my life is surrounded by stories. For example, listening to the stories of beginning teachers allows us to take a glimpse into the whole person: where they have come from, where they are, and where they are going. Narrative inquiry recognizes that our experiences are personal and social, affected by the past, present and future, and situated within a particular context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Wnuk (2013) described how "narrative inquiry is a transformative, always-in-the making process that allowed me to inquire into my past stories of teaching" (p. 24). As I inquire into my past stories, I recognize my own evolving landscape and story. Narrative inquiry investigates a three-dimensional space of temporality, personal and social, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Temporality refers to how "any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). Each of the participants, and myself, are formed and shaped by events that are continuously shifting our landscapes. By sharing their stories and reflecting on my own story, threads of temporality can emerge.

To begin the process, I received approval from the Research Ethics Board at Concordia University of Edmonton. I then received approval from both the selected school district and the schools the participants were employed in. The research took place in a mid-sized suburban district in a K-9 school. Letters of my proposed research were distributed via e-mail and placed

on a bulletin board in the staff room after the principals granted approval. I envisioned one to three participants who are currently in their third to sixth year of teaching and would be willing to share their journeys of mentorship and teaching. A few teachers who fit the criteria reached out and two participants were chosen. Rather than choosing participants who are currently in a program, I wanted to hear from teachers who were able to reflect on their past mentorship experience to see how (and if) it still influences their pedagogical practices today. I selected the first two teachers who reached out and appeared the most eager and willing to share their experiences. As well, these two individuals taught in different programs and divisions which would lend to varying perspectives.

After consent forms were discussed and signed, selected participants engaged in a semi-structured interview. Both participants chose to invite me into their homes for the interviews which created a calming, comfortable atmosphere. Following the interviews, the recorded questions and responses were transcribed verbatim for data analysis. As I read through the transcripts and reflected upon my own experiences, I began to see threads that appeared interwoven between our experiences. I began to consider these three threads on a 3-Dimensional Inquiry Space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in order to gain understandings from their stories. Upon completion of the written initial research texts, follow up conversations were held with participants to negotiate their voices in the written texts. Pseudonyms were given to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Participants

Participant 1 (i.e., Diana) was in her fourth year of teaching. Diana completed her education degree with a secondary focus and is currently teaching junior high school language arts and elementary school music. Diana chose to teach in order to bring learning alive for

students. Her passion for her students was evident throughout our conversation as she shared numerous stories regarding her students.

Participant 2 (i.e., Anne) was in her fourth year of teaching and teaching in an elementary school classroom at a K-9 school. Anne has taught three years within a classroom and also one year as a substitute teacher. She did not plan to become a teacher, but found herself in an education class during her university years. After highly enjoying the experience, Anne changed her trajectory to education. Throughout our conversation, Anne expressed her joy in the everyday interactions she has with her students that are often unexpected, but delightful and memorable.

Both Diana and Anne participated in district-wide mentorship programs where a mentor was assigned by principals for an early career teacher's first and second year of teaching. In these particular districts, early career teachers are only viewed as teachers' in their first or second year of teaching. Some districts use the term "beginning teacher" rather than early career teacher (as previously mentioned).

From Field to Field Texts to Research Texts

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that "Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry as we work in the field, move from field to field text, and from field text to research text" (p. 60). Narrative inquiry is about a relationship with my participants, as well as a relationship with myself. As a researcher, I began my autobiographical inquiry during the second summer of my master's program. From there, my works in progress evolved through a fall course as I prepared for the research portion of my final project. As Clandinin and Caine (2012) expressed "because inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry" (p. 171). As I

prepared and executed multiple interviews, I reflected on my own experiences using the 3-Dimensional Inquiry Space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), thus looking forward, backward, inward, and outward throughout the inquiry process.

As I looked across the field texts and my own experiences, my attention was drawn to three threads that occurred throughout the participants' stories. In the following section, I note the connecting threads while sharing reflections within my autobiographical inquiry.

Thread One - Reflections on the First Year

Go and teach.

I was told...

So, I felt lost.

I had no idea what to do.

I felt stupid my whole first year.

You're a teacher now, they said.

Go and do something.

(Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020)

These words were Diana's response to our conversation around the challenges she faced in her first year of teaching and what she originally envisioned teaching to be like. When asked regarding what she expected, Diana was surprised at the level of independence teaching required. "Go and teach" was the phrase she used to describe her first year. Although these words were never actually said to her, that is what Diana believed the expectations were of a new teacher. She expressed a story of teaching where there would be a "little bit more of a structure or a plan... or people would check [on your plan] and check up on you" (Transcript with Diana,

January 3, 2020). Instead, she felt there was an unspoken expectation of, “oh, now you’re a teacher. Go do something” (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020).

Clandinin et al. (2013) mentioned how “what is clear from this way of thinking about the experiences of beginning teachers is to see that the move from pre-service teacher education to teaching involves transitions” (p. 257). For Diana, there appeared to be little transitional support from her pre-service experience to her first teaching position. Rather, she felt as though she was expected to have all the required skills to teach students successfully.

Diana’s comment of “go and teach” stayed with me long after our conversation. To me, it illustrated a jump. Almost an analogy of just diving into the deep end when you have only ever been trained in the shallow end where you can touch. You have learned some strokes, but you have not learned to use them in the context of the deep end. And, there is no one in the deep end with you commenting on your strokes and guiding you through every moment. The transition does not involve slow steps walking into the deep end. Rather, early career teachers take the plunge into unfamiliar territory. The transition to embracing a school culture takes time and most early career teachers are unsure how to navigate the heavy expectations. The expectations for Diana were the same as other teachers in the school who had profoundly more experience, yet there was no daily supervision or guidance. As a result, the level of independence required made it challenging for Diana.

As our conversations continued, both participants shared their thoughts on what specific aspects of their first year proved most challenging as they found themselves independently teaching in their own classrooms.

Likewise, during the interview, Participant 2 stated “I don’t think I was prepared for any of it” (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). Her words echoed across the table as she recalled

her own first-year experience and what she envisioned teaching would be like. She candidly explained "I think I thought that it would be way easier than it is. And I think I thought I would have more free time than I do. I didn't realize how emotionally draining it is…" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). After four years of being enrolled in an Education program, Anne felt completely unprepared for the expectations teaching would bring. She was surprised by the emotional exhaustion she experienced. During our conversation, Anne described the steep learning curve of classroom management, planning, teaching, and building and nurturing relationships with her students. In the beginning, she felt as if she had no choice but to let work consume her. Again, while the words were never said, Anne felt she had to put in the long hours and struggled to find any balance between her personal and work life. These invisible, unspoken pressures permeated her first-year experience.

Looking across the transcripts, both participants mentioned how the transition from pre-service teaching to in-service teaching was challenging due to the daily protocols and procedures that were particular to a school culture. Anne expressed how "the little things add up" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). When she transitioned from a support teacher to a homeroom teacher, she struggled to keep up with remembering all the daily tasks and procedures. As an example, Anne described her experiences related to remembering various forms such as hot dog and/or field trip forms. She worried about things like forgetting an EpiPen for students with allergies. As a new teacher, Anne was unsure not only about how to navigate the daily protocols and procedures, but also how to remember them all.

Diana summarized her experiences of the challenge in following and aligning with a school's particular culture in our conversation.

> Researcher (Aimee): *Would you say those count as some of the most challenging aspects of your first year of teaching...or what did you find?*
>
> Diana*:* *All the other things that they don't teach you in university. Like, how to use Teacher Reporting*[4]*, and how to do attendance, and all the little protocols within the school... all the activities that are just, you know, unique to every school that I had no idea what was going on half the time.* (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020)

Looking across the two participants' stories, they seemed to share similar feelings around navigating school cultures. Hudson (2012) found early career teachers frequently discussed the need for "induction on school culture and infrastructure" (p. 80). Each school culture has their own policies, procedures, and nuances which teacher education programs cannot fully prepare them for (Hudson, 2012).

Lastly, even the type of school affected the transition. For example, Diana was a secondary trained teacher who found herself at a K-9 school. For Diana, her first teaching assignment did not align with her pre-service education and experience. As a secondary trained teacher, she felt ill-prepared for the elementary school assignment she had been given. Diana described how she felt lost and "stupid" during her first year of teaching (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). Clandinin et al. (2015) found similar stories in their research:

> Yet, in our interviews, participants told stories of themselves and other beginning teachers who, year after year, were given assignments and grades to teach where they had no previous experience, relevant education courses, or experiences in pre-service teacher education. (p. 8)

[4] To protect the district's anonymity, a pseudonym was created to represent the online report card system utilized by this particular district.

New teachers are often given the assignments that are mismatched or often feel required to take whatever is available. Clandinin et al. (2015) found that in their "interviews, participants told stories of themselves and other beginning teachers who, year after year, were given assignments and grades to teach where they had no previous experience, relevant education courses, or experiences in pre-service teacher education (p. 8). In Diana's experience, she was unsure how to set up an elementary school classroom and how to navigate the core subjects that she had not received any pre-service training for. For example, the varying ages of Diana's assignment (from grade one to nine) and subjects created a challenge regarding how to set up a classroom that would be functional for grade one music and grade nine Language Arts.

Anne's first year consisted of moving from support to a homeroom teacher. Then, the following year, she shared a classroom and provided support in multiple classrooms. Her complex schedule had her running between multiple classrooms in the course of a day, working with a variety of grade levels and in different programs. The second year proved most challenging as she found she required a support system to assist her in the dynamics of team-teaching. As I reflected on their stories, I recalled my own initial first-year experiences.

Sliding Back to My First Year…

Social Media Post on November 8, 2011

A day in the life of Aimee:
9:00 - Staff Vs Student volleyball
10:30 - Computer lab experience filled with learning pains
12:35 - Lay out intense student math working period
12:40 - Student offered to pray for my headache
12:45 - First three students go for needles
12:50 - Student chaos

1:45- See 12:50

2:00 - Have 35 students in music class writing a quiz (quite successfully!)

3:00 - Have intense testing time with the Grade 2 class…

3:30 - Volleyball!

What a fabulously drama-filled day! (Post by Aimee, November 8, 2011)

Social Media Post on November 13, 2011

It is 7:15 pm and my art lesson planning is failing. I need suggestions that do not involve painting for my grade 3/4 class tomorrow?" (Post by Aimee, Nov. 13, 2011)

Above are two social media posts I made during my first year of teaching. In the first post, I listed off my lengthy schedule. At the time, I was living in a new city away from my community and friends. I was teaching grade 5 and this particular day was immunizations. Immunizations provide a great example of an aspect of teaching I had never thought I would be navigating. When I consider the reason why I made this post, I think I was surprised by all that I accomplished in just one day or perhaps I wrote it to gain affirmation that I was doing a good job. However, I remember coming home at the end of the day with a sense of disbelief - *did that all just happen in one day?*

In the second post, I was desperately seeking lesson plan ideas at the eleventh hour. My first teaching assignment consisted of 13 subjects spanning 7 grades. I had abruptly moved to this new city and began teaching with fervor. While I had musical training, music was not my major in university. I did not know how to effectively plan for music classes that spanned 7 grades. Also, I had very little art teaching experience for the two split art classes I was assigned to teach. Long days at the school became the norm and many times I was merely one step ahead

of my students. Every day felt like survival mode as I felt unequipped and unprepared. I found myself constantly questioning and doubting myself. Where would my lessons come from? How do I meet all the objectives? How am I supposed to fit in everything?

Clandinin et al. (2015) noted how "many participants thought they had to do almost anything, whatever it took, to enter the profession" (p. 8). This rang true in my first year as I coached volleyball, directed a music concert, and had my assignment switched twice throughout the first year alone. The stories told in this inquiry highlight how the early career teachers can experience "a great degree of dissonance" (Tait, 2008, p. 66) as they embrace the reality of teaching.

For the participants and myself, teaching presented unexpected challenges and expectations. At the beginning of their first year, Diana and Anne were both assigned a mentor to walk alongside them for the first two years. In the subsequent section, I outline Diana and Anne's perceptions and experiences regarding the role of their mentors.

Thread 2 - The Perceived Role of a Mentor

A mentor (a list)

- *Someone who has been there and can empathize with you*
- *Point person*
- *Checkpoint*
- *Shows them the ropes*
- *Guide*
- *Willing participant*
- *Giver of advice*
- *In-school personal counsellor*

(Transcripts with Diana & Anne, January 3 & January 9, 2020)

These were the words used to describe their mentors during our conversations. When asked about her mentor's role, Anne's first response was how her mentor provided emotional support almost in the form of a counsellor. When she felt overwhelmed and needed an empathetic ear, her mentor provided one. It is interesting to note how the personal support her mentor provided was the first thing that came to mind rather than professional supports. Anne expressed a summary of the emotional support a mentor brought her. From her perspective, a quality mentor would "triumph when you had triumphs, and be excited when you were excited, and understand when you're having a hard day" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). Anne believed this emotional support proved to be the most valuable part of what a mentor could bring. As noted by Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005), "strongly forged relationships and the accompanying feelings of emotional well-being are protective factors and critical to retention" (p. 39). The 'emotional well-being' her mentor provided became a protective factor for her.

When Diana was questioned regarding what qualities of her mentor made her a good one, she emphasized her mentor's ability to listen, and be open, honest, and available. These emotional supports are what she felt set her mentor apart as a quality support system. This coincides with Normore and Loughry's (2006) findings of how "your mentor must be someone that you feel you can approach with any questions or situation" (p. 28). Diana mentioned how her mentor always embraced her questions by stating "I could text her, I could call her, I could visit her pop in whenever she'd never seemed like I was bothering her" (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). Her mentor was someone who she could approach at any time, with any question or circumstance. This allowed for open communication and a safe space for Diana to bring her questions.

Diana and Anne emphasized the important supportive but practical role that their mentors provided. Anne felt mentorship was valuable "because I had somebody in the school that I knew was the point person I could go to whenever I needed help" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). Diana described her mentor as a 'checkpoint'(Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). It struck me after the conversations how they both integrated the word 'point' into their description of a mentor's role. Anne and Diana both expressed the need to have someone to guide or 'point' them through protocols, challenging situations, and to ask questions to.

When Anne was asked to expand on her view on mentorship by explaining the role mentors should provide, Anne used the wording of having "somebody to show them the ropes. Somebody to guide them through the first years of teaching because it is a cultural shock for anybody" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). As Diana and Anne navigated the challenges previously expressed, mentors took on the role of mitigating stressful factors by guiding them through the tricky protocols.

Both participants drew back to how their mentors provided advice. Advice took on many forms– from problem-solving to conflict resolution to reminders. To both participants, mentorship was a positive experience. In Anne's words, "It's nice to know that there's somebody there that is a willing participant to help you" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). These sentiments echo Knobloch and Whittington (2003) who suggested that "novice teachers feel more efficacious and confident if they receive positive feedback, guidance, and encouragement from their students, other teachers, administrators, parents, and community members" (p. 60).

When asked to describe the relationship she had with her mentor, Anne commented, "nobody can relate to it unless you're in it" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). She

teaches in a specialized program and felt as if even other teachers in regular programs could not relate to her everyday experiences. In her conversation, she gave examples of how she felt being new to a specialized program, oftentimes "the parents question your knowledge on it, and they asked for a lot of reasoning" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). She struggled to find the *why* behind the processes in the school program. Her mentor was able to provide insight into the specific nuances to the program and resources that provided foundational knowledge. To Anne, a mentor is someone "who has been there and can empathize with you" (Transcript, January 9, 2020). In other words, a mentor is someone who has been in *similar shoes* before and can draw on their own experiences to support another.

Reflecting on my experience as a mentee, my most memorable mentors have been the ones who have provided guidance and encouragement in the form of advice that helps elevate my confidence. Frequently, I would stop by before school to ask my mentor questions. No matter how busy she was she would take the time to address my questions and provide solutions and suggestions for what was concerning to me. I often felt encouraged to be the best teacher I could be, while also feeling supported. I was able to ask for help without the fear of judgment or correction.

Looking across the transcribed conversations, what was missing or infrequently mentioned during our conversations was the notion of being provided with individual, pedagogical feedback. While there were small mentions of assistance with resources and classroom management, the role of the mentor appeared to reflect more of an emotional and supportive role. The mentor's greatest asset appeared to be their availability to be a resource for the participants, rather than an overseeing figure. A mentor was not seen as an evaluator. This helps distinguish a mentor as a safe person or a critical friend that can be a haven for struggling

early career teachers. As well, the participants' experiences demonstrate the active supportive role a mentor can provide. Following their reflections on their mentor, participants expressed their hopes and visions for mentorship programs to consider.

Thread 3: Hopes and Visions in a Mentorship Program

Diana and Anne took part in mentorship programs that were district-based and assigned mentors for the first two years of a teacher's career. Their positive experiences can provide insight for future programs to glean from. As one of teaching's greatest challenges is finding time, both participants reflected on the considerable time spent with their mentors.

Interviewer*: How did you connect with your teacher: mentor teacher?*

Diana: *I kind of just bugged her whenever I needed her.*

Anne: We talked all the time.

(Transcripts with Diana & Anne, January 3 & 9, 2020)

How time is carved out for mentors and mentees to collaborate is a vital consideration. In our conversations as evidenced above, both participants emphasized how their main forms of connection with their mentors were spontaneous and organic. Riveros (2012) found that "professional learning occurs in diverse situations" (p. 610) and many times during unplanned conversations. It is vital to not underestimate the power of availability and how meaningful everyday conversations can be. Diana and Anne both expressed how their mentors made themselves available as they were needed.

Any time given to mentors and mentees was viewed as valuable on behalf of the participants. While conversations and assistance felt very organic, finding mutual meeting times could be difficult. When asked if there were any challenges that presented themselves during her involvement in the mentorship program, Diana expressed how "it would have been nice to meet

with her more one-on-one; where I had more time like built into the schedule that I could take to meet with her" (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). While her mentor was available for pop-ins and via text, aside from the three half days, there was no additional scheduled time.

Anne echoed her sentiments by expressing that finding a time that worked for both parties at times was a challenge. At one point in their schedules, both Anne and her mentor had a shared prep and expressed how valuable this shared time was. Anne expressed her desire for a monthly assigned time where her mentor and herself could be intentional in reflecting on the previous month and prepare for the next.

Diana and Anne were asked for their opinion on feedback districts and schools should consider within the implementation of mentorship programs. In reflection, both agreed on how mentorship partnerships are structured and decided upon matters. For Diana, there were small challenges at times with having a mentor teacher who was in a different division[5]. At times, (in her words) "some things...she just couldn't help me with" (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). As a junior high school teacher paired with an elementary school teacher, there were systems and protocols that varied even within the same school. Her mentor teacher would assist her as much as possible, then Diana would search out others to guide her to these particular solutions. While her mentor and her were in different divisions, they did teach in the same program.[6] Diana felt that it was vital in a school with varying program offerings to match partnerships based on the programs they were teaching in. Since different school programs have

[5] Diana's school had three divisions: kindergarten to grade 3 (division one), Grades 4-6 (division 2), and Grades 7-9 (division 3).

[6] Some schools offer varying program tracks such as regular program and French-immersion, or an academic program and a sports program (for example).

varying teaching philosophies and expectations, Diana saw matching partnerships within programs to be essential.

Anne noticed how having a well-matched mentor was a key factor in her success. She mentioned that other teachers had shared less positive experiences with their mentors. In her perspective, a successful program would consider not just necessarily grade-alike, but would consider the personalities involved. In her words, “I think it would be really important to match people up based on how well they would work together” (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). She credits the strong relationship to compatible personalities and also the willingness expressed on both ends to foster a mentorship relationship. From her perspective, not all mentors sign up for the program, but rather enter one out of obligation which hampers the development of a mutually-beneficial relationship.

When asked for additional ideas for districts to consider, Diana suggested “a little bit more of a structure when it came to, like, what a mentor could actually offer” (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020) could aid in increasing support in an effective manner. While three half days were given, there was little direction or structure. In her perspective, more guidance as to how to effectively utilize the time would have been beneficial.

Both participants continued a relationship with their mentor beyond the mentorship program. Also, both agreed that a mentorship program adds value to their district. When I met with Diana to negotiate with the written text, she expressed once again how much she enjoyed and gained from the opportunity to participate in a mentorship program. From her perspective, the mentorship program was a support she highly appreciated (anonymous, personal communication, February 28, 2020).

In my own experience, the district I was employed in for my first year did not have a mentorship program. In fact, I was not assigned a mentor. Instead, my principal took the role informally. The challenge I discovered, was availability. A principal has copious amounts of obligations. Instead, I found myself continuously asking the teachers around me. Since I was the only grade five teacher in the school, I resorted to asking teachers in other grades. While I was willing to seek out individuals to answer my questions, I wonder if other early career teachers would be willing to do so. Also, I was fortunate to teach in a school with supportive colleagues. I wonder what beginning teachers in an environment with co-workers who are less willing to answer questions would do?

During my second year, I entered a formal mentorship program. Having a designated person, eased the fear of intruding on or consuming time from teachers. The three half days were mainly used to work on learning how to complete report cards. A few times a year, my mentor and I would attend sessions at the district office together as additional professional development. While my mentor was teaching a different grade than myself, she was the head of the program I was in. Her position enabled her to mentor me in the nuances of the specialized program I was teaching. For me, the structure was enough as my mentor clearly defined our meeting times and set out a purpose for us to attain. However, I wonder if all mentors would clearly define a purpose or see this as an intrusion or as additional work and time away from the class. Matching participants well appears to be a key factor in the success of a mentorship program. Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) reported that "an effective induction program assigns mentees with mentors who are in the same grade level" (p. 270). Also, selecting willing mentors and providing them with direction and training is a key to effective mentoring programs (Hudson, 2012, Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017).

Throughout the interviews, I kept reflecting back on my initial question. While I felt the participants had described their mentors' active role of support, I was unsure if I saw evidence of mentorship being a key fact in retention. In the following section, I explore participant opinions around retention and desire to remain in the profession.

What about Teacher Attrition?

Throughout the interviews, the question remained: does mentorship help with teacher attrition? This study was limited to two participants who expressed differing views. Anne viewed mentorship as an invaluable asset that has impacted her decision to remain in teaching. Anne discussed how a challenging second year of teaching led to her second guess if teaching was the right profession. In her words, "it was a serious consideration for me not to be teaching" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). In her experience, her mentor's ability to validate her feelings and walk her through the season had "a bigger impact than I (she) was aware of" (Transcript with Anne, January 9, 2020). Anne also highlighted how she believes that her current job is partly due to her mentor's feedback to the administration. Her mentor supported her emotionally, but also by advocating for her.

Diana's perspective differed from Anne's. To her, mentorship was a nice support and helped ease "the transition from being a student into being the teacher right away" (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). However, she expressed that the main reason for staying in this profession was her love for children. This recognizes the complexity of attempting to measure retention as a means by itself. Referring back to Clandinin et al. (2015), viewing attrition through categories "can artificially divide beginning teachers' lives into professional and personal ones" (p. 2) and keeps us from considering the whole individual. While this was applied to investigating the reasons teachers leave the profession, I believe it can also be applied to the

reasons why they stay in the profession. This study exemplified how teacher retention is influenced by a multiplicity of factors, not just one single factor or event.

So Now What?

As I reflected on the threads presented, I began to address the questions regarding 'so now what?'. In this section, I explore the personal, practical, and social justifications for this research. By using narrative inquiry methodology, I also recognized my own story and shifting landscapes.

Personal Shifts

Being in my ninth year in this profession, it is easy to forget the complex nature of my initial experiences. As I plan to continue being a mentor for both pre-service and early career teachers, I recognize my own role in creating safe spaces for them. From the stories, I am reminded of how valuable it is to simply "be available." Hudson (2012) noted, "the proximity of the support appeared essential to the everyday matters where these beginning teachers required assistance" (p. 76). If the little protocols and daily tasks are the most challenging, a person needs to be able to address these questions as they arise. As I am available to answer questions and provide collegial support, I can enhance a teacher's efficacy and belief in themselves. Normore and Loughry (2008) described how "an effective mentor takes on a leadership role and will not judge you for your mistakes but will help you in every way possible" (p. 28). What made the inquired mentorship relationships successful was the openness and trust between the mentees and the mentors. Diana and Anne felt secure to bring forth any concerns to their mentors without judgment. Moving forward with mentorship, I hope to continue to strive to create a safe space for mentees.

As I make myself available, it is also vital that I continue to cultivate positive relationships as "taking time to establish these relationships is crucial for success." (Giles, Davis, & McGlamery, 2009, p. 45). Effective mentors realize how a teacher's identity and story occur across multiple landscapes, all of which affect their everyday practice. Early career teachers are trying to come to terms with finding a balance between the professional and the personal. In a mentor role, I must be "keenly aware of the important link that exists between the personal and professional lives of their mentees" (Normore & Loughry, 2006, p. 28). I need to invest in who these teachers are, in order to best support them in moving forward. From my own experience, a word of encouragement, dropped off resources, and/or a quick check-in went a long way in building my confidence and self-efficacy.

Also, as I press forward I hope to remember the reciprocal nature of mentorship. It is easy to grow stagnant in my teaching practices. Rather, I have much to learn and gain from mentees. Often, early career teachers come with insights, innovative practices, and a zest for the profession. Hudson (2012) noted how observing and providing feedback for beginning teachers "may also lead towards developing a culture of shared practices" (p. 77). Moving into my third and fourth years, I almost felt more isolated in my classroom. There was no feedback and very little sharing of practices. As I build and nurture relationships with mentees, I hope to continue those relationships into fostering shared practices where we both are continually expanding our professional knowledge and gaining from each other's personal knowledge.

After the interviews, I reflected on the feedback provided by the participants in order to see what aspects could potentially be practically applied within mentorship programs. From their responses and my own reflections, I have compiled some suggestions with practical implications for consideration.

Practical Implications

When I reflect on the words of the participants and my own experience, the largest gap appears to be in the movement from the pre-service teaching experience to the reality of the everyday classroom. Clandinin et al. (2013) echoed this by recognizing, "that the move from pre-service teacher education to teaching involves transitions" (p. 257). Based on the conversations alongside my own experience, here are a few practical innovations schools can adopt.

First, mentorship programs would benefit from an outlined structure to present direction for the mentorship relationship. Being a mentor, I made myself presently available, but could have benefited from a guide of protocols and procedures to walk my mentee through. While procedures and policies vary from school to school, the types of procedures are relatively normalized. For example, all schools have a vision statement and report card procedures. Communicating these procedures in advance can lay out expectations early for teachers. As a mentor, I received very little direction regarding which procedures to review with new teachers. I propose that each school or district strives to create a mini-handbook or checklist of procedures that mentors can review with their mentees. Such a handbook (beyond the detailed school handbook) could provide an easy access tool for not only early career teachers to review, but also be useful for experienced teachers who transfer in.

Second, while the participants developed positive relationships with their mentors, in reality, this is not always the case. Normore and Loughry (2006) noted that "the process of matching mentees with mentors is of utmost importance in the mentoring program" (p. 26). Practically, within mentorship programs, care must be taken to create mentorship

partnerships that are fitting and optimal. From this study, matching partnerships within school programs is the most essential. Matching grade alike was viewed as beneficial but not always necessary as long as teachers were in similar divisions. As Diana suggested, matching partners in similar programs and grades allows for the ability to have someone who can assist with the particular protocols that exist (Transcript with Diana, January 3, 2020). When a mentorship relationship is established, clear guidelines and professional expectations should be outlined. While the participants collaborated well with their mentors, it cannot be assumed that this will always be the case. At times, mentorship pairings will struggle with connecting and forming a meaningful relationship. Gilles et al. (2009) mentioned the possibility of a social contract as well as policies to deal with conflict resolution between mentors and mentees. According to a study conducted by Barrera, Braley, and Slate (2008), "mentors responded that it was absolutely essential a teacher-mentoring program have well-defined goals" (p.14). This provides for consistent structure and clear expectations for mentors and mentees involved. Expectations regarding a mentor's role, healthy interactions, the purpose of the allotted time, and the vision of professional development can set up participants for greater success.

While mentorship programs exist in some districts, many of the expectations and the mentality towards early career teachers has not changed. For many, they continue "to live with competing, often contradictory, stories" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 11). In addition, they feel pressured into accepting any assignments or requests they receive because they struggle to "say no to the requests being made of them because it could jeopardize their careers" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 9). In the next section, I propose a social shift of thinking regarding early career teachers or beginning teachers for schools and districts to consider.

Social Shifts

Clandinin et al. (2015) suggested the "need to shift the conversation from one focused only on retaining teachers toward a conversation about sustaining teachers throughout their careers" (p. 255). Mentorship can provide one avenue to aid in the sustainment of teachers as it can ease the difficult transition from pre-service education to teaching (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 257). However, this study highlighted some considerations for wider social implications in regards to the retention of beginning teachers.

First of all, "sustaining beginning teachers requires that we know them as people" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 11). When we consider the whole individual, we recognize the need to create network opportunities and foster "an accepting school climate" (Barrera et al., 2008, p. 14). When early career teachers are hired, taking time to connect the teachers with fellow colleagues and provide team-building time, will aid in networking teachers into the community. If a mentorship program is not available, principals can pair up new staff with current staff members in order to foster potentially successful collegial relationships, as well as creating a designated point person. Promoting collegiality in all fronts can alleviate the isolation experienced by early career teachers. For example, having a staff luncheon or incorporating a short team-building activity into staff meetings can promote collegiality and opportunities for natural connections to form even within the busyness of the school environment. By focusing on early career teachers as holistic humans, with lives and identities outside of the profession, we recognize how we can learn from their experiences. "It is through relationships that the co-composing of new lives for both becomes possible" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 220). Mentorship and walking alongside early career teachers must be seen from the perspective of how it is mutually

beneficial for all and an opportunity to co-compose new possibilities for our schools, our society, and ourselves.

Second of all, it would benefit schools and districts to strive for continuity when creating schedules and assignments for new teachers. Research has found that "continuity was something many participants wished for because they had not yet had the opportunity to stay in the same school or same teaching assignment" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 8). The conversation needs to shift towards sustaining teachers to promote retention (Clandinin et al., 2013, p. 257). While it benefits schools to place new teachers in open positions, filling in empty roles and boxing them into a yes, fails to recognize the benefit of long-term teacher development. By focusing on sustaining and developing teachers, schools and districts have the opportunity to enhance their school culture and develop teachers who demonstrate greater efficacy and pedagogical skills.

Moving Forward

Notions of dispositioning to unknow and not know open up understandings of the importance of seeing teachers as in processes of continual growth and change (Huber et al., 2013, p. 22).

In this profession, it is important that I keep acknowledging my ever-evolving transformation. Every day my own perceptions and understandings are changing as I interact with my colleagues and learn from those around me. I must remember that growing stagnant does a disservice to myself and my students. I must remember that I am not a sole source of knowledge for early career teachers, but rather we are constantly changing and growing simultaneously. It is vital that I aim to place myself in the position of "not knowing" and be prepared to 'unknow' (Vinz, 1997, p. 139) what I think I know in order to remain a learner in this profession.

Walking alongside Diana, Anne, and my former mentee- reminds me to be empathetic and aware of the challenges early career teachers face. Their storied experiences, along with my own as a once mentee myself, make me think about Huber et al.'s (2013) words as they share of how "individual stories entangled with, become shaped by, and shape one another" (p. 227). What makes mentorship meaningful is that we truly have much to gain from, and with, each other.

Moving forward, I hope to continue to hear more of the stories of the teachers around me and be able to travel into their world. Traveling in the way that Lugones (1987) speaks of reminds me that through "world"-travelling, we can work to identifying with others and seek to understand what it is like to be them and "what it is to be ourselves in their eyes" (p. 17). To better support those around me, I must continue to pursue knowing them holistically and travel to their worlds of experience. Along with this, I hope to continue to grow in my ability to actively reflect on my ongoing journey. To accomplish this, as Lessard (2015) noted, I, too, hope "to become more attentive within the school landscapes in which I live in the present, as I try to find spaces within myself to slow down, pay attention, and listen to the stories being shared with me" (p. 12). As a mentor, I must first listen to the stories around me and continue to recognize the value of each person's lived experience. These stories need to be heard.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. Describe your teaching assignments.
3. What was the extent of your participation within a mentorship program?
4. Why did you pursue teaching? Are there specific life experiences of people that influenced your choice to enter the profession?
5. Reflecting on your first month of teaching, what did you expect it to be like?
6. What are some memories of your first years of teaching that stand out as memorable?
7. What were some of the challenges you found in your first two years of teaching?
8. Describe the relationship you had with your mentor.
9. How did you connect (and how often) with your mentor?
10. Reflecting back, what did you see as your mentor's role?
11. What supports did your mentor provide?
12. What challenges did you encounter within mentorship?
13. Did interactions with your mentor change your every day teaching? If so, how?
14. Are there additional supports and/or resources that you wish you had received during your first two years of teaching?
15. Is there an interaction with your mentor that is memorable?
16. Did mentorship impact your decision to remain in teaching?