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Finding Spaces for Inquiry: An autobiographical narrative inquiry into shifting teaching experiences

by

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Dedication

For all with the heart of a teacher…

Abstract

This work is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences teaching and my struggle to make sense of my shifting stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). My research is nestled within a larger semi-structured interview study of 40 early career teachers in Alberta. To begin, I inquire into the tensions and bumping places that lead me to leave teaching during my eighth year of practice. As I awaken to Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) concept of professional knowledge landscapes, I explore ways in which my experiences have been shaped by the various contexts in which I have worked. I move to identify three threads from the larger study that resonate most with me. I use these threads to further guide my inquiry. This study provides insights into how we might think differently about sustaining teachers who are beginning as well as sustaining teachers with experience.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Coming to the Research 7
Introduction 7
Coming to the project study. 13
Literature reviews. 15
Beginning to frame my research puzzle. 21
Methodology 23
Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry 23
From Field to Field Texts to Research Texts 25
Chapter Summaries 26
Chapter 2: Interrupted stories, silence on the landscape. 26
Chapter 3: New voices. 26
Chapter 4: Finding ways forward. 27
Chapter 1 References 28
Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Questions 32
Appendix B: Participant Information and Consent Form 35

Chapter 2: Interrupted Stories, Silence on the Landscape 39
Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry 41
My Dream Job- An Imagined Story 42
June 2006. 42
New landscape - September 2006. 50
BBQ blitz. 50
Sliding Forward 54
Beginning of the end—Last week of September 2006. 54
Facing a cover story. 54
Cover story exposed . . . anxiety builds. 57
You Need a Rest – October 2006 58
Visit to Human Resources, staff support. 58
Time Away: October 2006–February 2007. 62
Finding space. 62
Story Fragment—Smashing the Apple 63
Chapter 2 References 65

Chapter 3: New Voices 67
Amidst Leaving and Returning to Teaching 69
A Place and Time to Walk 70
Coming to Stories 73
Teacher stories-Stories of teachers-School stories-Stories of school. 73
Coming to the Research 75
Framing My Research Puzzle—Laying My Stories Alongside Others 77
Thread 1: Identity thread of belonging. 79
Thread 2: Deciding not to let teaching consume me and struggling to keep that decision. 83
Thread 3: Can I keep doing this . . . for how long? 88
So What? 90
Chapter 3 References 93

Chapter 4: Finding Ways Forward Through Looking Backward........................ 96
Revisiting my Research Puzzle 96
A reflective turn on the literature around early career teacher attrition 97
Justifying the Research: Responses to the questions of "so what?" and "who cares?" 100
Chapter 4 References 104

Chapter 1: Coming to the Research[1]

Introduction

I spent the first seven years of my teaching career as an elementary teacher. I began as a classroom teacher and within two years I became a specialist reading teacher. I taught individual students as well as with small groups of students how to read. I taught in schools considered to be inner city schools alongside children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Some were dealing with poverty issues on their home landscapes. As I started my first year of teaching, I found myself unprepared to teach the students. They did not fit the fixed profile of middle class, suburban students my teacher education had prepared me for nor did they fit my own imaginings of the students I imagined I would be teaching. In my educational experiences, I went to school with others who grew up in middle class families similar to mine. There was little cultural diversity on my early school landscapes or in my community.

I imagined I would teach nice, neat, well-prepared lessons that covered curricular outcomes throughout a carefully planned daily, weekly, and yearly schedule. This was a story of teacher that I learned through my own schooling experience, as well as from the influence of my teacher education program. I thought I "should" adopt this story of teacher. Often the students I taught in my beginning years of teaching came to school unprepared to learn because they were tired or hungry.

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[1]This thesis follows a manuscript format. Chapters 2 and 3 are papers that will be submitted for publication.

Others arrived as new immigrants, unable to speak English. For some students, entering my classroom was their first ever experience with formal schooling. I quickly learned to let go of my story of teacher created from my earlier school experiences. I learned to listen to my students and, in doing so, they taught me everything I needed to know to teach them well. I became more flexible with my planning and teaching, making adjustments as needed in order to attend to their lives. Flexibility allowed time for the exchange of home, family, and cultural stories between us. My students taught me many things about culture that I had not learned. I learned about different religions and the significance of many cultural traditions. I began to incorporate some of what I was learning into my lessons and also into the classroom space. As a result, a strong sense of community developed in the classroom. I knew flexibility was important but I questioned and was unsure if I was making the *right* teaching decisions. While I was in the classroom, working with students, I was confident and happy to teach in a way that gave students space to be who they were. I felt good about providing multiple access points for them to connect to the mandated curriculum and about the flexibility I provided for them and myself to work throughout the day. This way of teaching was different than the schooling I had experienced and the way I learned to teach at university. When I moved out of the classroom, I occasionally covered over what I was doing in the classroom because I thought maybe I was not teaching in the way I thought I was "supposed" to. At the same time, I wondered if my administrator would evaluate me poorly for teaching in this way. In my second year, when I was evaluated in

order to receive a continuous contract, my administrator asked if she could have a look at my lesson plan book. I panicked. I did plan very thoroughly and I put a lot of preparation and thought into teaching my students. However, my lesson plans did not resemble the format I was taught to use in university. I was concerned I might be judged poorly for this. I briefly considered rewriting months of daily lessons plans for her to look at. Realizing how much unnecessary work this would be, I decided to explain my style of planning and my reasoning for it. The response of my principal was very supportive. She liked my approach and encouraged me to continue doing what I was doing. She complimented me as told me how she noticed a positive shift in the behavior of my students; they were happy and she could tell they wanted to be at school and in my class. She also told me that she was pleased to see them learning.

I spent my third and fourth year at the same school, working with this supportive and encouraging principal. I grew a lot as a teacher there and with each year I further developed my story of who I was and was becoming as a teacher. The staff was collaborative and valued each other's knowledge. At formal staff meetings, and also around the table at lunchtime, we shared teaching ideas and strategies with each other, regardless of the grade level we taught or number of years of experience we had. We often informally exchanged resources with other teachers and also with support staff. Everyone was willing to share. I knew I could go to any one of my colleagues, including the principal, and ask for lesson ideas, receive feedback, or just talk about my day. We shared our emotions: excitement, feelings of being successful, feelings of frustration, or

confusion. Each staff member cared about one another; we lived and told our stories of being a team. There was a philosophy in the school that we (all staff) were teachers of all the students in the school, not just the ones in a particular classroom. We shared with each other the progress of the students in our classrooms as well as information about whether there was something going on in the lives of the students that might affect their time at school. Together the whole staff celebrated student successes alongside the children and their families. For example, in September, we hosted a "welcome to school" barbeque for students and families. Our Christmas concert was a community event. The students performed an elaborate musical, which involved the whole school and the gymnasium was packed with parents. We hosted many afterschool clubs and invited many community partners to work with students and families. To show our appreciation for the support of families, the staff hosted a community pancake breakfast in June. I thrived as a beginning teacher in this school. I developed confidence, felt valued, and felt knowledgeable. I loved teaching. I was a very passionate teacher.

As I moved away from that first school and accepted new teaching opportunities at other schools, I learned it was not always safe for me to teach in the way that I had become accustomed to, one that attended to the lives of students. I felt pressure to measure students against set standards and to implement the latest programs or teaching practices recommended by the district. Measuring students against set standards and implementing mandated programs bumped against who I imagined I was as a teacher, and against my

experiences in the first 3 years as a teacher. I began to question what I knew and what I believed in. I now recognize this was a time when I began to experience tension as a teacher. I began to notice how I shifted as I moved in and out of my classroom.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) identify two different moral places on school landscapes in-classroom and out-of-classroom places. In-classroom places are described as safe places where teachers live out their personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988), that is their stories of who they are and who they are trying to becoming as they interact with children. Out-of-classroom places are prescriptive, professional places shared with other teachers, where teachers are expected to hold a certain expert knowledge shaped by policies, theories and research, and given to them through dominant stories of school. Teachers often experience a dilemma as they cross between these two places each day on the school landscape. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25)

As I moved in and out of my classroom I felt this dilemma and experienced it as tensions (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009). I was uncomfortable about having tensions and I felt guilty about their existence. For many teachers, and people in general, tensions have a negative affect and should be avoided or smoothed over. Tensions that are evident in a school are usually seen as a problem that teachers learn to deny or cover over (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009). I set my dis/ease aside and clung to the hope that I might be able to work again in the way I had in those first three years of teaching. I sought out teaching opportunities that might give me the chance.

At the end of my seventh year of teaching, I accepted a position as the department head of student activities at a large high school. Shortly into my new position, I was forced to face the tensions I felt from crossing the boundaries of in-classroom and out-of-classroom places on my school landscape. I now recognize that I had been pushing my tensions aside or smoothing them over for years. Just months after beginning, I was physically and mentally exhausted. I questioned who I was, and, was becoming, as a teacher. I began to acknowledge the tensions with teaching I had been trying so desperately to ignore. Clandinin et al. (2009) "understand tensions in a relational way, that is, tensions that live between people, events, or things and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways" (p. 82). I recognized that I needed to inquire into who I was, and was becoming, as a teacher and also how I fit into the educational system where I worked. I sought out individuals within my district who knew about teaching, my teaching context, and who could help me to negotiate my tensions. I longed to teach in a school like I had in my first, second, third, and fourth years of teaching. I craved working in a supportive and collaborative environment as part of a team. I believed it was possible. I wanted someone to help me find that again. I wanted someone from outside to confirm my knowing as my earlier administrator had. Finally, my district's human resources department gave me the name of a woman I could talk with. This meeting was disappointing to me. I did feel supported; however, it was not the kind of support I was seeking. I was told I would not find what I was looking for, that my approach was "too innovative for this big system." Discouraged,

and desperate, I made a very difficult decision to leave teaching. I saw no other alternative, leaving seemed to be the only answer.

I struggled to make the decision to leave teaching and, as difficult as the decision to leave was, it was also difficult to make sense of my leaving of teaching. I started by talking with others and keeping a personal journal of my thoughts as a way to inquire into my experiences. After two years of independent inquiry while I was completely away from school landscapes, I returned to teaching. At the same time, however, I also entered graduate school. My stories of teaching and of leaving teaching stayed with me as I began graduate school at the University of Alberta in 2009.

Coming to the project study.

Early on in my graduate program, I was invited to participate with the Early Career Teacher Attrition project team in July of 2010.[2] I joined a research team comprised of teacher educators, principals, and teacher consultants from a variety of disciplines. Together we inquired into the experiences of early career teachers in Alberta, with particular attention to the issue of early career teacher attrition (Clandinin et al., 2012). I was interested to study early career teacher attrition because of my experiences, which lead me to leave teaching in my eighth year. I was especially curious if other beginning teacher shared my experiences as a beginning teachers.

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[2] Alberta Education provided a grant funding the studies, including the literature reviews.

We began the project by completing two extensive literature reviews. The first was on early career teacher attrition[3] and the second was on mentoring and induction[4] as it relates to early career teacher attrition. Our purpose for the reviews was to explore current research on the phenomenon of early career teacher attrition and to establish a strong conceptual basis for three empirical studies within the project (Clandinin et al., 2012). Based on our review of the literature, we undertook three separate empirical studies. The overall research puzzle that guided each study was to understand more about the experiences of early career teachers.

The first study was a semi-structured interview study[5] of 40 teachers in their second and third years of teaching. Drawing from our literature reviews, and with consideration to Schaefer and Clandinin's (2011) research highlighting the importance of attending to teacher lives both on home and school landscapes, we designed semi-structured interview questions[6]. We envisioned that the participants' answers to the interview questions would provide insight into how beginning teachers' experiences are shaped by their lives on personal and professional landscapes (Clandinin et al., 2012). Furthermore, we wanted to gain understanding of how these experiences influence the future intentions of

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[3] Schaefer, L., Long, J., & Clandinin, D. J. (2012). Questioning the research on early career teacher attrition and retention. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research.* http://ajer.synergiesprairies.ca/ajer/index.php/ajer/article/view/980t

[4] Long, J., McKenzie-Roblee, S., Schaefer, L., Clandinin, D. J., Pinnegar, E., Wnuk, S., & Steeves, P. (2012). Literature review on induction and mentoring related to early career teacher attrition and retention. Mentoring and Tutoring, *20*, (1), 7–26.

[5] The semi-structured interview is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced . . . . Semi-structured interview employs an interview schedule or guide. Analysis of the objective knowledge constitutes the framework for the development of this guide and foci for the development of the interview questions . . . . Participants are free to respond to these questions as they wish and the researcher is free to probe these responses (McIntosh, 2009, p. 59)

[6] Interview questions are included as Appendix A.

teachers. We selected second and third year teachers because we wanted to talk with them while they were still teaching. There is a sharp increase in beginning teacher attrition between years three and four of teaching[7].

The second study was a narrative inquiry focused on four teachers who had graduated from Alberta universities but who did not take up contractual Kindergarten to Grade 12 teaching positions in Alberta schools. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience. It is also a research methodology that recognizes and honors the complexities of individuals' experiences over time and in context, which are shaped through the past, present and future stories we live and tell (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). "Narrative inquiry is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Narrative inquirers are always in relation to, or work with, the participants, and they view themselves as part of the phenomenon under study (Clandinin et al., 2009).

The third study was also a narrative inquiry into the experiences of seven early career teachers who left the profession within their first 5 years of teaching. Working with these teachers allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of beginning teacher attrition and retention (Clandinin et al., 2012, p. 10).

Literature reviews.

The research team reviewed the scholarly literature on early career teacher attrition and retention from 1999 to 2010. Much of the research framed

[7] Statistics were provided by Alberta Education in conversation about the project.

attrition as a problem associated with either individual factors (such as burnout) or a problem associated with contextual factors (such as support or collaboration among colleagues). Some recent conceptualizations consider early career teacher attrition as an identity-making process that involves a complex negotiation between individual and contextual factors (Schaefer et al., 2012).

I wondered about the individual factors of teacher attrition including burnout, resiliency, personal demographic features, and personal factors (such as family). I situated myself in the literature and, considering each factor, I began to reflect on my experiences as a teacher. Professional burnout as defined by Maslach (1978, 1982), a leader in burnout research, is a syndrome of bodily and mental exhaustion, in which the worker becomes negative towards those with whom they work and develops a negative sense of self-worth. Yessel and Merbler (2005) note that lack of administrative support, role conflict, and unclear expectations contribute to the burnout of teachers. I wondered about the term burnout. I wondered about the perception of burnout among administrators and teachers who were beginning and of those who had years of experience behind them. I wondered about my perceptions of burnout and wondered if I had experienced burnout myself.

Much research suggested teachers identified as resilient were able to cope with stressors that may impact them as teachers. In the beginning teacher attrition literature, resiliency and commitment are terms often associated with one another. Freedman and Appleman (2009) note that beginning teachers who stayed teaching had a disposition for hard work and were characterized as being

persistent. Others found that beginning teachers who were committed to the profession were more likely to stay (Gehrke & McCoy, 2006). Framing the problem of beginning teacher attrition in this individualistic way suggests that beginning teachers who leave the profession are not resilient, are not resourceful enough, or are not committed enough to stay in the profession. Thus, those who leave are often seen as having deficits or as being deficit. I was characterized as a hardworking, persistent, and committed teacher; I had received accolades and promotion for my work. Yet, I wrestled with the idea that I could be seen as a failure or a deficit teacher if I spoke of my tensions with teaching, or if I left the profession. I wondered if resiliency was enough to sustain beginning teachers in their beginning years if they were not living out their imagined stories of teaching. Resiliency is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties” (Barber, 2001, p. 1227). I wondered how long teachers would choose to stay teaching if they were constantly “recovering from difficulties.” At what point might they seek out other opportunities to work in ways less difficult?

The literature indicated that personal demographics play a role in whether or not an individual stays in, or leaves, teaching (Schaefer et al., 2012). When speaking about beginning teachers there is an assumption that beginning teachers are younger than more experienced teachers. While this is not always the case, a number of U. S. and international studies showed that younger teachers are more likely to leave in their first 5 years (Billingsley, 2004; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Macdonald, 1999).

Ethnicity and gender also play a role in beginning teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino et al., 2006). Other U. S. studies that attended to gender found that females leave the profession of teaching more often than males (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Teachers' personal landscapes outside of schools are also seen as playing a role in beginning teacher attrition. Ingersoll (2001, p. 22) wrote that "personal reasons such as departures for pregnancy, child rearing, health problems and family moves are more often reported as reasons for turn over than either retirement or staffing actions." Borman and Dowling (2008) noted that teacher attrition might be caused by any number of personal factors that may change across the span of a lifetime. I began to reflect on the idea of change over time and upon the personal changes I had undergone in my life during my first 8 years of teaching. I wondered how these shifts had influenced me over time. I wondered what effect they had on the evolution of my personal and professional identity. I wondered if more teachers would choose to stay in the profession if there were places to negotiate personal shifts on their professional landscapes.

Support on the landscape, salary, professional development, collaboration, nature of teaching context (poverty, urban, rural, suburban, etc.), student issues, and teacher education were also factors identified as influencing beginning teacher attrition that are situated in the context in which beginning teachers work (Schaefer et al., 2012). Andrews, Gilbert, and Martin (2006) found that opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers were highly valued by beginning teachers. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found that

beginning teachers who were involved with integrated professional cultures (that encouraged collegial and collaborative relationships for all teachers) were more satisfied with their jobs and more likely to stay teaching. McCoy (2006) found that beginning teachers valued support that focused on problems of practice but were frustrated by "one size fits all" support such as district orientations. I recalled being part of a district mentorship program and, although it had certain elements of support I appreciated as the literature indicates, I was frustrated with the relevance (or lack thereof) of the content to me and to my teaching context. I wondered how district support might be re-imagined to become more personalized and how collaborative environments for beginning teachers might be created.

Teachers' experiences with students are often seen as one factor that influences beginning teacher attrition and retention. Elfers, Plecki, and Knapp (2009) found that attrition was related to student poverty, that is, teachers are more likely to leave when schools are located in high poverty areas. Borman and Dowling (2008) and Guarino et al. (2006) noted that schools with a higher portion of students from minority groups had higher levels of attrition. Patterson, Roehrig, and Luft (2003) found that student issues were a factor in teachers' reasons for leaving. Wynn (2007) found that schools grounded in philosophies focused on students had lower levels of attrition. My first four years of teaching were in a high needs, inner city school. My students were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; many lived in poverty and were affected by issues related to living in poverty. Despite these factors that would seem to

contribute to my leaving teaching, my experience at this school was rich and among the best years of my career. I wondered why my experience contrasted with what the literature suggested. I recalled the supportive collaborative environment I worked in during my first year as a teacher and considered that to be a significant factor for my wonderful experience.

We recognized a need to undertake a second review of the research literature on mentoring and induction particularly as it relates to early career teaching attrition and retention.

Much of the literature on early career teacher attrition suggests induction programs including mentoring are seen as to alleviate the problem of early career teacher attrition and retention. State, provincial, or district administrators mandate or strongly encourage such programs or initiatives as a solution to the problem of early career attrition and retention. This focus on mentoring and induction programs as a solution to the problem of early career teacher attrition prompted the need for the second literature review.

We found that while the literature often equated mentoring with induction, it is only one facet of a comprehensive induction program. We wondered whether there is a link between induction programs including mentoring and teacher retention. The effect of induction (including mentoring) programs is unclear around the issue of early career teacher retention. Complexities in induction (including mentoring) programs stem from differing ways they are conceptualized and the differing ways they are lived out. The research drew our attention to the significance of the school culture and contexts

in which beginning teachers work. Highly collaborative school cultures which value all teachers' knowledge including beginning teachers, which focused on what is most educative for students, and which see students as the responsibility of the whole school, appeared to be most successful. Principals were seen to have a pivotal role in the success of early career teachers (Clandinin et al., 2012). I thought about my first 4 years and began to think that it was because of the supportive nature of my principal who allowed me to be flexible that may have helped me feel successful.

Beginning to frame my research puzzle.

As part of an eight person research team[8], I was an integral part of the collaborative study. My master's thesis research would be nestled within the larger semi-structured interview study. For the semi-structured interview study, it was important to have a wide representative sample of teachers from across the province. We included 40 teachers who were in their second and third years of teaching and who had graduated from an Alberta institution. To recruit participants, we designed digital and hard copy posters and distributed them throughout the province, as well as set up a Facebook and email account. We also included a recruitment advertisement in Alberta Teachers' Association newsletter. The participants were males and females of varied ages, they taught in a variety of contexts (urban, rural, isolated communities), and had a wide

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[8] The research project team members included D. Jean Clandinin, Lee Schaefer, Julie S. Long, Pam Steeves, Sue McKenzie-Robblee, Eliza Pinnegar from Center for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta and C. Aiden Downy from Emory University.

range of subject specialties and experiences prior to beginning teaching (Clandinin et al., 2012).

All research team members engaged in the processes of interviewing participants. We discussed an information letter with each participant and they signed a consent form[9] in which we guaranteed their anonymity before we began each interview. Each teacher participant was assigned a number to identify them and was referred to by these numbers in our final project report, and in my thesis.

Initially, my intention was to select five teachers from the study whose expertise in teaching paralleled mine. I planned to complete a comparative analysis of their experiences as beginning teachers and my experiences and then offer a commentary on my findings. At first, I considered selecting teachers who had language arts teaching backgrounds, as I had been a literacy teacher for several years. Then, I thought to broaden my sample and to consider the interview data from teachers working at inner city schools. Deciding a focus for participants was not an easy task at this initial stage of my research. As I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and engaged in weekly conversations with the research team about all of the interviews, I realized that narrowing down a target group of teachers from a certain profile or demographic was not an important aspect for my research as it had seemed to be when I first conceptualized my work. I gradually came to see that I was after something else. I discovered that the stories of all the beginning teachers we interviewed

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[9] See Appendix B: Participant Information and Consent Form Teachers in Years 2 and 3 of Teaching: Semi-structured Interviews

resonated with me. It did not matter that they were in their second or third years of teaching and that I was a graduate student who had taught for over 10 years. Their stories were helping me to reflect deeply upon my stories of teaching, of leaving teaching, and of returning to teaching after 2 years away from teaching. Clandinin and Connelly point out "it is in the inquiry in our conversations, within the texts, the situations, and with other stories that we can retell our stories and come to relive them" (1998, p. 251). This awakening prompted a shift in my approach to my research. Inspired first by the literature reviews and further by the stories of the 40 research participants, I began an autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Clonnelly, 2000) into my stories of experience.

Methodology

Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they are and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters a world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

Narrative inquiry is a transformative, always-in-the making process that allowed me to inquire into my past stories of teaching and of leaving teaching in order for me to make sense of my experiences and to imagine a forward looking story. Freeman (2006/2001) reminds me of the transformative aspect of autobiographical narrative inquiry as, "We might therefore think of the self as a kind of *work,* an unfinished and unfinishable poetic project issuing from the narrative imagination as it is manifested in the process of autobiographical understanding" (p. 139).

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience and is defined in terms of a "metaphorical three dimensional inquiry space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Temporality (past, present and future) is one dimension. The terms *backward* and *forward* are used to describe the temporal directions of inquiry. Thinking temporally as a researcher means I am "not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Sociality (personal and social) directs attention *inward* toward the individual's thoughts and emotions and *outward* toward the environment, events, and actions. Place directs attention to the places where experience happens as well to the places where inquiry occurs. These three dimensions are explored simultaneously through my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences on teaching landscapes.

In narrative inquiry the researcher and participant are in relation with one another. The relational space between the two is integral to understanding the

composition of field texts. Relationships are a central way of making sense of the temporal and contextual aspects of narrative work (Clanindin & Caine, 2012). The process of narrative inquiry is composed of engaging with participants in the field, creating field texts, and writing both interim and research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Writing autobiographically, I revisited my work and was able to negotiate a research text that represented the dimensions of my stories from a shifting vantage point. By inquiring into my own experiences I began to see possibilities for new ways of working and I began to imagine ways in which beginning and experienced teachers might be sustained as they continued on with their careers.

From Field to Field Texts to Research Texts

I began my autobiographical narrative inquiry in 2012 by inquiring into my personal journal entries written in 2007. I moved to inquire into an assortment of autobiographical writing written in 2010, as part of a graduate course requirement. These are stories of my experiences of teaching and leaving teaching which took place during the years (1999–2006). I also drew on all the semi-structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed with our research participants. My notes of team meetings helped me to make sense of the experiences of the participants, the issues of early career teacher attrition, and also helped me to inquire further into my experience.

Chapter Summaries

This thesis follows a manuscript format. Chapters two and thre are papers that will be submitted separately for publication.

Chapter Two: Interrupted stories, silence on the landscape.

This chapter is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences of teaching and into my struggles attempting to negotiate my shifting "stories to live by," a narrative term for identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). I unpack and inquire into four stories that contributed to my departure from teaching during the eighth year of my career. I conclude the chapter by writing about my struggles to accept and make sense of my leaving and I explain my feelings at this time.

Chapter Three: New voices.

Chapter three begins as a continuation of Chapter two. I include autobiographical writing that covers the time I was away from teaching and tells of my continued inquiry to make sense of my experiences of leaving teaching. As chapter three continues, I incorporate research from the semi- structured interview study. I identify three of seven thematic findings from the study which were most resonant for me as they thread through my experiences. I write how the participant responses lead me to further inquiry.

Chapter Four: Finding ways forward through looking backward

In chapter four I return to the research puzzle that shaped my autobiographical narrative inquiry in order to draw forward some ways that we might work to sustain teachers who are beginning and also teachers who are teaching beyond their beginning years.

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Appendix A:

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Describe the school(s) and classrooms in which you're teaching now.

   Where do you teach? (rural, urban elementary, jr. or sr. high etc.)

   Who do you teach?

   What do you teach?

2. Are you at the same school as your first year (second year)? Same assignment? (what was your previous assignment, situation?)

3. Where do you live? Is this where you consider home?

4. Tell me about a typical day for you. Include your life outside of school. A typical week?

5. Is this what you imagined for yourself . . . at school, at home?

6. When you planned to be a teacher what were your imaginings about the place where you'd be teaching? (urban, rural, level of school, special program, province, country, etc.)

7. Where did you imagine you would live as you began your teaching? (at home, with friends, close to school, on your own, commuting)

8. Did your University program, teacher education, influence your ideas of teaching?

9. Did your student teaching influence your ideas about teaching?

10. Did your first year of teaching influence your ideas of teaching?

    If yes, in what ways?

    Was there a specific event or experience that comes to mind . . . that stands out for you? Can you tell me about it?

11. Do you feel a part of the school culture or climate? How do you know? Is this what you imagined it would be like?

12. Do you feel valued in your school? How do you know?

    Do you feel valued as a professional outside of your school? How do you know?

13. What do you consider are your support networks at home? School?

    What are your ideas surrounding support for beginning teachers? (what was significant for you?)

14. What sustains you? What keeps you going?

On a personal level?

Professionally?

15. Create a timeline of what brought you to teaching and your teaching/work experience(s) since graduation.

    What would come next on your timeline? Will you be teaching?

    If so, what other assignments or roles might you imagine doing or might want to explore?

    If not, what might you envision doing?

16. If you could change something about your experiences what might that be?

Demographic Information

Where did you do your teacher education, B. Ed.?

Was it all at the same institution?

How was your practicum shaped? (how long? levels or grades?)

What year did you graduate?

What year was your first teaching assignment?

Were you or are you a part of an official induction program? (how was it shaped?)

Did you or do you have an assigned mentor?

Appendix B:

Participant Information and Consent Form

Teachers in Years 2 and 3 of Teaching: Semi-structured Interviews

A Narrative Inquiry into Early Career Teacher Leavers' Stories to Live By

This consent form is an invitation to participate in the study entitled ***Early Career Teacher Attrition: Problems, Possibilities, Potentials*** that is being conducted by a research team from the University of Alberta, led by Dr. Jean Clandinin from the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca; (780) 492-7770), and funded by a grant from Alberta Education. You may contact Dr. Clandinin at any time if you have any questions.

Most research on early career teacher attrition focuses on leaving as a singular and significant event and looks to answer the question of *why* teachers leave. Our research frames leaving as a process that unfolds over time and we plan to study not only *why* but *how* teachers leave. Focusing on early career teacher leavers' stories to live by (a narrative conceptualization of identity), including the experiences that brought them to teaching as well as the experiences that shaped their leaving, will offer insights into the processes early career teachers experience as they begin teaching and leave teaching.

There will be a total of six audio-recorded conversations with each participant, and the first conversation will focus on the stories that brought them to teaching. The second conversation will focus more on their experiences in the

schools and classrooms, as well as any mentoring or induction program they were involved in. The third conversation will deal with the tensions they experienced as beginning teachers. The fourth meeting will be a conversation that revolves around why they chose to leave the profession. The fifth discussion will delve into what they have done since leaving teaching. The last conversation will delve into questions that have arisen throughout our dialogue. After the conversations we will draft individual narrative accounts of each participant and will negotiate those accounts with the relevant participant. The expectations of each participant is that they would be willing to talk with a member of the research team for six individual 1.5- to 2-hour conversations and then read and respond to the narrative accounts.

Fortunately, there are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. A potential benefit of your participation in this research is that you will be contributing to original research as well as expanding current understandings of early career teacher attrition. You will also be privy to a supportive environment where you may share your stories and experiences on a regular basis. Your participation must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you should know that you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation, up until the final research texts are negotiated. If you do withdraw from the study, there will be no repercussions of any sort and your data will be removed from our study.

No one except members of the research team will ever know your responses. Moreover, you will never be referred to by name in any of the

research publications or presentations. We will use a pseudonym for anonymity and confidentiality. Also, your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected. Only the University research team and an experienced transcriptionist will have access to the data. The transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality agreement. All data will also be safely locked in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development will be destroyed after 5 years. Other planned uses and sharing of this data include a doctoral dissertation for one team member (Lee Schaefer), as well as possible publications and/or presentations in professional journals and conferences for the research team. You may also receive a final report of the study, at your request.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by Research Ethics Board 1 at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

I, __________________________, understand the above conditions of participation in this study and I have had the opportunity to have my questions answered a member of the research team. I consent to participate in the study ***Early Career Teacher Attrition: Problems, Possibilities, Potentials.***

_________________________	__________________________	__________
Name of Teacher	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Chapter 2: Interrupted Stories, Silence on the Landscape

My starting point of inquiry:
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In my wonders,
Who am I? Who am I becoming as a teacher?

Growing tensions around teaching
New ones arising

Who I was becoming
Bumping against stories of teacher

Stories of teaching
Bumping against my desired story of teacher

I wanted to teach in a way that attended to the lives of students. Yet I felt outward pressure to attend to preset objectives and mandated curriculum that were sometimes irrelevant to the lives of students. I grew tired of the pressure to measure students against set standards and to teach within rigid timelines and school schedules despite the need for more flexibility—flexibility for me, for students, and their families. I developed rhythms[10] to work around the daily and annual cycles[11] of school and to cope with these tensions. I tried to create new teaching experiences for myself with the hopes they might give me the

[10] For Dewey (1934), rhythm is found in the tension between order and novelty. Using this understanding of rhythm, Clandinin & Connelly (1986) explain that teachers develop rhythms over time, as a way to penetrate the dulling experience of cyclic repetition that exists in schools.
[11] Clandinin & Connelly (1986) note that schools have one of the most highly structured cyclic temporal orders among institutions in society (p. 378). They identify 10 school cycles that vary in duration, sequence, temporal location, and rate of occurrence (p. 379).

opportunity to work in a way that was more satisfying and provided change from the predictive cycles of daily classroom life.

As I moved and shifted to accept new opportunities that seemingly "advanced" my career, I slowly began to feel as though I was losing my autonomy to teach in a way that was personally satisfying and that attended to matters of importance to me. I was uncomfortable about having tensions and felt guilty about their existence. I wanted to make them go away and to stop feeling uncomfortable. I tried to set them aside but they quickly reappeared. Despite my best effort to resolve or smooth them over, I was not successful and over time this too became an added tension. As I put more and more effort toward working through my tensions, negative feelings began to grow and intensify. This was beginning to take a toll on me.

I realized that I needed to approach my tensions differently, but I was unsure what to do or how to go about doing it. This was frustrating to me. I wondered why I couldn't just accept things the way they were and why I even cared so much; after all, teaching was just a "job." At the same time, I thought about teaching as a "job." I began to think deeply when wondering if teaching was something greater for me. I began thinking about what really mattered to me as a teacher, and about who I was as a teacher. At the same time, I considered who I was as a person and what I brought to teaching. I compared my two identities[12]—the person and the teacher—discovering similarities and differences in each of them. I wondered about the differences: were they a

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[12] I return to my understandings of identity; the relation between the personal and the professional, later in the paper.

source of tension for me? I noticed the similarities and wondered if these would help me to negotiate the differences and ease my tension. I began to explore my beliefs about what it meant for me to be a teacher and I compared that with the dominant story of teacher that prevailed. Telling stories of my experience was a way for me to explore my wonders.

Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry

In what follows, I share four stories of my experiences from 2006 which led me first to a reflective journey into my teaching in 2007 and, later, to narrative inquiry in 2010. These stories were written in the fall of 2010 while I was attending a graduate class at the University of Alberta, entitled *Life in the Elementary Classrooms.* They are italicized, and at various points I interrupt them, to unpack and inquire into them. At these points of interruption my inquiry is from my perspective in 2012. To keep the flow of stories going, I footnoted theoretical terms rather than include them within the stories. It is important to note that narrative inquiry is defined in terms of a "metaphorical three dimensional inquiry space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Temporality (past, present, and future) is one dimension. The terms *backward* and *forward* are used to describe the temporal directions of inquiry. Sociality (personal and social), the second dimension, directs attention *inward* toward the individual's thoughts, and emotions and *outward* toward the environment, events, and actions. The third dimension, place, directs attention to the places

where experience happens as well to the places where inquiry occurs. I use these three dimensional inquiry terms throughout this paper.

My Dream Job- An Imagined Story

June 2006.

After 7 years of teaching various grade levels in two different schools, I was eager for new learning opportunities. I was ready to branch out in my career and was looking for a new challenge. In my stories to live by[13] *I was a person who told stories of believing in possibilities. I moved and shifted in order to take advantage of opportunities that satisfied my curiosities, evolving interests, and my desire for personal development. In line with my stories to live by, I began to visit my district website looking for job postings that might satisfy my desires.*

In early June of 2006, while scrolling through the leadership section, I noticed a posting that was particularly intriguing. It was titled Department Head, responsible for student activities. I read on to learn this position would involve coordinating school-wide student activities, teaching leadership classes for students in Grades 10 through 12, as well as teaching classes for struggling readers. I immediately became excited. It was as though somebody had written the posting with me in

[13] Connelly and Clandinin (1999) developed the term 'stories to live by' as a narrative conception of identity, which conceptually links together experiential knowledge and storied contexts (p. 4).

mind! (Life in Elementary Classrooms, Written response, October, 2010).[14]

As I inquire into this story now, I wonder about my motivation to apply for a new position. I recall wanting a new challenge, but I also recall I had felt many tensions around teaching on my school's professional knowledge landscape.[15] On occasion, I would secretly[16] talk about these with my non-teacher friends. Yet on a school landscape, I somehow talked myself out of them, set them aside, or worked to convince myself that they could go away. A way for me to do this was to think and talk positively about my experiences, leaving out any reference to tension. As I reflect on my action, I wanted to "fit in" with the grand narrative[17] of school. I awakened to my search for spaces where I could live my imagined story of the teacher I wanted to be. I wonder now if I truly wanted "new learning" or to "branch out in my career" or if I really was looking for an escape from it. I remember I was hopeful things could be different for me elsewhere. Buber (1957) conceptualized, communities in which people with different points of view thrive. He imagined the community of otherness as located on a narrow ridge, a place of tension between two gulfs where there is "no sureness of knowledge" but only a certainty of meeting. From the ridge there is the possibility of response without withholding of self.

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[14] Events in this story fragment took place in 2006. The story was written as part of a graduate class in 2010 and inquired into 2012.

[15] "Teachers' lives take certain shapes because of their professional knowledge landscape. They draw on their individual biographies, on the particular histories of the professional landscape in which they find themselves, on how they are positioned on the landscape, and on the form of everyday school life that the professional landscape allows" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995 p. 27).

[16] Secret stories are lived stories of practice told in secret places in order to avoid scrutiny (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25).

[17] Grand narrative of school refers to the dominant, commonly accepted view of school and schooling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The ridge allows the possibility of "overcoming otherness" in a lived unity that is community (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 247). I believe I was seeking new edges to explore, hoping to discover more spaces and open places where I would "fit" in.

> *The description and requirements matched my interests and expertise perfectly. I was a literacy lead teacher at my school, was heavily involved with student council, and, as a personal interest, I did a lot of extracurricular work with students that involved building their leadership capacities. I thought, as I finished reading the screen, "this is my dream job." I began to imagine myself in this role and a feeling of exuberance filled me. (Life in Elementary Classrooms, Written response, October, 2010)*

When staff members were required to organize sports clubs and supervise other events, I took on the responsibility. I accompanied many students to city-wide track events, independent community runs, and fundraisers. I participated with students during their training as well in planning and organizing for these events. As I write, I am reminded of the immense value I gained being involved with students at extracurricular events. When we were together at these times in out-of-classroom places, I began to know them in a different way. I was able to gain a greater sense of the whole lives my students were living. When I brought my insights back to my school landscape, I became a more effective teacher. All of this took a lot of personal time and was in addition to my teaching responsibilities, but it brought joy to teaching. Today, I

am awake to the notion that my extra-curricular involvement was in large part what sustained me in teaching and got me through the days. It allowed me to live, in some part, my imagined story of teaching, a story in which I am able to attend to the lives of students by creating a curriculum of community in my classroom. I wonder if this is why I was motivated to pursue a new position. I wonder if I was searching for a way to attend to matters of importance to me on a school landscape. I was attracted to a position that described working with student activities. Instead of working after school at this, in the new position, it would be part of my day time teaching responsibilities. I loved the idea.

> *I printed off the posting and immediately brought it to my principal. As the school leader, I valued his perspective and his opinion was important to me; I believed I was very qualified. Enthusiastically I asked, "What do you think?" as I handed it to him to read. As I considered the requirements again myself, I felt confident and, before hearing his response, I decided I would apply. His reply was reassuring and my decision was further confirmed as he told me, "You'd be great in that position." He showed further support by offering to be a reference and to review my application package. When I spoke to my friends on staff about applying, they, too, agreed that this job seemed great. They were also supportive of me.*
>
> *I began to work at completing the application package and putting my resume together. I enjoyed this process because I was able to*

retell[18] *my teacher stories as I prepared statements about my philosophies and wrote about the highlights of my experiences. (Life in the Elementary Classroom, Written response, October, 2010)*

As I prepared this section of my application, I remember thinking about the relationships I had developed over the years: relationships with students, their families, with colleagues, and with workers at community agencies that supported my students. I valued these so much; they were central in sustaining my in teaching and working. As I engaged in conversations with these people I was able to explore and understand the connection between school and home lives of my students. I thought about my students, about who they were, and the wholeness of their lives, as children, living on and off of school landscapes. As part of my teaching, I thought about me living alongside students and wondered how that, in some part, shaped their experiences in school. As I remembered these things, I thought about all that I had learned from my students and I felt a deep sense of gratitude for the relationships I had with them. Looking back now, I understand I was also trying to be attentive to the familial curriculum-making world that students bring with them when they attend school[19].

One reason I was so attracted to the leadership position was because I believed it would give me more opportunity to work in ways centered on relationships. The posting had even listed "skilled at relationship building" as an asset for the candidate. I had considered this as one of my strengths; it was my

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[18] Clandinin & Connelly (1998) encourage us to "engage in retellings [of stories] that might lead to different social narratives being lived out on the professional knowledge landscape" (p. 253).

[19] Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin (2011) conceptualize a familial curriculum-making world where families, children/learners, subject matter, home and community milieu are in dynamic interaction and an integral part of the curricular process (pp. 7–8).

preferred way of teaching and was part of who I was. I remember that I convinced myself that I would be moving to a position where I would "fit" in. I optimistically trusted this new landscape would be a belonging place for me to safely live out my story of teacher and teaching.

As I presently inquire into my past experience applying for my dream job I am awakened to new understandings about my experience. I believe I purposely overlooked the amount of work that was required to move schools. I simply did not allow myself to consider this reality that I knew. Perhaps if I had, I would have brought forward a tension I had already "smoothed over." I told myself that moving was part of teaching, as I hadn't known otherwise. As I inquire temporally, looking back in time to the early days of my career, I remember being very tired from packing my belongings in the evenings after teaching all day. I remember I was frustrated at having to spend weekend time moving all of my supplies over to new schools. I remember wishing that I had someone at school to help me. It seems I set aside, or denied, those early tensions when I told myself "both moves proved to be successful growth opportunities for me."

> *I also thought about how I had been welcomed in the past at the new schools, how I had adjusted quickly and easily to each new landscape. I was able to establish connections with other staff members who had become some of my best friends. I was used to meeting new people and being in new environments and was good at "fitting in." (Life in Elementary Classrooms, Written response, October, 2010)*

When I considered the time requirements of a new position, I told myself I was used to having positions that were demanding in terms of time. I reminded myself how enjoyable being involved with extracurricular events was for me. I affirmed in my thinking that I had a balanced system that allowed me to weave together my personal and professional landscapes and, looking forward to the new position, I was convinced I could do it again.

> *I was used to changing grade levels and was not intimidated about the thought of learning a new curriculum. In my 7 years, I shifted between assignments and taught many grade levels, subject areas, and specialty programs. Every move offered a multitude of learning experiences. This movement was in line with my stories to live by. I shifted my teaching to match student levels and various curricula. I felt successful at each of the levels I taught, and I received appreciation, praise, and thanks from my students, their parents, colleagues, and principals. I was motivated to develop expertise that might serve me for future possibilities. (Life in Elementary Classrooms, Written response, October, 2010)*

As I inquire into this segment of my story, I am attentive to the fact that I moved grade levels and "shifted my teaching to match student levels and various curricula." I wonder if this was part of the rhythm I had created to manage my tensions and adapt to the cycles of school. I wonder if I created new and novel experiences by shifting my teaching with the hope of ridding myself of tensions. I wondered if I was searching continually for something that felt right for me. I wrote that "I felt successful at each grade level" but I remember my notion of

success was changing. I was shifting and becoming less appreciative about being considered successful according to the grand narrative of school and by systemic standards. I told myself that approval from principals mattered less and less to me. I began to question the "rules" (of the system) and I was satisfied to question them if it meant being attentive to the lives of students.

As I inquire, I note that I refused to allow myself to think about the amount of time it took to prepare for a new course. In my past, I had spent many extra hours familiarizing myself with course material and organizing ways I would teach. I developed a system of working late in the evenings and on one weekend day at school. When I was considering the posting, I did not allow myself to think about the time or effort that might be necessary at a new school to learn different systems, meet staff, and familiarize myself with resources different than those I was used to. I also refused to think about the amount of extra work that might be required to build a course from scratch. Again, this was my way of smoothing over tensions, by ignoring them. I downplayed the fact that I desperately wanted this teaching position to be the one, on a landscape where I could be me, spending time living out my stories to live by in out-of-classroom places.

> *I adopted a positive and hopeful stance. I imagined a perfect story of school on a new landscape where I would fit. The position would be mine. (Life in Elementary Classrooms, Written response, October, 2010)*

New landscape - September 2006.

BBQ blitz.

It was the first of many things; the first Thursday of September, the first semester of the new school year, and my first day of teaching on a new school landscape. As I walked, at day's end, to the staffroom for a glass of water, I reflected on my teaching that day and I thought about my students. I imagined how I might begin to know them and how I might teach in an engaging way. The day, a day "A" had gone well. I had been nervous with anticipation, yet I relaxed and felt at ease once the students arrived. I felt a surge of positive energy in me throughout the day. I felt confident in my decision to accept this new position. Tomorrow would be day "B," a first day all over again, and I would meet more students. In my stories to live by I was an efficient and effective task manager, prepared and organized. I quickly began to make mental notes of items to prepare and attend to for the next day. I wondered how it would unfold as I sipped from my glass. (Reflection on starting school, April, 2010)

My wonderings were interrupted when an assistant principal, Lisa[20], approached me. She very casually asked how my planning for the "Welcome Week" barbeque, to be held in 2 weeks, was coming along. I was surprised. This was the first I was hearing of it. By the way she spoke I knew I was responsible for it.

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[20] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of those I write about in my experiences.

Inwardly, I felt an instant pang of anxiety. Outwardly, I appeared calm and at ease; I began a cover story.[21] Rather than ask for clarification from Lisa, or admit I did not know what she was talking about, I confidently asked what had been done in the past, alluding to what I hoped she would see as some prior knowledge of her expectation. I was following my old script, one in which I was a successful teacher who would, and could, do anything. Lisa described a week's worth of elaborate activities that had been done in the past, each lunch hour of each day of the week, leading up to a culminating barbeque for over 600 students on the Friday. I was new to the landscape and, as such, felt pressure to live up to the high expectations of my administrators.[22] I needed to prove myself. Perhaps this feeling resulted in part from my initial interview. I remember the panel telling me how they were looking forward to the work I might do at their school, how they wanted me to "do grand things" (for student activities), and that I was "just the person to do them." I wanted to exceed the standard of the past, so I quickly decided that I would do whatever was needed to pull off the best barbeque ever. It would be grand.

My stories to live by, threaded by plotlines of being prepared and organized, bumped up against the school story I now found myself storied into. Looking backward, at my stories to live by, I imagined briefly how I might begin to move forward. I imagined working alongside students, listening to their

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[21] "When teachers move out of their classrooms into the out-of-classroom places on the [school] landscape, they often live and tell cover stories . . . cover stories fit within the acceptable range of the stories lived at school and enable teachers to continue to practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25).

[22] In a 2012 report focusing on early career teacher attrition in Alberta, researchers (Clandinin et al.) found that teachers had complex feelings of belonging with colleagues and administrators (p. 6). This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

ideas, helping them plan, and guiding them to put their ideas into practice by hosting a successful barbeque. I imagined being able to establish relationships with the students and other staff who could offer their support. My imaginings were interrupted with the reality of my new story. My dream job became a dream interrupted, a waking, an awakening for me. I was new on staff, teaching all new courses, and about to undertake a huge task, alone, on top of my regular teaching responsibilities. Of course, I would have students to help, but this provided little comfort, as I barely knew them. I had only taught them for one day at this point and would need to begin preparation immediately. There would be no time for relationship building. And, in the end, I realized the expectation would be on me to plan and implement the barbeque, not my students. I immediately wondered about the amount of extra time that I would have to dedicate toward welcome week and the barbeque. I wanted to tell Lisa my inner feelings yet I remained silent. After my first day on a new landscape, I wondered what I was getting into.

In the days that followed, I spent most nights until midnight studying curriculum guides, preparing lessons, and planning for the barbeque. Quickly, it became difficult to complete typical errands such as preparing meals or doing laundry. My personal fitness routine and social life began to suffer as I opted out of activities in order to complete my work. There was no other alternative; I was working on a compressed schedule, and I was running out of time to get things done. With less time for rest and healthy eating, I started to feel sluggish. Most of the open time slots during the day, including lunch hours and after

school, were spent in meetings. There were student meetings, staff meetings, department meetings (I belonged to two), telephone conversations with parents, and meetings with vendors who were supplying items for welcome week. Work consumed every minute of my time. I spent one entire weekend shopping for food for the barbeque. This was bumping against my way of teaching and not fitting with my stories to live by. I was operating under a lot of pressure and simply saw no other alternative but to complete most aspects of planning for the barbeque on my own. I had to forgo the usual time I spent building relationships with students. I set my felt tension aside because I could not dedicate any time or mental capacity to reflect on them. On the following Monday, I arrived at the school with enough pop, hamburger, and hotdog buns for 600 students loaded in my vehicle. When my first group of students arrived I was so thankful because they could help.

I began that Monday morning class by describing my vehicle to one boy as I handed him my keys. I randomly selected two people to go with him to bring in the food from my vehicle. I coordinated the rest of the class to meet them at the door to carry the food to a storage place. I was exhausted and overwhelmed by this assignment, and my ability to make effective decisions was hindered as a result of fatigue. The task had become all-consuming. Rather than think about what I was asking my students to do, or what or who I was asking them to be, my chief concern was to get things done as quickly, efficiently, and effectively as possible! The task became everything, and the importance of lives, who the students were, and who I was as a teacher, were set aside.

I hadn't been at my new school long enough to establish trusted relationships with the staff and administrators. Even though I'd quickly made several friends, I felt it was unsafe for me to share my inner feelings with them. I was fearful that if I did I would be judged, considered weak, a failure, or someone who just couldn't "hack" it. I wondered if I was becoming a failure. I fought this idea. It didn't fit. It wasn't me. I pushed it away.

It crept back.

Failure . . .

Push.

Failure . . .

Push.

Sliding Forward

Beginning of the end—Last week of September 2006.

Facing a cover story.

"Ms. Wnuk, are you OK . . . You are always so happy, positive and full of energy, what's wrong with you?"

I was standing at the front of my classroom, on an ordinary day, welcoming students as they walked through the door, when I heard those words. I was stunned and unable to continue as usual. Uh . . . he knows, I thought, feeling embarrassed, warm in the face, and heavy in the chest. I had been trying so hard to keep the tensions and negative emotions I was feeling hidden, but they surfaced and became visible. I questioned—

was I that transparent? I couldn't hide my fatigue, the pressure to perform, or the uneasiness that I felt any longer. The idea of any student, colleague, or staff member knowing how I truly felt was terrifying, and worse, it was a student who I barely knew who had detected something was wrong.

I was tired and lacked energy from all of the extra hours that I was spending at work. Just 4 weeks into my new assignment, I was exhausted, physically and mentally worn down. Never in my 7 prior years of teaching had I experienced this kind of fatigue, especially so early on in the school year, and I hated that my students could detect this in me. With angst I questioned, how did this happen? Perhaps that student thought, "My teacher seems a little off." Perhaps his question was a simple wonder. He couldn't possibly have known how profound it was, how deeply I would be affected by it, and how intensely I would search to find an answer. . . . What was wrong with me? (Reflections, December, 2010)

With an outward smile and a cheery disposition, I was teaching classes, attending meetings, and making positive contributions on staff every day at school. This was my cover story. Privately, I wondered if anyone could sense how I felt on the inside and I worried what might happen if they could. When I was asked, "what's wrong with you?" by my student, my anxiety heightened. My worst fear had come true. My cover story was beginning to crack. I

panicked. Who else, other than this student, could tell something was going on with me?

Failure . . .

Push.

F a i l u r e . . .

Panic.

In my cover story, I was content with teaching and I worked to implement the visions of administrators and system leaders. Outwardly, I accepted system mandates and I followed the suggested prescription for "effective teaching." I implemented strategies that were recommended by "experts" and I accepted my role as a teacher in a larger system. I was a district representative and was lucky to be working at such a progressive and innovative place. That was the message constantly being repeated. It became a district slogan I heard at almost every professional learning session I attended. When I began teaching, this message motivated me and I felt a sense of pride about the work I was doing. I felt as though I belonged with a group of teachers, doing good work while following the vision of the district. In time, I began to develop my own vision as I worked to implement innovations in my teaching practice. Inwardly, I questioned the slogan and wondered about certain policy and implementation strategies. I felt I could not openly explore these wonders and remain safe on the school landscape.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) write about the places teachers spend their time on a school landscape. Part is spent in the classroom with students,

and the other is spent in professional common places. These common places are "filled with knowledge funneled into the school system for the purpose of altering the teachers and classroom lives" (p. 25). It was in the common places where I learned to be agreeable and live out my cover story. I worried my administrators might perceive me negatively if I spoke against or questioned the vision. I worried I might be labeled as negative and be passed up for future opportunities. I had seen this happen to others around me when they spoke up. I was also concerned about being perceived as a failure. I believed that my performance as a teacher was evaluated in part by my willingness to adhere to the requests of senior administrators. My feelings about being perceived as a failure are expressed in the poem Cover Story Exposed.

Cover story exposed . . . anxiety builds.

Successful career.
Excellent reputation.

Could be ruined.
Storied as a failure?

Physically ill.
Nervous feeling.
Loss of appetite.

Tensions growing.
Stronger.
STRONGER.

Need Relief . . .
HELP . . . Who can help?

Immediately, I decided I needed some help to sort this all out. Clearly, I wasn't able to do it on my own, despite my desperate effort and extreme

desire for privacy. I yearned to speak with someone, anyone who understood, who could sympathize with my feelings. I needed help and this was a very difficult admission to myself. I wanted advice from someone who knew what it meant to be a teacher, from someone who understood the complexities of teaching. It would be risky and I felt nervous about my decision, but I quickly resolved to call my district's HR department. I didn't know what would happen if I called, but I knew I could not continue on teaching and feeling this way. I had to do something different. I placed the call briefly in between teaching classes. I calmly and thoroughly described the parameters of my teaching assignment. I did not mention any of the feelings I was having at the time, it was a short conversation. Immediately, I was invited to meet with someone in just 2 days. As I hung up the phone I breathed a sigh of relief . . . I could make it—only 2 more days. Soon a meeting would take place at another district site over my lunch hour and during a preparation block that followed the hour afterward. Just 2 more days . . .

You Need a Rest – October 2006

Visit to Human Resources, staff support.

I burst into tears.
"That's crazy. It's too much," she responds.
I'm sobbing. "I don't want to go back."

"So don't," she says, matter-of-factly.

WHAT??? I perk up.
Did she just say, don't go back?

She sits there—flat; and listens.
"But I have to—I have a class at 2:00."

How can she say that?
I have no choice. I have to teach.

Oh, thank God, She's right.
I'm relieved. But I fight it.

She continues:
"If you were in a car crash—
Today, on your way back from this meeting . . .
What would happen?"
She pauses.

This is a trick question. I know the answer.
I'm fighting her suggestion—still teary.

I have to go back.
I'll be a failure . . .

"Who would teach the kids?
Somebody would.
They would get by—be fine without you," she tells me.

OK.
I shift toward acceptance.
I start to settle.

"Take a couple of days off—
Take the rest of the week."

Anxiety builds again and I begin to cry.
I'm fighting what she's telling me—
Even though, I know it's true.

I need a rest,
She says I do.
It's OK.

Relief.
Quick shift.

Teach class at 2:00,
Prepare plans,

Book supply teacher,
Organize material,
Respond to emails,
Arrange coverage for student meetings . . .

All this for a rest.

The story fragment above tells of my experience visiting a teacher support consultant. Today, some years later, as I look back, I realize how vividly this day comes into my mind. It was the first time I shared my inner feelings about teaching with anyone on a school landscape. Emotion unexpectedly poured out as I confessed to a district consultant the tensions I was experiencing. I spontaneously sobbed, "I don't want to go back." I had not planned to tell. I had been living and telling a cover story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) for quite some time that was in sharp contrast to the secret story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) I began to tell on that day.

I struggled with my admission moments after I spoke to the counselor; I had exposed myself in a common place, on a school landscape. Interestingly, I made attempts to argue against the woman who acknowledged and calmly accepted my feelings. This seems to be an example of the inner struggle to accept and express my feelings without fear of the possible repercussions of them. Despite "fighting her suggestion" to take a break, inwardly, I felt a sense of relief. I felt relief to have an outside person, someone in a position of authority, honour and validate my feelings and accept my view. This was not something I expected from a district representative. Looking back, I see how I was nervous about being judged negatively by her too.

I wept sincerely as I drove from the meeting back to school. Tears streamed softly as I continued to release months of concealed emotion. I couldn't believe what had just happened. I couldn't believe I told and was still supported. I felt as though finally I had been granted permission to have the feelings I did. I was relieved to have been heard by somebody inside, somebody who wasn't a friend or family member.

When I arrived at the school parking lot, I took a deep breath as I parked my car. I quickly shifted my focus and began to think about teaching my next class. As I did this, my tears stopped. I mentally prepared myself to be a "teacher," despite what had just happened. I wiped my eyes and looked in the car mirror. I told myself to set this experience aside and turn off my emotion. I adopted my cover story once again and let it settle in as I walked back to the school, outwardly appearing ready for my next class.

At the end of that day, I sat still at my desk and reflected for an hour or more in silence. I replayed the day's events in my mind, trying to gain a deeper understanding of myself and sort out a way for me to move forward. I had gone too far with sharing and suddenly I felt different. I could not go back to the way I was. I was not the same person anymore. This made me feel uncomfortable and unsure. I did not understand how I was different and my feelings were confusing. I paused and began to look around my classroom space. As I scanned the room, noticing every bit of its detail, I wondered, who am I? Who have I become? What am I

doing? What does this all mean? I could not ignore all that had transpired that day. I had been able to pretend as a way to finish off the day, but I knew I was done living out my cover story. I considered what had been suggested earlier . . . should I take a day or two off? With reluctance and a deep sense of guilt, I decided I would. I spent the next 3 hours preparing detailed lesson plans and organizing material for the teacher who would be working with my students during my absence.

Time Away: October 2006–February 2007.

Finding space.

Day 1:	Crash. Sleep. Anxiety. Breathe. Sleep.
Day 2:	I'll go back next week after the weekend. I can do it next week. Rest. Settle.
Day 3:	You need a break take 2 weeks off. You're sick. I'll give you 2 weeks. Am I a failure?
Week 1:	I'm sure by next Monday, I'll go back. I'll be better then.
Week 2:	I need to get back. PRESSURE. Go back to school. Pressure . . . I don't feel ready . . .
Week 3:	Why am I so confused? I want to go back. I don't want to go back. Ah . . . I'm so tired. I need to rest more.
Month 1:	I can't go back. Can I go back? Where could I go? Who knows my truth? [Call to HR] Where can I fit? Help me to fit. I want to come back. There's nothing? Who else can I talk with? Searching. Searching. Hoping. Searching for answers and a place to fit.
Month 2:	[Referral to career counselor by district] Focus on finding a new career. Weekly meetings. Talk always leads to teaching. She tells me, "I hear your passion for teaching." Work hard to find new career. No luck. I hate teaching. No I love teaching . . . What do I hate? Frustration. I can't see myself being anything else. I hate, love, hate, teaching. Grasping for answers. Hopeful someone will say, yes, you belong.

Calling to find that.
Month 3: Frustration. Why can't I sort this out?
Just let it go. Move on. Why can't I let go?
Enroll in HR Management course at University.
Hello, I am a teacher. Wait, no I am not a teacher . . . Am I a teacher?
Frustration.

Story Fragment—Smashing the Apple

I desperately dug through several boxes in my garage to find a glass apple that once rested on my desk—a special gift from a student, shiny and bright. As I picked it out and held it, it seemed dull and felt heavy in my hand. I moved with awkwardness as I carried the apple away from my garage and up into my second story condo. I gripped it tightly, and with each step, it seemed to get heavier and heavier. Emotions and memories flooded through me in waves and I became confused. I felt betrayed; I was hurt and angry, sad and frustrated all the same time. Once inside, I felt my body temperature rise. I was uncomfortable with the apple, yet unwilling to set it down. Perhaps I needed fresh air? With apple in hand, I slowly walked over to the balcony and opened the door. I stepped out and examined it for a moment.

It had come to represent all the parts of my teaching career, and me as a teacher unable to make sense of it all, I wanted to rid myself of that identity. In a desperate attempt to gain some relief from the discomfort and tensions I was feeling, I channeled every bit of emotion through my arm, forcing it upward. I gripped the apple tightly as emotional energy surged into my hand. I took a deep breath…and, with

as much force as I could muster, I lowered my arm and released my "teacher apple" onto the cement sidewalk below. It smashed. I thought…

There.

Done.

It's over.

Shattered . . .

Shattered into tiny pieces.

Broken.

Broken like me.

As I stared down at the mess, at the shards of glass, I felt relief. I believed, I could move on. (Life in Elementary the Classroom, Written Response. December, 2010)

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Chapter 3: New Voices

> Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeed totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are. (Carr, 1986, p. 97)

In my eighth year of teaching, I found myself in an inner state of disorder and confusion[23]. I had, as Carr (1986) suggested, lost my coherence. Yet, outwardly, I appeared content and satisfied. With a move to a new high school, I was teaching and working as a department head. I was excited to have this position because I believed it would allow me to work with students in ways that attended to their lives rather than focus on the delivery of mandated curriculum. I was ready to take on a leadership role and I was excited about this opportunity. I shared my ideas about teaching during my interview for this position and one of the administrators told me I could teach in this way. I was praised and encouraged for my statements. I believed I had my dream job. My dream was soon interrupted and a nightmare began. Shortly after beginning my new position, I felt outward pressure to meet the spoken and unspoken expectations

[23] Chapter two details the events, that lead to these feelings.

of my administrator. As administrative plotlines shifted on my school landscape, they bumped against other plotlines I was living (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009). Early on, I learned the institutional narrative of school and I understood my role in the story. While I played my part, the effort do so caused me tension. An excerpt from my journal at this time tells of my tension:

> I was identified for leadership, but leading what, other people's goals, objectives, values? I am caught, lost. My sense of direction has vanished. (Personal Journal, 2006)

I wondered, what caused this? How did I get here? Who was I? Who was I becoming as a teacher? What did it mean for me to be a teacher? I told and retold myself a story, as Carr (1986) wrote, that I was a teacher who could do anything. My life had held together. Why was I struggling so much inwardly?

What I was searching to find perhaps, is what Carr calls a coherence of self, that is, the "unity and integrity of my personal identity" (1986, p .96). I did not know how to negotiate or make sense of the shifts that were going on in me. I shifted to a moment that was six weeks into the school year when I decided I could not live with my tension any longer. I decided to leave teaching. This was the most difficult move I had ever made in my life. I was in my eighth year of teaching, had a successful career, yet teaching no longer made sense, no matter how much I struggled to compose a life as a teacher. The only response that made sense was to leave.

Amidst Leaving and Returning to Teaching

As a way to make sense of my experience of leaving teaching, I stayed connected with friends who were still teaching and others who were in the field of education. I hoped teachers might offer me new insights into my experiences of leaving teaching, experiences that were so troubling to me. What happened when I told my stories to others surprised me. While I expected verbal affirmation that I was a good teacher, I also hoped others would suggest ways to change my perspective, so that I could manage to make teaching work for me, so that I could regain a sense of coherence. I wanted this so desperately. Instead, other teachers affirmed my decision to leave teaching. In response to my stories of leaving teaching, other teachers shared their stories of uncertainty and tensions in teaching. Some said that I was brave to leave. Others shared that they wanted to leave, but could not because of financial responsibilities to their families. One friend told me that he had invested too much time in a teaching career to begin over at something else. Another shared her story of taking an early retirement after teaching for over 20 years. After many years of loving teaching, she told of teaching a very challenging group of students who demanded an enormous amount of attention during the day. After school hours, she spent several hours with paperwork and communicating with parents as well as on teaching preparations, which included planning, marking and reporting. She felt defeated and frustrated with the lack of administrative support. She grew very fatigued and began to experience health concerns. When this happened, she made the difficult decision to retire early. She explained how she

no longer wanted to sacrifice her personal well-being for her work. I sensed how agonizing leaving had been and I also understood how important teaching had been to her. Carr (1986) reminded me that "what we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are." (p. 96). As I exchanged stories with other teachers, I experienced a shared understanding of teaching and of the complex, intense and often confusing emotions that surround the experience of leaving teaching.

As I was having these conversations with other teachers, I began to wonder about teaching in different ways. I wondered about what it meant for me to be a teacher, but also for me to be a teacher in a system. I questioned, was there a difference? It was at this time that I began to look beyond myself and to wonder about the profession of teaching that was leading to so many tensions for others.

A Place and Time to Walk

While I was away from teaching, I found tranquility walking in solitude along the river near my city home. Often, I stopped for coffee at a nearby bakery before I set off down a sidewalk, which eventually became a dirt trail through trees. In the quiet of this natural place and with the rhythmic pattern of my steps, I began to reflect.

Despite the fact I had left, I knew myself to be a teacher and, during my walks, I affirmed my knowing of myself as a teacher. It was a story to live by. Okri (1997) writes of stories planted in us by others that we knowingly and

unknowingly "live by" and "live in" (p. 46). I wondered about this story to live by that was shaped by my experiences and others' stories of teacher that I had knowingly planted in myself. Through my journey from pre-teacher to beginning teacher to specialist teacher, I realized I had learned to "live by" or "live in" whatever institutional story of teacher my current administrator held and asked me, not always in words, to live out or live up to. Carr (1986) reminds me "our world consists of pre-established social roles and ongoing stories not of my making" (p. 84). He suggests our existence is to be "understood as a matter of assuming and acting out the parts determined by the already existing repertoire of roles" (p. 84) finding us caught up in stories already going on. I was caught up in the given or ongoing stories of teacher that were formed as educational trends and system demands of teachers changed over time. I learned to play my role being attentive to what others thought was important about teaching, and, in doing so, I tried to live the story my principal preferred I live out or lived up to (Carr, 1986). I tried to include these stories as part of my teacher identity, my stories to live by[24]. They seemed to fit, but over time trying to make these existing stories fit into my stories to live by caused me a great deal of tension[25].

When I could no longer deny the tension I was experiencing as I attempted to live out these systemic stories of teacher, I made a distressing decision and left teaching. Initially, I felt deficit for leaving because I was not

[24] Clandinin et al., (2006) describe "stories to live by" as a way to understand identity making. They wrote, "Teacher identity is understood as a unique embodiment of teacher's stories to live by, stories shaped by knowledge composed on landscapes past and present in which a teacher lives and works. Stories to live by are multiple, fluid, and shifting continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living alongside" (p. 9).
[25] Chapter two discusses the tensions I lived out in greater detail.

able to simply live out the story my administrators preferred, the dominant story on the landscape. I was puzzled by this and began to inquire into my experiences. For the 2 years I was away from teaching, I wondered, could I live out more of who I was, my stories to live by, on the landscape?

With new insights into my stories to live by, I considered the possibility of returning to teaching. In order to do this successfully, I needed to be attentive to myself and to the stories I lived by as a teacher. Could I live out my stories and protect who I was from bumping up against the dominant story of "good teacher"? Could I return and work in ways that sustained me and allowed me to know who I was and was becoming?

Looking back, I was also motivated to return so that I could continue to inquire into my teacher identity and my wonders around the profession of teaching. I was particularly interested in knowing why I felt I did not "fit" into the system (even though I had received external validation and recognition for my work). Why did I feel I was a deficit teacher even though I was not judged to be deficit?

After much consideration, I re-entered teaching and, at the same time, began graduate school. I believed graduate studies could sustain me and ground me in my knowing as a teacher on a school landscape. I also believed graduate school would provide me with greater opportunities for movement within "teaching." I worried that my leaving would be perceived by others as a sign that I was deficit. I was protective of myself and of the stories others told of me before I left teaching. Today I am saddened about the level of concern I had for

me to be seen as a teacher who could do anything. I vividly remember the pressure I felt to live up to this story. I did not want my uncertainties around whether to continue teaching to be known by others. Returning to teaching at the same time I entered graduate school kept me safe from the negative perceptions of others and even from my own feelings that I may be a deficit teacher because I left. I now see that returning to teaching at the same time as creating new life possibilities was the start of composing a safe and acceptable "story to leave by"[26].

Coming to Stories

Teacher stories-Stories of teachers-School stories-Stories of school.

In July 2009, I enrolled in an 8-day graduate class called "Toward a Curriculum of Community" at the University of Alberta. The course allowed intense inquiry into who I was as a teacher. Prior to each class, I read several theoretical articles and wrote reflective responses to each. When I met with my fellow students and our professor, we discussed each article at length and shared our written responses, sometimes as a whole class, sometimes in smaller groups.

One article profoundly influenced me, shifted my thinking, and moved forward my efforts to make sense of my experiences. As I read Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes: Teacher Stories–Stories of Teachers-School Stories-Stories of Schools by Clandinin and Connelly (1996), I was

[26] Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) use the narrative term 'stories to leave by' as a way to understand the gradual shift of teachers as they move out of teaching. Stories to leave by usually include telling a cover story that follows a storied plotline that is an acceptable story to leave teaching by.

struck by their question, “How is teacher knowledge shaped by the professional knowledge context in which teachers work?” (p. 24). Their question opened up an inquiry into my experiential knowing, the landscapes on which I had worked, and my stories of leaving.

> The professional knowledge context shapes effective teaching, what teachers know, what knowledge is seen as essential for teaching, and who is warranted to produce knowledge about teaching. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 24)

How had the professional knowledge landscape shaped my knowledge? How had it shaped the stories others told about what I knew and what I should know? How had my experiences been shaped by the various contexts in which I had worked? I realized that what I knew as effective teaching was different than what was commonly expressed or valued in many of my teaching contexts. I understood my knowledge was more than applied theory or policy.

I felt comforted, validated, and hopeful. I identified with the narratives of teachers who Clandinin and Connelly used to illustrate their concepts. These concepts included a metaphor of a professional knowledge landscape to understand school contexts, temporality, place, secret stories, cover stories[27] and sacred stories[28] (pp. 24–26). I was introduced to a new language, and a new set

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[27] The discussion of secret, sacred and cover stories provide a map for studying the dynamics of the relationship between teachers’ personal practical and professional knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p.25). Secret and cover stories are lived out on personal and professional landscapes. Secret lived stories are stories told to others in safe and secret places. Cover stories allow us to cover over secret stories, in order to protect the secret stories we live (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 3).

[28] Crites (1971) refers to sacred stories as unspoken resonances living in stories of the past, while presently creating a forward-looking story.

of terms and concepts that helped me make sense of my experiences. Now I had a discourse for engaging in further inquiries into my experience.

I had wrestled with the idea I would be seen as a failure or as a deficit teacher if I left. I even struggled not to identify myself that way. My concerns about negative perceptions silenced me on school landscapes. I wondered about the notions of failure and deficit. Why did I feel this way? I was a competent teacher who had received accolades. Who planted the story of teachers leaving as a story of being deficit? I recognized my teacher knowledge was, in some part, shaped by the professional knowledge landscapes where I worked and I was awakened to the idea that my tensions around teaching were not all situated in me. I began to think of my past teaching contexts and about my experience in those contexts. I began to consider how various contexts had shaped my teaching and my stories to live by. I realized there was space for me to inquire into the bumping places and tensions between my teacher stories and school stories, and into my experience as a teacher who left the profession.

Coming to the Research

After two semesters of part time study while teaching full time, I decided to apply for, and was granted, a leave of absence for the 2010–2011 school year. As part of my leave, I joined a team of researchers[29] to explore the experiences

[29] The research project team members included D. Jean Clandinin, Lee Schaefer, Julie S. Long, Pam Steeves, Sue McKenzie-Robblee, Eliza Pinnegar from Center for Research for Teacher Education and Development, University of Alberta and C. Aiden Downey from Emory University.

of early career teachers in Alberta, with particular attention to the issue of early career teacher attrition (Clandinin et al., 2012, p. 3).

First, we completed two extensive literature reviews, one on early career teacher attrition[30], and a second on mentoring and induction, as it related to early career teacher attrition.[31] Our reviews provided a strong conceptual basis for three empirical studies that aimed to understand more about what contributes to early career teacher attrition in (Clandinin et al., 2012, p. 9).

The first study was a semi-structured interview[32] study. Drawing from the research of Schaefer and Clandinin (2011), which highlights the importance of attending to teacher lives both on home and school landscapes, our team designed interview questions[33] in a way we envisioned would provide insight into how beginning teacher's experiences are shaped by their lives on personal and professional landscapes (Clandinin et al., 2012). We interviewed 40 Alberta teachers in their second and third years of teaching who had graduated from an Alberta post-secondary institution. Participants were males and females of varied ages, who taught in a variety of contexts, and had a wide range of subject specialties and prior experiences to teaching.

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[30] This literature review is published in Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 2012. http://ajer.synergiesprairies.ca/ajer/index.php/ajer/article/view/980
[31] This review is published in Mentoring and Tutoring, *20,* (1), 7-26. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13611267.2012.645598
[32] The semi-structured interview is "designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced . . . Semi-structured interview employs an interview schedule or guide. Analysis of the objective knowledge constitutes the framework for the development of this guide and foci for the development of the interview questions . . . Participants are free to respond to these questions as they wish and the researcher is free to probe these responses" (McIntosh, 2009, p. 59).
[33] See Appendix 1.

For the second and third studies of the project, narrative inquiry methodology was used.[34] The second study focused on four teachers who graduated from Alberta universities but did not take up contractual kindergarten to Grade 12 teaching positions in Alberta. The third study inquired into the experiences of seven teachers who chose to leave the profession within their first 5 years of teaching.[35]

Framing My Research Puzzle—Laying My Stories Alongside Others

My research for this thesis stems from the larger semi-structured interview study. The 40 interviews were transcribed. The research team read and reread each transcript and engaged in two kinds of data analysis: a descriptive statistical analysis and a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis allowed us to make the participants' experiences more visible. We developed the following seven themes:[36]

1. The first theme was around the notion of support. Participants shared a variety of ways and means they felt supported. Support clearly meant something different for each individual beginning teacher.

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[34] "Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology aimed at understanding experience. It is a collaborative, educative type of research that takes place over time and provides both researchers and participants the opportunity to tell and retell the experiences they are living. Through narrative inquiry, experience is studied attending to three dimensions: the personal/social dimension, the place dimension and the dimension of temporality" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 in Clandinin et al., 2012, p. 82).

[35] A detailed description of these studies and their narrative threads can be found in Chapters 5 and 6 of Early Career Teacher Attrition: Problems, Possibilities, Potentials (Clandinin et. al, 2012).

[36] A detailed description of this study design, descriptive statistical analysis and thematic analysis of the qualitative data are included in Chapter 4 of our Final Report to Alberta Education entitled: Early Career Teacher Attrition: Problems, Possibilities, Potentials (Clandinin et al., 2012).

2. The second theme included an identity thread of belonging. Teachers wanted to belong, and be part of a professional community with others. Although most felt as though they did belong, they also spoke of multiple layers of belonging and of complexities of feeling included. We linked these feelings to a question of identity in this theme.
3. A third theme involved the uncertainty about obtaining permanent contracts and what this meant for beginning teachers.
4. A fourth theme involved the teachers' willingness to do almost anything to enter the profession and secure a job.
5. The fifth theme involved the struggles the teachers had between home and school because of the number of hours they worked during and outside a "school day." We named this theme "Composing a life—working hours."
6. A sixth theme involved teachers' decisions not to let teaching consume them. This theme also involved the struggles teachers had trying to keep with this decision.
7. The seventh theme is a question many participants asked themselves: Can I keep doing this? Is this teaching?

As I was engaged in interviewing participants and coding transcripts, I was also engaged in my own autobiographical narrative inquiry. I realized many of the seven themes we identified from the stories of beginning teachers were also threads that resonated with me and triggered my inquiries. Hoffman (1994)

writes of “resonant remembering” (p. 392) that is, through telling, listening, responding, and interacting with others’ stories of experience, I was reminded of my own. Downey and Clandinin (2010) call this a “process of calling or catching threads from the teller’s story” (p. 392). Using the idea of catching threads from the teller’s stories as resonant threads, I asked myself: Are my experiences different from the experiences of beginning teachers? Perhaps these seven themes not only represented the stories of beginning teachers, but were also themes in the stories of teachers who had been teaching longer, as I had been.

From the seven themes we identified, I found myself resonating strongly with three: an identity thread of belonging; deciding not to let teaching consume them and struggling to keep that decision; and asking can I keep doing this? If so, for how long? In what follows, I write of how I caught threads from the participants’ stories and how this lead me to further autobiographical narrative inquiry into my stories of experiences of teaching, leaving teaching, and returning to teaching.

Thread 1: Identity thread of belonging.

My first teaching assignment was a temporary half-time position in a Grade 4 classroom. Hired just 2 days before my November first start date, I shared the class with a seasoned teacher who had been at the school for 15 years and who had been with the students since the beginning of the school year. I was the third teacher in this position since September. Both experienced

teachers before me had decided not to continue teaching this group of students as they had been disrespectful with their behavior. This group was challenging to say the least. I wonder now if I would have declined this position had I known this story ahead of time.

I experienced teaching as surviving the 2½ days per week in the classroom. I had spent 2 years away from teaching since graduating with a B. Ed. to obtain this first teaching job. I was now renegotiating my professional identity from office manager of a private vocational institute to the stories of myself as a teacher composed during my B. Ed. I had some sense of belonging during this time as I developed a friendship with another first-year teacher who had also begun in November. Together we navigated through our first year. He was teaching full-time, and so he kept me informed about what went on during the days I was not teaching. Even though we did not teach the same grade, we discussed ideas for teaching and shared knowledge of resources. Together we figured out the logistics of teaching such as, how to use the computer system for attendance and report cards, the secret language of district acronyms, abbreviations and so on. I felt like I belonged with this teacher on staff. Our common experiences grounded us in a supportive relationship. At the same time, I tried to develop a greater sense of belonging with the other staff members. Because I had started late in the year, taught part-time, and shared teaching in my classroom, I felt these relationships took longer to develop and were not as strong. I was reminded of the complexities of belonging I felt during my first year when Participant 33 said, "I really love my Grade 1 staff, but other

than that you kind of feel like an alien." Like this participant, I felt different levels of belonging at the same school among the same staff.

After my first year, I moved to another school and received a full-time probationary contract teaching Grade 5. I was welcomed and fully supported by the staff as well as the principal. Teachers at this school were extremely supportive of each other and we worked collaboratively for the benefit of all students. Our principal told us we were teachers of all the students in the school, not just the ones in our classes and we very much worked in that way. As a result, the students benefited and we became a strong community of teachers focused on doing our best for all students. I was reminded of those experiences and my feelings of belonging when Participant 31 stated: "I've established a lot of personal relationships with my coworkers and we're not shy about thanking each other, sharing resources with each other, [or] giving each other feedback."

Under this principal's leadership, I also had flexibility to teach in a way that I could express my personal practical knowledge.[37] I was able to take my students on many field trips, bring in guests (skilled friends) to help teach my students various sports and craft skills. I offered to complete projects such as a yearbook and start clubs like a running club because I enjoyed doing these things personally. I was able to incorporate them into my teaching and to bring myself fully to the school landscape. This was a significant force in shaping my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and for my early understandings of

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[37] Personal practical knowledge is a term Connelly and Clandinin use to "capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teachers' past experience, in the teachers' present mind, and body and in the future plans and actions" (1988, p. 25).

"teaching." I thrived personally and professionally in the supportive and collaborative environment at this school. I resonated with Participant 31 who said; "I honestly felt respected as a professional . . . it felt so good when they asked me to share my [writing] strategy with them." I was reminded again how the relationships I established lead to my sense of belonging and to my feelings of being knowledgeable and valued as a contributing staff member even though I was just beginning. As I look back now, it was an early sense of belonging that sustained[38] me through the beginning years of my career.

As I reflected further on these participants' comments, I was reminded how my feelings of belonging faded over time. Due to funding cuts, I was declared surplus and had to leave the school. I was not retained or sustained. Suddenly, I was displaced and searching for a new school even though I held a continuous contract. Sadly, I became distrustful of colleagues because we were competing for the same postings at other schools. When this happened, there was a peculiar shift in the dynamic of our once tight-knit group and, with it, my sense of belonging changed. Since then, I have struggled to regain the feelings of belonging I once had (Wnuk, 2012).[39]

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[38] In our report, Early Career Teacher Attrition: Problems, Possibilities, Potentials (Clandinin et al., 2012), we noted the current discourse as it relates to early career teacher attrition focuses on retaining teachers rather than sustaining teachers in a "profession where they feel fulfilled and see themselves as making a strong contribution" (p. 249). I use the term "sustained" to describe my feelings of fulfillment and sense of contribution.

[39] My experience of struggling to belong is the focus of Chapter 2.

Thread 2: Deciding not to let teaching consume me and struggling to keep that decision.

Similar to many of the teachers in the study, I imagined myself composing a life (Bateson, 1983) in the classroom and also in other places, as an interested person satisfying my curiosities, as a learner, a dedicated family member and friend, a traveler, and physically active person. This required me to manage the delicate balance between my work and personal life. I worked long hours on and off the school landscape in order to keep up with my teaching responsibilities and the related commitments I made as a teacher, to students, staff and my school. In my first year of teaching, I worked more than full-time hours, even though I was only teaching part-time. This time commitment changed little over the years as I continued on with my career even though I made a conscious decision after my first year not to let teaching work consume all my time. Most days, I was at my school for 9 to 10 hours and I often brought work home to do in the evenings. I made sure that I allowed time for exercise or activity before I began with homework from school such as responding to student work, researching material for new units of study, preparing student reports, etc. For many years, I committed to go into work at school for one day on the weekend. I was not happy to go in and work on a Saturday or Sunday yet my week was so much more manageable when I did. I rarely missed a weekend. I was brought back to these memories when Participant 6 described her experience of working on the weekends as “everything piles up. It’s easier for me to go in on Saturday or Sunday afternoon and do some work.”

I was always busy, and I felt in years three through five of my career, if I had a couple of free hours to do something for myself in the evenings, that I was successful and maintaining a balance between my personal and professional life. I learned later how delicate the balance between my personal and professional life was.

There were so many times especially early in my career, when I declined invitations from my family and friends to visit or I denied myself the opportunity to participate in activities because I felt the need to work. I began to struggle with competing stories and feelings of guilt. Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) write about teacher guilt in *Teaching and Guilt: Exploring the Feelings of Teaching*. I was caught in what they call a "guilt trap" (p. 495). If I chose to spend time with my family, I felt guilty for not attending to my work. If I worked and missed family functions, I felt guilty about letting my family down.

I remember one Fathers' Day, during my fifth year of teaching, I appeared anxious at our family barbeque. My sister asked me what was wrong and I responded, explaining to her how much work I had to do and I went on to suggest that I should have been working. She scolded me, and suggested that I relax and enjoy my time with our family, my nieces, and especially my dad. She told me that the work would wait. I remember how my heart sank when she reminded me of this and also how difficult it was for me to set work aside for that one day. Because it was for my family, I managed to do so, but not without feeling a sense of guilt at first for not working and then for feeling that I needed to in the first place. I was brought to this memory when Participant 16 explained

“I actually made sure and made the effort to put my daughter in something after school. ’Cause if I didn’t do that, then she never would go . . . so, I made that promise to myself . . . and because I’m [also] making it to my child, I’m not going to break it.”

This teacher made a conscious decision not to allow his teaching work to consume him. It became easier for him to keep with this decision when he made a commitment to his daughter after school. This commitment forced him to leave schoolwork behind twice per week. He recognized his own struggle to balance the workload and, as a consequence, planned to be accountable to someone else and himself as a way to manage. I too attempted this tactic by committing to family or enrolling in fitness classes.

There were also times when I tried to adapt an attitude similar to Participant 6 who said, “I’m trying not to feel guilty if I’m not doing work . . . I’ve kind of realized I can’t do that. I can’t do everything. I do what I can in the day, then bring the workbag home and [if] nothing gets done, then that’s just what happens that night.”

There were days over the years when I chose not to delve into my work bag which was usually packed full. I made the decision to set work aside; however, my struggle to accept and manage this decision never went away. I believe the complex feelings associated with my struggle contributed to my leaving teaching. There was a shift in the stories I was telling and retelling to myself that happened during my 2 years away from teaching. When I returned, I learned to manage my struggle a little better but it never went away. I was

satisfied with setting limits and staying within boundaries. I no longer felt the need to justify myself or commit to others to help me achieve my goal. My sense of guilt was lessened, but still remained. I was reminded of my change when Participant 37 said, "You just realize that it doesn't really matter if you go in on Sunday. It's still not going to change the fact that you have a lot [of school work] at home, a lot of stuff to do, you're always going to have a lot of stuff to do."

Knowing my limits and creating strong boundaries to stay within them, allowed me to return to teaching. I learned to evaluate and prioritize the demands and requirements of authorities outside my classroom. I began to weed out what was not important to me, my teaching, or student learning. I reduced my time spent on things like fancy bulletin boards, committee work that was not relevant to my students or me, and participating with initiatives I did not believe in. This was a rough transition to make. In making these changes, I had more time and energy to focus on teaching. I was still a strong teacher (perhaps I felt stronger) and I was more satisfied with my ability to respond to students. I did sense, however, other teachers who had known how I worked in the past, judged me negatively for reducing the amount I took on. Participant 16 (2011) also spoke about being judged for restricting her work hours. She felt judged for not attending "every community event." I remembered overhearing one colleague speaking critically about me saying how "Sheri used to do so much." I wondered, was this colleague suggesting that my work performance was somehow less than it had been in the past? I was surprised and hurt about being

judged this way. I reminded myself of my parameters for returning. I was experienced, knowledgeable and working on a graduate degree. I decided not to take her comments personally, but it was hard to do.

In my experience, the struggle and feeling of being judged never went away. Participant 13 spoke about his sense of the relentless "pressure to impress" as a beginning teacher. I too felt and continue to feel this pressure. When I returned to teaching, I could see it was very much present and it is evident in my colleague's critical comment about me. Today, I observe that my ability to say "no" before I left teaching was dependent on the context in which I worked. If I was in a supportive and collaborative landscape, I felt safe to have limits. If not, I became fearful of being judged and I would over extend myself. My experience was similar to the experiences of Participant 38 who said, "In terms of finding the balance, I've chosen to pursue my professional life and put my personal life on hold." This statement helped me understand that I had, for the first seven years of my teaching career, put my personal life on hold. I was not overtly aware of this before I left teaching (perhaps it was a part of the tension around work hours that I had set aside). From the beginning of my career, I sought out opportunities to bring my personal interests to my professional landscapes as a way to preserve them. This distracted me at the time from what was really happening. For example, I enjoy running and when a fellow teacher asked me to start a running club after school with her, I was excited. I could run with students as part of my work on the school landscape. This ensured I would keep running, despite the hours I worked in the evenings.

Running was a mental break and a sport where I could unwind and recharge after an intense day at school. I see today that my running with students was not an activity just for me as it had been in the evenings. Attention to students was required, and I was still very much in "work mode," a teacher during these runs. As well, there were many logistical issues with running club that I was responsible for organizing. I believe my awakening to the loss of my personal life and my acceptance of this tension contributed to my decision to leave teaching in my eighth year.

Thread 3: Can I keep doing this . . . for how long?

One of my inspirations for teaching beyond my first five years was the hope that things would get better. This hope, coupled with a stubborn dedication to seek out opportunities in places where teaching would be "better," kept me going. I was brought to reflect upon that hope and my beliefs as I re-read the transcribed conversations with Participant 6 and Participant 1. There is a clear parallel between my experience and theirs and, as I read their words, I was reliving my past as a beginning teacher as well as my past as an experienced teacher[40]. I understood how they felt and I was able to see myself in them, as I caught resonant threads. Participant 6 spoke about her motivation to carry on teaching, and her belief that teaching would be better for her when she stated,

> I think what keeps me going is that I've always wanted to do this job and I wanted to be good at it and I don't want to feel like I gave up just

[40] At the time of inquiry into these memories I was working as a teacher consultant for a school board.

> because it was hard . . . I think the other thing that keeps me going is the idea . . . I can get better, thinking it's really hard right now, but it's going to get easier in some ways.

Participant 1 questioned her ability to be hopeful over a sustained period of time, "I worry and I wonder about how long I can keep that up . . . there is hope, but it is almost unfounded because I don't see any change happening . . . if I was still in the position I'm in, in 5 years . . . would I still be doing this? I don't know." I thought about Participant 1's question. It reminded me of the times I had asked myself this question. Based on my experience, I knew the answer: eventually she would leave teaching as I had. I was struck by her reference to time and her suggestion to question her position in 5 years. I wondered what the right amount of time to feel settled with teaching was. I had given myself 8 years. Was that too long? During these years, I clung to the hope that things would be better. I adopted an "I can do anything attitude" in an effort into making things better and remain positive. This attitude was at an expense of my well-being[41]. I believed I would be able to teach in a way that was personally satisfying, managing the accountability demands and bureaucratic controls that restricted me. Although I became a better teacher over time, I found that little changed in terms of the demands I placed on myself. As I engaged in this inquiry, it seemed as though the demands increased with my years of experience. It is interesting that Participant 1 in her second year of teaching was already noting a lack of change in terms of her ability to keep up the demands that encompassed her as a teacher. I remember how I questioned this, only to return to my hopeful optimism.

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[41] I write about this in detail in Chapter 2.

Participant 15's words resonated strongly with me and brought me to the time and place just before I decided to leave teaching. "Every year I just feel more drained and it's the politics of it too . . . the pressure you feel is insane and you never feel like you can keep up, and I have never thought more in my life about changing my career choice than this year." At this time, during my eighth year of teaching, my hope had dwindled, my health was compromised, and I was disheartened, angry, and confused by the micro-politics, bureaucratic controls and administrative demands that surrounded me as a teacher. I realized I needed to make a change in my career choice for self-preservation.

The participants asked themselves: Can I keep doing this . . . for how long? I too asked myself this question and eventually found an answer. I wonder how many teachers, those beginning as well as those who have years of experience, are wondering how long they can continue to teach. I wonder what their answers might be.

So What?

As I began this paper, I used Carr's words to help me understand how we all struggled for coherence in our lives. We tell and retell our stories of who we are and are becoming in order to create coherence. I left teaching in my eighth year of teaching. I sought inquiry spaces to inquire into the stories that I was living and telling of who I was as I struggled to find coherence in my life stories. The stories of the teachers who were beginning helped me see multiple bumping places I had experienced in my career. As I bumped against stories of school

that existed on school landscapes and as I bumped against the stories of teacher that I told and retold myself, these bumping places created tensions. I chose to smooth them over or set them aside. When I could no longer live with the tensions, I chose to leave teaching.

There is a high rate of teacher attrition, particularly for teachers who are beginning. Approximately 40% of beginning teachers are also choosing to leave teaching within their first 5 years of practice[42]. I wonder about teachers who stay beyond 5 years. I wonder if they experience tensions and how they learn to tell and retell their stories. What happens for those teachers with experience, who live with tension, but who are unable to inquire into these tensions? Will they too, like me, leave? How might these teachers be sustained over time? How might they attend to who they are and are becoming as their personal and professional landscapes shift over their years of teaching?

What helped me in my struggle to regain coherence after I left teaching in my eighth year was to engage in inquiry into who I was and was becoming. I created those inquiry spaces at first alone. I searched for years to find a similar space on my professional landscape and eventually I found it in a course I attended in graduate courses, and in working on the research project with teachers who were beginning. There were no spaces on school landscapes where I could engage in such inquiries. I now imagine a place on school landscape where all teachers have space to inquire into their tensions. In supportive and collaborative inquiry spaces, tensions are viewed in a relational way (Clandinin

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[42] This statistic was provided by Alberta Education in conversation about the Early Career Teacher Attrition Project (2010).

et al., 2009, p. 82), as a point of inquiry into experience rather than as something negative to smooth over, or move away from. The inquiry space I imagine is a place for beginning teachers and also for teachers with more years of experience like me. I imagine that this space could be present on every professional landscape. In such a space I imagine all teachers can negotiate and make sense of who they are, and who they are becoming as they compose and recompose their lives. It would be a way to ensure that teachers can continue to compose coherence that will allow them to stay in teaching.

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Chapter 4: Finding Ways Forward Through Looking Backward

Revisiting my Research Puzzle

I framed the puzzle for my autobiographical narrative inquiry around the tensions I experienced in teaching as well as around the experiences I had in leaving teaching, as I struggled to make sense of my shifting stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). As I inquired into my experiences, I wondered about the experiences of other teachers. Did other teachers struggle like I had when travelling back and forth between in-classroom and out-of-classroom places on their school landscapes? Did other teachers struggle to maintain a balance as they shifted between life on school landscapes and life on their personal landscapes? Were their points of tension similar to mine? Did these struggles lessen with years of experience in teaching?

In chapter two, I inquired into my experiences of tensions as I travelled between in-classroom and out-of classroom places on school landscapes. As I awakened to Clandinin and Connelly's (1996, p. 24) concept of professional knowledge landscapes, I began to wonder how my experiences were shaped by various contexts in which I worked. In retelling an experience of tension around travelling between classroom places, I wondered about my shifting identity, my stories to live by, and how they were shaped from the stories that lived in me as well as by the stories that lived in the contexts in which I worked. I ended this chapter in the midst of always becoming.

In chapter three, I continued my inquiry, searching to make sense of my experiences. When I joined a project team interested in the experiences of early

career teachers, my research puzzles began to be reshaped as I underwent the experiences of the project research. I had always intended for my research to be nestled within the larger study. Drawing from participant data from the larger study, which inquired into the experiences of forty early career teachers in Alberta, helped me think about, and further inquire into, my experiences of teaching, of leaving teaching, and of my shifting stories to live by. As I conducted the semi-structured interviews as part of the team, and worked with the transcriptions of participant data, I recognized many resonant threads existed between my experiences and those of the early career teacher participants. I began to wonder if the stories of the beginning teachers were resonant with more experienced teachers as well as teachers who were beginning. I began to wonder how individual teachers regardless of their years of experiences navigated shifts in their personal and professional landscapes. I began to wonder about having conversations with teachers of all levels of experience.

A reflective turn on the literature around early career teacher attrition

As I attended to the literature around early career teacher attrition, I was also able to reflect upon, and narratively inquire into, my own experiences. Much of the research framed attrition as a problem associated with individual factors or contextual factors. In some conceptualizations early career attrition is framed as an identity-making process that involves a complex negotiation between individual and contextual factors (Schaefer et al., 2012). I identified with some of these factors during the time I was teaching and many of what were

identified as factors that contributed to attrition contributed to my leaving of teaching. I wonder if we might pay attention to the literature and consider how these factors not only contribute to early career teacher attrition but how they might affect all teachers regardless of the number of years they have taught or their intentions to remain teaching.

The literature spoke of teacher burnout being a contributing factor for attrition. As I began this research, I wondered about the term burnout. Through the process of inquiry, I wondered if I too had experienced burnout, which is characterized by bodily and mental exhaustion in which the worker becomes negative toward those with whom they work (Maslach 1978, 1982). I was silent about being physically and mentally exhausted in order to smooth over my tensions and prevent them from being exposed. I am certain that lack of administrative support, role conflict, and unclear expectations (Yellel & Merbler, 2005) from others contributed to these tensions and this resulted in what I could have named burnout. Not having a safe relational space where I could inquire into my lived experiences including tensions came at a cost.

Thoreau's (1854/2008) words helped me think of the term *cost* when he wrote, "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it" (p. 20). As we inquired into participant data, the project team wondered about the *cost* of becoming a teacher. We wrote, "The cost of becoming a teacher is paid from the "life" of the teacher, much of which takes place off the school landscape" (Clandinin et al., 2012, p. 72). I knew that some

costs had come from my life not only when I became a teacher but also as I remained teaching.

The research suggested resilient teachers who are able to cope with stressors are more successful in staying. Those who had a disposition for hard work (Freedman & Appelman, 2009) and those who were committed to the profession (Gehrke & McCoy, 2006) were more likely to stay. I was very committed to teaching and I was able to cope with stressors. I ignored the tensions that were brought on by stressors and I became resilient as a way to continue on the teaching landscape. I wonder what the cost of resiliency is. I wonder how long teachers can sustain themselves and at what cost, if they continually have to work hard and cope with stressors (Freedman & Appleman, 2009)

Personal landscapes can be considerations that lead to beginning teacher attrition. Reasons such as pregnancy, parenting, health problems and family moves are all seen as contributing reasons for staff turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). Borman and Dowling (2008) noted that teacher attrition may be caused by a number of personal factors. Both personal landscapes and personal factors may shift and change over time. As I inquired into my research puzzle, I began to reflect on the changes I had gone through during the 8-year span of my teaching career. I experienced many shifts on my personal landscape and I began to recognize how these shifts had affected my teaching life.

Support on the landscape, salary, professional development, collaboration, nature of teaching context, student issues, and teacher education

are indicated in the literature as factors influencing beginning teacher attrition. Andrews, Gilbert, and Martin (2006) found that opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers were highly valued by beginning teachers. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found beginning teachers who were involved with integrated professional cultures (that encouraged collegial and collaborative relationships for all teachers) were more satisfied with their jobs. As I inquired into my experiences, I noted, an integrated, supportive kind of environment was a key factor for me being sustained as a teacher when I began teaching. When I was not able to work in a supportive collaborative landscape, I experienced many tensions. I wonder if a supportive and integrated culture is important to sustaining teachers, not only beginning teachers but teachers who have taught for more than five years.

Justifying the Research: Responses to the questions of “so what?” and “who cares?”

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical . . . [and] it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and a sense of significance and larger social concerns” (pp. 121–122). These interests and social concerns are met through personal, practical, and theoretical justifications. The personal justification “often fuels the passion and dedication” and is often relived and retold through autobiographical stories of experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 174). Before coming to the research project and learning of autobiographical

narrative inquiry, I struggled to make sense of who I was on my teaching landscape. When I could not find an inquiry space on my school landscape and the tensions I was experiencing became too difficult for me to smooth over, I left teaching. I struggled on my own to make sense of this difficult decision. I considered myself to be a teacher, I was passionate about teaching, yet the costs were too great and I decided to leave during my eighth year of practice. I could not make sense of my decision to leave. I experienced many tensions around teaching and I viewed tensions as negative, something to be smoothed over, silenced, or avoided. I wonder now if other teachers struggle to find inquiry places on teaching landscapes as I had. I wonder if other teachers smoothed over their tensions as I did. I wonder if other teachers are leaving teaching as I did, because they do not see alternatives. If I had experienced an inquiry place on school landscapes, I wonder if I would have left teaching. If I had not experienced an inquiry space in my graduate work, I wonder if I would have returned to teaching.

The second justification, the practical, is shaped by possibilities into shifting or changing the researcher's own and others' practices (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 25). I wonder what might happen if schools created inquiry spaces where teachers could inquire into their experiences. I wonder how such spaces could shape who they are becoming on and off of school landscapes. I engaged in autobiographical narrative inquiry in order to make sense of who I was and who I was becoming, as a teacher. At first, I created spaces to share and inquire into my experiences with others off school

landscapes. I did this because there was no safe place to do this on school landscapes. I am beginning to imagine a place on school landscapes where all teachers might find spaces to engage in inquiry into their experiences as teachers. In supportive and collaborative spaces, tensions are viewed in a relational way (Clandinin et al., 2009, p.82), as a point of inquiry. The inquiry space I imagine is a space for teachers who are beginning as well as for teachers with years of experience like me. Greene (1993) helps me to think about this inquiry space for students and I expand her suggestion to include teachers as well. She reminds me of the importance of

> creating the kinds of situations where, at the very least, students [teachers] will begin telling the stories of what they are seeking, what they know and might yet not know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something into being that is in-between . . . releasing potential learners [educators] to order their lived experiences in divergent ways, to give them narrative form, to give them voice. (pp. 218–219)

In safe spaces on the professional landscape, I imagine teachers, who are always in the midst of becoming, will be able to tell and retell stories of who we are and what we are about (Carr, 1986, p. 87) in ways that will allow us to continue to compose and recompose our lives.

The final justification is the theoretical justification of a narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Huber (2010) write, "theoretical justification comes from justifying the work in terms of new methodological and disciplinary knowledge"

(p. 436). Adding to the work that has begun around early career teacher attrition, I wonder if we might expand the conversation to include the lived experience of the tensions that teachers at varying points in their careers are undergoing. By including these teachers in conversations, I wonder what we might learn from their experiences. How do these teachers make sense of who they are and who they are becoming? How are their years of experiences shaped by shifts on their personal and professional landscapes over time? How do experienced teachers negotiate shifting landscapes and plotlines in their personal and professional lives? What might we learn from these teachers if they could tell their stories?

As I take a reflective turn backward and forward on my years of undertaking this narrative inquiry, I see that there is much to do in schools to begin to create inquiry spaces for teachers, both those who are beginning and those who have more experience. I also see that there is the need for further research, for studies with experienced teachers such as the one we undertook with the teachers who were beginning. My autobiographical narrative inquiry opens up the possibility that other teachers are also experiencing tensions as they struggle for narrative coherence amidst composing their lives both on and off school landscapes. My work offers a starting point for what we might consider.

Chapter 4 References

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