IDENTITY AS PEDAGOGY: LOCATING THE SHADOWS IN THE SACRED SPACE BETWEEN

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is a version of a travel journal, as it shares the journey of a research study and documents an exploration of identity as pedagogy as it was understood by one group of teachers in a specific context. Guided by voices of feminist, critical, and humanist theorists, drawing on the work of Dewey, and with an overarching descant of sustainability, this narrative inquiry explored teacher identity and how identity becomes pedagogy through pedagogical relationship. An appreciative inquiry framework provided structure and direction for the conversations. Utilizing a narrative lens, the chapters share the story of what emerged and apprise what was explored, what themes surfaced, and how participants came to better understand how teacher identity shapes pedagogical relationships. The dissertation employs reflexive examination of self in practice throughout the research process to tell the parallel story of the researcher's journey as a developing researcher. As a result of this journey, the study accentuated four contributions across the collective participant experiences. Those contributions are presented in the following ways: as an opportunity to explore the work of understanding teacher identity as professional learning; as a consideration of one's story of teacher identity as pedagogy; to examine the stories of a system, reflecting on how stories embed in teacher identities; and as an illumination of a hopeful path forward, as living systems such as school systems evolve in response to changes in the educators in their midst. Consideration of this journey might inspirit educational change in the composing of new stories that not only contribute to but also inform teacher identity, and illustrate how pedagogical relationships are shaped as identity becomes pedagogy. The study is offered as a way others might see their personal journeys in teacher identity reflected, inviting them to vicariously travel alongside and

explore their own teacher identity anew while considering sacred spaces of pedagogical

relationships.

Keywords: teacher identity, polyphonic identity, pedagogical relationships, researcher

identity, appreciative inquiry, narrative inquiry

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your lives was tremendous, I know this, and am so grateful to you. I hope you feel the extent of

my love, and know that I am profoundly thankful for you.

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Foreword

A travel journal is the story of a journey. Through it, a reader might discern who the traveller was and where they had gone. Every journey is uniquely experienced by the traveller, understood through their eyes, and interpreted through their individual worldview. The route also reflects meanderings—where the traveller's interests took them, pauses in places that spoke to them—moving towards an eventual destination. Travel companions may also enrich the journey, sharing in the adventure, offering different perspectives.

This dissertation is a version of a travel journal. It shares the journey of this research study and documents a collective exploration of identity as pedagogy as it was understood by one group of five teachers from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. By engaging in group and individual interviews, reflective journal entries, and shared metaphors and artifacts, this narrative inquiry explored teacher identity and how identity becomes pedagogy through pedagogical relationship. A 5-phase Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework provided structure and direction for the conversations. Through a narrative lens, the chapters share the story of what emerged, appraising what was explored, themes that surfaced, and how participants came to better understand how teacher identity shapes pedagogical relationships. The dissertation also tells the parallel story of my journey as a developing researcher through my reflexive examination of self in practice throughout the research process. Offered as a way others might see their personal journey in teacher identity reflected, the dissertation invites others to vicariously travel alongside and explore their own teacher identity anew and consider sacred spaces of pedagogical relationships.

This dissertation is organized in three parts: Part 1, "The Landscape," sets the context for the collective journey including my identity as a traveller on this research journey, the travel

guides, the landscape, and the route travelled. Part 2, "The Journey," explores each phase of our

AI into teacher identity, how teacher identity emerges and evolves over time, and how that

identity shapes the way we enter the sacred spaces of pedagogical relationship, thus becoming

our pedagogy. Part 3, "The Journey Continues," looks at what we might learn from the current

study and the significance of sharing this journey.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions refer to how the terms are understood for the purposes of this research study.

Dialogic Self Theory: situates the development of one's identity in inner dialogue through which one negotiates and reconciles one's own understanding of self, or internal views of self, with external situations, influences, and contexts (Hermans, 2001, 2013; Vandamme, 2015).

Identity: the intersecting of our experiences, influences, and stories in our lives, which converge differently in response to situations and become a voice we offer to the world in each moment in time (Clandinin, 2019; Dewey, 1938/1997; Høveid, 2012; Palmer, 1998/2018).

Identity as pedagogy: When entering relationships how our stories, experiences, beliefs, values, biases, and views of ourselves (identity) intersect and influence how we show up in the relational space (Palmer, 1998/2018). Extending that understanding of relationships to teaching, and stemming from the belief that teaching is primarily a relational act where both teacher and student enter relational space, our pedagogy—how we teach—emanates from our identity. Identity is pedagogy.

Polyphony/polyphonic/polyvocal: involves bringing into dialogue multiple points of view "that offer multiple ways to see and understand the world" (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015, p. 2). In extending polyphony to identity, the many voices that emerge through our experiences and participate in our inner dialogue converge at points in time and place to inform how we understand ourselves; polyphony thus contributes to identity.

Sacred: an understanding of one's deep sense of worth, (Kauffman, 1995) and in which the following "four things happen: (1) people feel 'safe' within it, safe to be and experiment with

who they are and who they are becoming; (2) people feel 'connected'—perhaps to each other, or a community, or nature, or the world they are constructing on their word processors; (3) people feel passionate about what they are doing, believing that their activity 'makes a difference'; and (4) people recognize, honor, and are grateful for the safe communion" (Richardson, 1997, p. 185).

Teacher: Fullan (2016, 2018) encourages all educators—classroom teachers, principals, superintendents, directors, or teacher educators—to consider themselves as teachers and think about who their class is. *Teacher* is extended in such a way in this research study, giving thought to the relational space we enter with our students.

Technical rational approach to teaching: a view wherein teaching is reduced to reproducible techniques and prescriptive, rational methods (Green, 1986; Sachs, 2000; Schön, 1983; Whitty, 2008). This emanates from the view that professional activity consists of instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique (Schön, 1983).

Part 1

The Landscape

Photo 1. Fox River Valley

A Research Journey

People will tell you where they've gone,

They'll tell you where to go

But till you get there yourself you never really know.

—Joni Mitchell, "Amelia"

This journey transpired as an uncovering of my teacher identity and emerging identity as an educational researcher. Research questions are sometimes generated from our own experiences, and the questions that guided this research study derived from my own becoming as a teacher. My image of myself as teacher, my understanding of the many influences upon my teacher identity, and the nexus points in which I sat as I travelled towards being and becoming a teacher, all informed the determination of the research questions and, ultimately, the manner in which the study was conceived and implemented. The people who were of influence in my emerging and evolving teacher identity, some of whom inspired and some of whom showed me a path I did not want to take, offered me much to consider: In a system where there are common narratives, common educational credentials, and common contexts, what motivated some people, more so than others, to connect and contribute so meaningfully to the lives of others in education? What was it about those people and their ability to connect, inspire, teach from their hearts, and enter pedagogical relationships fully? I noticed that these people gave of themselves in such ways that a connection existed between who they were known to be and their pedagogy. My interest in exploring teacher identity and my belief that we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998/2018) ensued from this noticing.

As the plan to engage in the research unfolded, other realizations came to the fore. Included in these was the realization that in exploring the stories of others, their processes of becoming and the sharing of the stories of their teacher identities, I would also grow in understanding of my story of becoming as a teacher. The research evolved as a journey of coming to know myself, how I entered the sacred spaces of teaching, and how I was also developing as a researcher to enter the sacred spaces of research.

The following chapters situate this research journey on the broader landscape:

"Guiding Voices: Explorations of a Theoretical Worldview"

"Traversing the Literature: Drawing on Current Research Literature"

"Perambulating the Landscape: A Methodological Overview"

Chapter 1

Guiding Voices: Explorations of A Theoretical Worldview

Who I am as teacher and person and who I am as researcher have evolved as the many experiences in my life converged. My identity and worldview are a confluence of the works of theorists to whom I have been exposed and by whom I have been influenced in my life, teaching, and academic experiences. My identity sits in a dynamic nexus point in which my worldview is shaped, and through which experiences are understood in context. Personal, professional, and spiritual experiences have contributed to how I know myself and view the world.

Throughout my academic journey, there were interactions with the works of theorists who seemed to give words to how I had known myself—people who "put into cogent words things you've felt but were unable to articulate" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 71). The theories that located my thinking and worldview as I began to approach this research included feminist theory (hooks, 1994, 2000; Noddings, 1995, 2012, 2013), critical theory (Freire, 1970/2000), humanistic theory (Aloni, 2013; Palmer, 1998/2018), and Dewey's (1916, 1938/1997) work regarding experience and continuity, which sought to examine the "myriad of stories and lives that compose a life" (Clandinin, 2019, p. 140). Coming to the question and enacting the research process has been a result of the interweaving, polyphonic, intersecting and converging stories, experiences, and voices of my life. As the stories intersected in time and space, they contributed to who I was as an emerging researcher and how I approached this study. The following sections of this chapter speak to the theoretical influences on my view of the world, and the influences of those who guided me and influenced the route taken on this research journey.

Voices of Feminist Theory

I come from a lineage of strong women. While feminist theory was in the stories they lived, it was not in the lexicon they used. However, our reality was still patriarchal and thus was heavily influenced by hegemony, masculinity, and a local culture steeped in colonialism. It was also a reality wherein voices of feminism were ever-present in the background and challenged and supported me to find a voice to tell my own truth to shape a different reality. Those voices whispered that I was not limited by the expectations of a world that viewed women as less-than. I was encouraged to find ways to see and know the world that reflected who I am and how I need to be to shape the world differently.

Noddings (2012, 2013) and hooks (1994, 2000) were influential voices in my polyphonic-researcher identity and my theoretical framework. Noddings's (2012) work on care offered me the caveat that, although care and the ethic of care may have arisen from women's experiences and were often associated with feminist ways of knowing, all are called to care and act in caring relations. This extended to my thinking about teaching and the reliance on technical rational approaches described by Schön (1983) that have negated relational and empathic "feminine" ways of being in teaching. Noddings (2013), in her call to enter into caring relationships, invited me to draw on and acknowledge the multitude of ways to come to the world and to relationship with each other and to honour feminist ways of knowing and being as valid. I drew on Noddings in this research, giving voice to feminist critical theory to understanding teaching as relationship.

hooks (2000) challenged me to think about an aspired world as one "where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction . . . where we can all be who we are" (p. x). In this way, feminist theory imbued my

thinking and was increasingly part of the intersecting voices of my researcher identity and worldview. Becoming better versions of ourselves involves introspection and seeking to understand the stories that shape us. When we sit with our stories and see them as influencing, informing, and sometimes manifesting as bias, thinking might be challenged and self-understanding enhanced, changing how we enter relational spaces. As I travelled this road of research, looking back on the formation and continued evolution of my teacher identity as well as an emerging researcher identity, the lens of feminism was influential in decisions made and interpretation formed.

Voices of Critical Pedagogical Theory

Another voice that rang clear and strong for me as I considered the intersectionality of my theoretical positioning was that of critical theory. Kim (2016) defines critical theory as "an interpretive paradigm that examines class relationships of domination and subordination that create inequality in society and raises critical consciousness in people for individual empowerment and social transformation (p. 304). This voice called me to confront the status quo, challenge hegemony and to examine how through pedagogical relationships inequality might be challenged. Few would argue that white, middle-class structures are privileged in our school system; for many children, what is a tailwind to propel some students forward in life, is a significant headwind for others. Schools have "serve[d] the interest of oppression" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 86) in their responses to race, social position, economic capital, gender, and many more life situations outside the dominant culture. Freire (1970/2000) encouraged me to engage in dialogue that challenged my thinking *and* the system; as we name the world, we change it (p. 88).

The influence of critical pedagogy also drew me to challenge inequities, particularly in education, to ensure that people are treated with dignity, kindness, care, and compassion, and that critical consciousness and awareness are elevated in conversations about education. According to Freire (1970/2000), those who rise up to become leaders as a result of their success in a system, often recreate the conditions that oppress others through their leadership roles (p. 45). When considering my role in education, I felt compelled to find ways to repel the status quo and bring about a reimagined system where, rather than oppress I hoped to contribute to conditions that might liberate through my challenge of the existing system. Freire's writing on oppression intersected with my thinking about identity as pedagogy when through reflection on our storied experiences we begin to understand how we come to relationship. Our identity is shaped and informed by our educative and miseducative experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997) and, through reflection, biases, assumptions, and subjectivities that cloud how we enter the pedagogical relational space can be revealed. This was very much how the voice of Freire transpired in my research study: Challenging individual thinking was a path towards liberation. As co-participants, actively engaging in conversations about how we entered relationship, the storied experiences brought to life—be they positive, negative, or neutral—made it possible to consider, recreate, and offer an alternative to counter-hegemonic narratives and to reimagine our school systems.

Voices of Experience, Continuity, and Constructivism

Dewey's (1916, 1938/1997) view of experience as education permeated much of my thinking about teaching and was woven throughout my approach to educational research. Undergirding my thinking was the belief that education unfolded through the "organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 35). Through

personal experiences, we relate to each other and to the world and, ultimately, understand ourselves. There is an "organic connection between education and personal experience" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 25).

Dewey's (1938/1997) beliefs about education also infused my view of research as learning across and throughout our lives, and firmly situated it within two criteria of experience—continuity and interaction. Continuity brought forth the idea that in experiences in life there were always elements of the past, present, and future. Our past experiences not only influence and inform how we understand our present, they also continue to inform our future; we are continuously affected by our experiences. As Clandinin (2019) wrote, we live in "an emerging vantage point created by the unfolding of experience, with each subsequent situation offering us a novel perspective to look back on the experiences leading up to, and out of, an experience" (p. 131).

Dewey's continuity of experience, and the fact that our view of the world has been shaped by those varied experiences, emerged clearly for me in considerations of teacher identity. Identity is a dynamic nexus, tied to all we have experienced and to how we are shaped by those experiences. An important understanding of identity, as it was understood and applied in this study, emanated from a place of knowing ourselves through our past experiences. Furthermore, this understanding of identity is influenced by the contexts in which we find ourselves; it offers a lens through which our future experiences might be understood.

Interaction situates our experiences externally and internally. Interpretations of the world are reciprocally shaped by situations and personal understandings of those situations; we know ourselves as individuals through knowing ourselves with others. Within an ecological paradigm of education, learning is situated within, with, and through the system, and it is personally and

individually meaningful (Sterling, 2015). This research was approached from a stance wherein the narratives gathered and the way new understanding would emerge were situationally constructed within both a shared and a personal context. The experience of the research found its place within each of our storied and un-storied lives. As participants interacted, a shared narrative emerged.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) considered a three-dimensional space, based on Dewey's (1938/1997) theory of experience, through which they approached narrative inquiry that situates experience: the *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); and the notion of *place* (situation). This metaphor of three-dimensional space buttressed my thinking about identity as dynamic nexus. Changing and evolving, drawing on how we experience the world through social and personal interactions, the nexus of identity draws on our past, sits in our present, and informs and shapes our future. It is also situational as we draw on different storied and not-yet-storied experiences in the contexts in which we find ourselves.

In the nexus of theoretical influences that informed how I engaged as researcher, Dewey played an influential role in how I saw learning through a constructivist lens. Through continuity and reflection, we continually construct and refine what we know in new contexts. Dewey's criteria of reflection as meaning-making moves the learner from one experience to another with deeper connections understood between experiences and relations. Systematically approached, reflection happens in relation with others and requires an attitude that values personal and intellectual growth of oneself and others (Rodgers, 2003). Dewey's (1938/1997) theory of experience brought coherence to my choice of narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study. Clandinin and Connelly's (1991, 1994, 1996, 2000) work in narrative inquiry is Deweyan-based; identity is shaped by our experiences, both storied and not-yet-storied. Exploring how

experiences influenced understanding ourselves and our worldview brought insight into how we enter the space of teaching.

The notion of experience as identity forming and informing who we are as teachers was a voice in the polyphony of my researcher identity and informed my theoretical framework. In this study, researcher and participants co-constructed understandings of identity as pedagogy through storied experiences, with a particular focus on how experiences increased understanding of ourselves as teachers. Reflection allowed connections to be made as we wove "meaning between threads of experience" (Rogers, 2002, p. 848). Throughout the research, we explored and sought to describe how we might foster our understanding of identity as pedagogy and move forward into new contexts and pedagogical relationships with our shared experiences informing future experiences.

Voices of Humanism

Within the theoretical framework of this study, humanism was also a contributing voice. In particular, Aloni (2013) who synthesized the thinking of philosophers including Plato, Kant, Dewey, Buber, and Freire, contributed to my understanding of humanism. He offered the following definition of humanism for our current place and time:

> When we say "humanism," we are referring to a cosmopolitan world-view and ethical code that posits the enhancement of human development, wellbeing, and dignity as the ultimate end of all human thought and action; namely, giving priority to the values of human dignity, equity, growth and solidarity over any alternative set of values—religious, ideological, economic or national. (p. 1068)

Further, Aloni (2013) wrote humanism has "grown to appreciate cultural diversity as well as 'mother nature' (the non-human world), hence being less Eurocentric and more multicultural,

less anthropocentric and more ecological or environmentally conscious" (p. 1068). In this light,

humanism is an evolving theory reflecting how we understand humanity and its role in the world.

I first encountered humanism as a novice teacher reading Palmer's (1998) *The Courage to*

Teach. Palmer situates teaching as connecting with students on a human level. Human

connection and relationship as the starting place of all learning stood in stark contrast to

disconnected curriculum outcomes and provincial test scores that dominated teaching

conversations. Humanism became foundational to my worldview and to how I realized my role

as educator and researcher. Drawing on humanism to inform my research was a starting place for

the conditions needed for our envisioned education system to be a place of flourishing, starting

with individuals collectively questioning and challenging who we were, and how we helped

others "become" in the world we continually shape.

Within a humanism paradigm, dialogue, or conversational learning, plays an important

role in that it is a way to construct our understanding, allows us to come to know and express our

humanity and that of others (Neville, 2008). From each other, we are able to construct our

understanding of how others feel, think, and view the world, and we can use that understanding

to inform our personal standpoints and positions. Conversational learning, as a medium to

construct meaning together, was therefore central to the humanistic approach that informed my

view of education. Buber's (1958) notion of the relational space between us heightened my

awareness of the reciprocity between teacher and student; how I affect the pedagogical relational

space students and I share: Teacher and student are influenced and continuously evolving in

response to each other. It is within pedagogical relationships and the shared space that care

(Noddings, 2012), liberation (Freire, 1970/2000), and continuity of experience (Dewey,

1938/1997) intersected within humanism, informing how I engaged as an educator and how I

approached this entire research study.

A Descant of Sustainability

A descant is the highest voice in polyphonic music (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 2004).

As I planned and conducted this research, a descant of sustainability soared above all the

intersecting voices that would become my theoretical framework. Sitting within an ecological

paradigm and critical consciousness emanating from our current global crises, the moral purpose

of sustainability situated us as interconnected and part of nesting systems (Sterling, 2015, para

1)—systems within systems that are influenced by and influential of each other as they change

and evolve. Changes can come about to larger systems as a result of individual changes in living

systems wherein individual parts of the system are understood within the larger systems in which

they exist (Capra, 1996). The individual parts, conversely, also define the larger system. As such,

changes that happen within our lives impact our pedagogical relationships and can contribute to

changes in our school systems and the broader systems of our world. Sterling referred to this as a

"positive feedback loop whereby change toward the larger sustainability in wider society

supports sustainable education, which in turn supports change in wider society, and so on"

(para. 4).) Consideration of individual change that might initiate system change was taken up in

the Destiny phase of this study. The theoretical voices that informed my thinking and supported

how I approached this research study melded with an ethic towards sustainability, seeking to re-

envision our schools, beginning with our personal reflection and identity and extending outward.

Chapter 2

Traversing the Literature: Drawing on Current Research Literature

Understanding how others have studied teacher identity, teaching, pedagogical

relationships, and professional learning contextualizes other research conversations within the

literature. Cultivating an in-depth knowledge of the literature forged a space for my research to

contribute to what is currently known about identity as pedagogy. In the following sections,

identified themes that emerged from the literature informed my starting place in the research and

provided direction. Five key areas are included and discussed, as follows: teaching as

relationship, teacher identity, identity work as professional learning, professional learning as

identity work, and professional learning that moves toward praxis.

Teaching as Relationship

Foundational to the Reggio Emilia philosophy of teaching is a basic tenet that all learning

is relational—teaching is relationship (Malaguzzi, 1993). Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio

Emilia schools, believed relationships to be the "fundamental, organizing strategy" of their

educational system (p. 1). Reggio Emilia teachers honour children's voices, believe that children

are capable and competent, and understand their teacher role as that of pedagogical guide. These

fundamental underpinnings contribute to and inform pedagogical relationships and shape how

both teacher and student engage in pedagogical relationships.

Van Manen (1994), in writing about pedagogical relationships, considered pedagogy as

situated within a relational space between teacher and student. Pedagogy is connected with

"friendship, love, or family," and significant in these is first a relationship; they "evoke relational

significance" (p. 141). Teaching based in relationship nurtures the pedagogical relational space.

The child is cared for, honoured, and respected, and there is a willingness to contribute what they

are and to create the conditions for the child as they are becoming. Noddings (1995, 2012, 2013)

called us to act in caring ways in our relationships. Noddings (2013) wrote that we understand

ourselves through our many relations and that "individuality is defined in a set of relations" (p.

51). When entering pedagogical relational space with the child, the teacher "affect[s] the whole

person . . . in his or her particular way . . . for a limited time—yet with consequences that are

infinite and lifelong" (Van Manen, 1994, p. 162). These consequences, which may come from

positive or negative experiences of pedagogical relationships, highlight the importance of

understanding our identity and how we influence the relational spaces we enter.

Buber (1958, 1947/2002) contributed to the literature regarding pedagogical relationships

with thinking about the relational space between I and thou. Buber wrote about the world as

known through relations—how we understand ourselves is in relation to how we understand

others. In relationships, a space between is created where each person influences and is

influenced by the other. Each person knows themselves differently through how they know the

other. The space is reciprocally created and individually understood. Høveid (2012) drew on

Buber in putting forth that we share of ourselves when we come to the pedagogical relational

space (Høveid & Finne, 2014). How we enter and what we contribute to pedagogical

relationships shapes the relational space between the student and the teacher.

In this study, pedagogical relational spaces are described as sacred. Sacred in this sense,

is situated in Kauffman's (1995) definition of *sacred* as an understanding of one's deep sense of

worth (p. 3) and Richards's (1997) description of *sacred spaces* as those in which

> four things happen: (1) people feel "safe" within it, safe to be and experiment
>
> with who they are and who they are becoming; (2) people feel "connected"—
>
> perhaps to each other, or a community, or nature, or the world they are

constructing on their word processors; (3) people feel passionate about what they

are doing, believing that their activity "makes a difference"; and (4) people

recognize, honor, and are grateful for the safe communion. (p. 185)

Through Kauffman's and Richards's definitions, my own understanding of sacred extended to

how we come to understand ourselves in relationship, and how we reflect to others a sense of

how we know ourselves.

Dewey's (1938/1997) theory of continuity and experience also guided my thinking about

pedagogical relationships. Of importance was both the experience itself and the manner in which

the experience was approached. Planning educational experiences involved knowing the student

so as to evoke a response in them. In teaching by simply delivering discrete pieces of

information, there were no pedagogical relationships into which we entered; all students were

treated the same because they were not known to the teacher. By knowing students and entering

into pedagogical relationships with them, students (and the conditions needed to support their

educational experiences) were better understood.

The movement away from traditional teaching into the space of relationship raises issues

of vulnerability and connection. "Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage,

empathy and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity"

(Brown, 2012, p. 33). Through our willingness to be vulnerable with students in pedagogical

relationships, we can make meaningful connections with them (Lyle, 2018). Humans seek

connection. Teaching relationally might offer ways to create more meaningful connections in our

pedagogical relationships.

Although the research literature supported an understanding of teaching as relationship

and the conditions that enable relationships (Dewey, 1938/1997; Høveid, 2012; Høveid & Finne,

2014; Malaguzzi, 1993 Noddings, 2013; Palmer, 1998/2018; van Manen, 1994), describing the relational space between teacher and student and our language about pedagogical relationships in the space between us in where this study can contribute. Starting from a place of love and care in a system that was traditionally focused on knowledge transmission requires developing "another language about what constitutes actions in this space between people" (Høveid & Finne, 2014, p. 258). Increased understandings of how we might create the conditions that cultivate and nurture pedagogical relationships provided an important opening in the literature and a place for my voice to be added. Explorations of this nature, how we come to the spaces between teacher and student and system conditions that honour pedagogical relational spaces as sacred, offer further insights into how we experience and cultivate the sacred space between in teaching.

Teacher Identity

Identity as Dynamic Nexus

The exploration of identity enters teaching in profound ways; I believe we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998/2018). In other words, when teaching is relationship, identity is pedagogy. Identity is,

> an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the
>
> mystery of self; my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave
>
> me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and
>
> people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others, and to
>
> myself, the experience of love and suffering, and much, much more. In the midst
>
> of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer

forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being

human. (Palmer, 1998, p. 17)

As Palmer wrote, there are many contributing factors that intersect to inform and form

identity, including experiences and conditions that arise in our personal and professional selves.

Teacher identity has also been described as "rooted in understandings of personal and

professional selves and the manner in which those understandings are either supported or

challenged by institutional and societal expectations" (Osmond-Johnson, 2019, p. 67).

The nexus of identity is dynamic—our experiences, influences, and stories converge

differently in response to situations and become a voice offered to the world in each moment in

time (Clandinin, 2019; Dewey, 1938/1997; Høveid, 2012; Palmer, 1998/2018). Høveid (2012)

also suggested, "Who you are as a teacher or leader is a very personal matter, because you are,

and you become, a teacher and/or leader in relation to all the others in the web of relations of

which you are a part" (p. 251). This is echoed by Noddings' work (2013), "I am . . . guided in a

relation from which I derive nourishment and guidance . . . my very individuality is defined in a

set of relations" (p. 51). Interactions, experiences, told and untold stories converge and re-

converge, offering ways to know and define ourselves; they become how we see the world and

how we enter pedagogical relational spaces.

The dynamic nature of identity, derived from our "web of relations" (Høveid, 2012), was

also explored by Beijaard and Meijer (2017) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), and embedded

in the work of Noonan (2019). These authors all discuss four common conditions through which

teacher identity emerges. First, this is an ongoing process, always evolving and being revised as

we move through space and time. Second, the contexts in which we work and live impact how

identity changes, as teacher identity is socially situated and may be different in different

contexts. Third, our experiences are layered, meaning they are understood based on previous

experiences and the continuous nature of identity; i.e., new understandings are embedded

through previous perspectives and layers of understanding. Finally, the sense of agency a teacher

feels impacts their ability to construct and actively form and reform teacher identity. Noonan

(2019) also drew on Mockler's (2011) work, acknowledging identity as being embedded within

overlapping contexts, including personal, professional, and political. The literature clearly shows

that identity emerges from, and contributes to, how each of the contexts is experienced and how

teacher identity is understood.

Various lenses and methodologies have also supported the consideration of teacher

identity (Chow, 2018; Connelly and Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Gardner, et al,

2020; Knowles, 1992; Noonan, 2019). Identity is explored through very specific identity threads

such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, poverty, and teaching experience. Clandinin

and Huber (2005) explored teacher identity through narrative inquiry, through stories of teachers

of diverse students. As the teachers explore their teacher identities, "who they are becoming as

people is intertwined with who they are becoming as teachers." (p. 56). While these studies

contribute to how the treads of teacher identity are understood, this study explored how those

threads converge at various nexus points and merge, intertwining polyphonically to become

identity as pedagogy. The intertwining polyphonies of teacher identity, understood through the

storied experiences of teaching, become what we draw on in in pedagogical relationships and

become pedagogy, in turn becoming identity as pedagogy.

Using appreciative inquiry to explore teacher identity as professional learning is a

concept not yet widely explored. Recognizing the gap that exists here, this current study offers

an example of how appreciative inquiry, used to guide research conversations towards a hopeful

future, might challenge dominant discourse through deeper understandings of teacher identities

and by extension also aid in the emergence of much needed system change.

Identity as Polyphony

Identity, as an intersection of all we are, can be referred to as polyphonic. The term

polyphony, sometimes called *polyvocal*, comes from music in which several voices, each with

their own melodic line, sing simultaneously. For example, polyphony can be thought of in

contrast to homophony, in which all voices follow the same melody and rhythm, sounding as one

voice (DeVoto, 2007). In literature, the term was extended by the Russian philosopher Bakhtin

(1973) who, drawing on Dostoevsky's work (1950), defined polyphony as several voices that

each have equal validity and rights (Samaras & Pithouse-Morgan, 2019).

Polyphony can also be understood as "bringing into dialogue multiple points of view"

that offer multiple ways to see and understand the world (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2015, p.

2). In extending polyphony to studies of identity, the many voices that emerge through

experiences and participate in inner dialogue converge at points in time and place to inform and

contribute to identity. The polyphony that emerges from those many voices, and the voices

which become more prominent at various points, shape the versions of ourselves we present to

the world.

Identity Emerging Through Stories

Teacher identities are dynamically defined and understood in relation to teaching

contexts through teacher stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Storied, lived experiences

contribute to shaping and understanding identity. Arndt et al. (2018) describe identity as closely

connected to the "cultural, social, and historical contexts in which they take place" (p. 99).

Clandinin and Connelly (1991, 1996, 2000) referred to stories in teaching as sacred, cover, and

secret stories—ways to describe the narratives through which we understand ourselves and

define ways of being as teachers, as we live, tell, and retell stories in relation to these narratives.

Teacher narratives situated in relation to the contexts in which teacher stories are lived and told,

thus offer a critical lens through which to view the work of teaching and to see ourselves.

Sacred Stories

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described sacred stories as those "filled with other

people's visions of what is right for children. Researchers, policymakers, senior administrators

and others . . . push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes and so on

down" (p. 3). Crites's work (1971) framed sacred stories of schools by saying they were not told;

rather, we "awaken" (p. 296) to them. These sacred stories are "funneled" (Clandinin &

Connelly, 1996, p. 9) to schools and, thus become part of the way teaching is understood. As

grand narratives through which we understand systems, sacred stories inform how we believe we

should teach. While these may change over time in response to what is being communicated to

the school, such change is gradual. Sacred stories reflect both theories and practices—ways of

thinking about teaching that become ways of being in teaching (Berry & Forgasz, 2018). In our

awakenings to the sacred stories, we also are awakened to who we understand ourselves to be as

teachers.

Cover Stories

Cover stories fit with the overarching narratives with which teachers align in the school

(Berry & Forgasz, 2018; Charteris & Smith, 2017; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Shared with

other educators, cover stories are the public matching of our actions with what we believe

teachers do; they allow teachers to "practise and sustain credible teacher stories" (Charteris &

Smith, 2017, p. 605). In cover stories, teachers "portray themselves as experts . . . and enable

teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is, to

continue to practice and sustain their teacher stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). Cover

stories are contextual and imply school culture (e.g., beliefs about the families of the school,

attitudes about how children are cared for, ways teachers relate to each other and to the school

community) shaping a way of being in the school. In sum, cover stories describe how teaching is

"supposed" to look.

What is understood and practiced in relation to cover stories also reinforces the status

quo; it speaks to a kind of teaching that remains on the "high ground" (Schön, 1983), where one

knows the formula of what is expected and required and enacts it. It has been suggested that

teachers feel a strong pressure to maintain the status quo (Butler, 2016; Cole & Knowles, 1996).

The pressure to act in ways that maintain a system and reinforce the cover stories that contradict

beliefs is another shaping force in teachers' defining of themselves: Cover stories contribute to

and shape our nexus of identity and understandings of that nexus point. Exploring the system

stories that permeated the culture in which participants were situated, was an important part of

understanding how teacher identities drew on the cover stories as defining stories. Cover stores

could have a prominent position in teacher identity nexus or take a less prominent role as those

from which to learn and move beyond.

Secret Stories

The ways teachers live and act with students behind closed classroom doors are the secret

stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Who teachers really are is shared and known in these

secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). Secret stories are compared and considered

against how we see ourselves contextualized in place and time and with others. Lyons (1990)

situated these dilemmas within teacher narratives about learning—in essence, how teachers see

themselves teaching, and what they believe teaching to be. Such dilemmas arise from situations

of misalignment between how teachers understand learning, students, and themselves (Berry &

Forgasz, 2018). Secret stories might also be seen as times when teachers live in the swamp

(Schön, 1983; Tan, 2020) and "challenge the status quo through their silent, unpronounced

actions" (Cole & Knowles, 1996, p. 366).

Søreide (2006) suggested that teachers "position" themselves either by oppositioning and

distancing themselves, or by positively identifying and recognizing themselves within teaching

narratives (p. 534). How teachers align with all types of teaching stories can affirm

understandings of teacher identity, but it can also cause dilemmas in knowing. Lauriala and

Kukkonen (2005) refer to these affirmations and dilemmas in identity as "the ought self" and

"the ideal self" (p. 200). In other words, what is understood through the grand narratives of

organizations and the stories told in schools about what teachers are supposed to be, sometimes

differs from the authentic stories lived by teachers in classrooms.

Dewey and Stories of Identity

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) approached narrative inquiry through consideration of

Dewey's (1938/1997) theory of experience and three-dimensional space, situating storied and

not-yet-storied experiences in the contexts (interaction, continuity, situation) in which we find

ourselves. How we enter into relationship—and, by extension, pedagogical relationships—shifts,

metamorphosizes, and recomposes in response to where and with whom we find ourselves in

space and time. We continually draw forward stories of ourselves in relation to others and

contextually understand ourselves through narratives and stories. Drawing on thinking about

identity through the work of Palmer (1998/2018), Clandinin (2019), and Clandinin and Connelly

(1991, 1994, 1996, 2000), the current research study is situated in literature that supports an

understanding of identity as ever-evolving in response to our life situations, context, and stories.

Dialogic Self Theory

Teachers interpret and adopt narratives into teaching identities through a personal process of situational sense making (Vandamme, 2015). Interpretations of sacred, cover, and secret stories are reconciled with the self is understood. Self-evaluation in relation to teaching stories can be understood through Dialogic Self Theory (Hermans, 2001, 2013; Vandamme, 2015).

Dialogic Self Theory (DST) situates the development of identity in an inner dialogue through which we negotiate understandings of our self, or our internal views of self, with external situations, influences, and contexts. Through self-dialogue, we continually recreate personal positions or "I-positions" to engage with the world (Hermans, 2013). The social self, or the outside self, is reconciled with the individual self, or the inner self (Gülerce, 2014). Identity is increasingly understood through the mechanism by which inner selves—the polyphony of inner voices—are mediated in response to the social self (Gülerce, 2014; Hermans, 2013; Vandamme, 2015).

DST also conceptualizes the self as a constant negotiation between the inner self and external events. It is a "dynamic multiplicity" (Hermans, 2013, p. 83) of voices—a polyphony of our own internal voices and those external voices of others that we internalize—that enables us to create narratives of life informed by the dialogical inner voices through which we understand ourselves. By extension, identity is a "society of minds" made up of many selves (Hermans, 2013, p. 250). In recent years, DST has been used to understand teacher identity (Assen et al., 2018; Badia et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2017; Toompalu et al., 2017; Vandamme, 2015). Common among those employing DST as a tool to understand teacher identity is the idea of positions. Positions are "point[s] from which we speak, act, think, and feel in relation to someone or something else. How we see ourselves consists of distinct positions that can manifest themselves

in I-positions, or positions by which we describe ourselves" (Vandamme, 2015, loc 896). Of

note, positions are tied directly to identity, as experiences, relationships, contexts, and influences

all shape identity and also shape worldview or the vantage points from which we engage with the

world. I-positions inform the internal dialogue we engage in to make sense of our vantage point

and are also dynamic: There is a continuous and iterative process of construction and

deconstruction in relation to the contexts and situations in which we find ourselves (Vandamme,

2015, loc 1009).

Teacher identity is "fuelled by many aspects that are primarily personal, such as

biography, aspirations, learning history and beliefs about education" (Beijaard, 2019, p. 3). We

come to understand experiences and beliefs in the contexts of our lives. The research literature

consistently indicates that teacher identity is shaped, influenced, and defined by the stories we

understand and by experiences in the teaching profession. Teacher identity changes throughout

our professional lives and continually influences how we evolve and recreate in place and time.

Throughout the current study, the examination and challenge of the narratives of emerging

teacher identity provided a context to consider and re-locate the nexus of our teacher identities.

Identity Work as Professional Learning

Teacher professional identity is at the core of what it is to be a teacher and to embody that

role in the teaching profession (Palmer, 1998/2018; Sachs, 2001). It can also be thought of as

"multi-faceted, constantly evolving and dynamic within a variety of contexts" (Thomas, 2017, p.

8). It is Identity work as professional learning provides a framework for teachers to construct

their own ideas of how to be, act, and understand their work and place in society (Sachs, 2005).

Exploring teacher identity as professional learning also provides a space to come to know one's

self as a learner, to acknowledge and articulate learning journeys, and to interpret how those journeys contribute to teacher identity (Canning & Callan, 2010).

Moving Away From Technical Rational Understanding

Frameworks stemming from a technical rational paradigm view teaching as reproducible techniques and methods (Kinsella, 2007; Mockler, 2011, 2013; Schön, 1983 Tan, 2020). Neoliberal and instrumental approaches of teacher professional learning (Mockler, 2011) are those in which teacher and practices are rationally informed. These approaches, such as a theory-into-practice approach (Korthagen, 2017), mitigate instances where teachers might influence the trajectory of the learning through relationships. Assurance that common teacher learning would produce good teachers and ensure that children succeed has driven how children are viewed and how teachers are seen and supported in their professional learning and development (Hauge, 2019). Teacher identity has been influenced through communicated narratives of compliance and conflict in this positivist paradigm (Johnson & Short, 1998). For example, as a natural consequence of promoting such a culture, teachers experienced many dilemmas in aligning their identities with the overarching narratives.

The literature regarding teacher professional learning offers much to guide this research in terms of understanding the necessary shift away from a technical rational approach—also referred to as a "managerial" (Sachs, 2000; Whitty, 2008), or neoliberal and instrumental (Mockler, 2011) approach—to teaching (Schön, 1983; Tan, 2020). Within a narrow, technical rational approach there is little room for teachers' worldviews, contextual understandings, or the multi-faceted experiences that inform teaching. Alternative understandings of teachers, professionalism, and professional learning have emerged over time as the technical rational view of teaching has been challenged. For example, Whitty (2008) extended Sachs's (2000)

"democratic" view of professionalism that involves listening to the voices of stakeholders in education and building "alliances between teachers and excluded constituencies of students, parents and members of the wider community" (p. 34). In a technical rational paradigm, teachers stay on the high ground, away from the swampy areas of real life and complexity (Schön, 1987; Tan, 2020). When things were reduced to their simplest forms, the outlined steps, theoretically, would lead to success, and there would be no room for individual interpretation of teaching. Simple strategies and procedures offered as professional learning are extremely narrow and position teachers as "functionaries rather than professionals" (Codd, 2005, p. 201). When teachers are functionaries, there is little room for the creation and building of authentic pedagogical relationships as the basis of teaching. We must therefore question and wonder "about the relation between scientific theory and techniques and the diverse, unstable, particular situations in which teachers do their work" (Greene, 1986, p. 69). We cannot remove teaching from the messiness of our lives and present it as a sterile technique. Technical rational teaching happens on high ground, away from where relationships and life happen; teaching as relationship happens in the swamp where things are messy, unpredictable, and intricately tied to lives lived (Schön, 1983; Tan, 2020). This study offered a space for participants to engage in professional learning that departed from technical rational approaches looking to reflection on pedagogical relationships to deepen professional practice.

Professional Learning That Develops the Self

Professional learning is in service of professional development (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016): Learning how to be a more effective teacher extends to developing ourselves, our understanding of ourselves in the world, and our understanding of the human condition (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Being a teacher is steeped in complexity and uncertainty (Mockler, 2011).

Professional learning, interwoven with self-reflection and self-development, provides opportunities to connect the complexities of the personal and the professional in teacher identity (Beijaard, 2019). Lyle (2018) explores the connection between knowing ourselves and embracing who we are as inherent to teacher identity: "being critically conscious of the embodied wholeness we bring to the classroom benefits both students and teachers" (p. 258). Understanding we cannot separate who we are from who we teach, knowing ourselves first, and being aware of the polyphony of voices that influence how we see and understand ourselves, situates identity work at the centre of professional learning. Identity work as professional learning honors the connection between our stories and who we are as teachers. Our stories of who we understand ourselves to be become the stories through which we imagine our potential and possible selves (Lyle, 2018). When we fail to acknowledge the connection of self and story, we become detached from ourselves and from our students, as becomes evident as described later by the participants in this study.

In bringing increased awareness to the many voices involved in education, the teachers' role is open to reconsideration. Organizational narratives need not define in restrictive and prescriptive ways what it means to be a teacher and contribute to an educational system. Teachers, along with students, families, and communities, might be able to recreate new education systems of possibility. Reimagining education potentially opens spaces for teachers to see themselves as agents of change (Whitty, 2008, p. 35), learning from their own experiences and re-storying how they understand their teacher identities. Identity work thus underpins professional learning (Beijaard, 2019; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016; Mockler, 2011, 2013).

Professional Learning as Identity Work

Professional and Personal as Intertwined

Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) suggest that in addition to learning through practice, meaning, and community, teachers also learn through identity, realizing who they become as teachers (p. 227). Upon entering the teaching profession, understandings of what teachers do are often shaped by what we have known and experienced in our life of learning before becoming a teacher (Olsen, 2008a). Kaplan and Garner (2017) viewed teacher identity as evolving through the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI), noting "teachers' learning is conceptualized as inseparable from these identity formation processes" (p. 13). As teachers continue to learn about teaching through professional learning, their teacher identity is influenced.

Teachers will encounter alternative views to traditional teaching, beginning with pre-service teaching, and throughout their careers (Mockler, 2013). Professional learning continually creates dilemmas for teachers, as they consider what is known, what is being learned, and what has yet to be learned while reconstructing new understandings of teaching (Olsen, 2008b). There are two kinds of knowledge teachers encounter through professional learning: the knowledge they need to become effective in the classroom, including policies and content, and the nuanced knowledge of what it is to be effective in the classroom. This nuanced knowledge is "composed by teachers in and through their life experiences in school, out of school, over time, place and relationships" (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019, p. 62).

Olsen (2008a) quotes Anaïs Nin: "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are" (p. 9). As a result, teacher journeys of becoming are ongoing, career spanning, and dynamic. Teacher identities, both personal and professional, are shaped and informed by how experiences

and contextual stories are seen, connected to, and understood. Teachers come to understand who

they are as teachers through the stories they live and choose to tell. The dynamic nexus of

identity is where all such stories and influences meet.

Becoming—Over Time and Space

Powerful professional learning is ongoing and contextually situated; it allows teachers

opportunities for "formation and mediation of teacher professional identity" (Mockler, 2013, p.

42). Regarding teacher professional learning, Kim and Greene (2011) stated,

> with national standards emphasizing content, pedagogy, and learning outcomes,
>
> rarely do we see recognition of the importance for teachers to understand
>
> themselves, to engage and expand their awareness and sense of being in the
>
> world, and to teach from their souls so they can touch and know the souls of their
>
> students (p. 109).

Such views of professional learning move beyond technical rational approaches to focus on the

teacher as a professional and as a person. Hargreaves (2003) wrote, "Through personal and

professional development teachers build character, maturity, and virtues in themselves and

others" (p. 48). As teachers come to know and understand themselves more deeply in personal

and professional ways, they are also better able to enter pedagogical relationships with their

students.

Professional learning allows teachers to continuously delve into beliefs about teaching

that are reflected in practice. Battey and Franke (2008) describe professional learning as "a space

for acquiring new knowledge, re-crafting identities, and challenging existing cultural and social

practices" (p. 128). Over time, for example, teachers might confront narratives writ large in their

organizations, deconstruct them, and recreate them. As teachers navigate ongoing learning, their

"identity mediates what makes its way into the classroom by how consistent or inconsistent" (Battey & Franke, 2008, p. 129) it is with what they believe. In confronting and deconstructing system narratives, dilemmas emerge causing teachers to realign who they are, who they are becoming, and how they need to reground in relationship (Toompalu et al., 2017).

Teaching that is based in relationship, is not learned and developed through teaching-as-telling disguised as professional learning. Fundamentally, the development of teacher identity is a uniquely personal and reflective process (Olsen, 2008b). Knowing oneself and considering the stories and experiences that intersect and shape identity at a particular time and place changes, influences, and reshapes the ways in which the relational space is approached. Greene (1986) observed that teacher reflection moves us to approach new places in our thinking as teachers "and to stir ourselves, to disturb, to transform. An emotion, a passion can be a transformation of the world. It can break through the fixities, it can open the power of possibility" (p. 81). Professional learning is identity work (Battey & Franke, 2008; Greene, 1986; Hargreaves, 2003; Mockler, 2013; Olsen, 2008b; Toompalu et al., 2017); it involves the teacher knowing and considering who they are as a person and offering who and what they are to students through pedagogical relationship.

Professional Learning that Moves Towards Praxis

Praxis as Moral Activity

Praxis, from a simple perspective, is the intersection of theory and practice; it is simply about doing (Anwaruddin, 2019). However, going back to Aristotle and the early use of the word, praxis moves beyond doing in a way that is technically proficient and describes the process of doing something well (Anwaruddin, 2019). Anwaruddin (2019) also drew on Gadamer (1975/2013) and Habermas (1971), for whom praxis entailed the thoughtful

contemplation of an activity as it arises in the world, developing the knowledge of an expert as

the means to achieve a product that represents learning in the end, and "doing what is right" (p.

717). Interweaving these three aspects of contemplation, knowledge, and positive intention

allows the teacher to be a good human as they do their work. Work done with a moral purpose

addresses what is needed to transform the world (Freire, 1970/2000). Praxis in teaching can be

seen as an increased understanding and awareness of the impact teaching has (White, 2007).

Quoting Schwandt (2002), White (2007) underscored that in praxis there is an "attentive or

interpretive perspicuity by which one recognizes what is at stake in a particular situation" (p.

238). Central to teaching and to what is at stake are the hopes and dreams of the child. Praxis, as

a moral activity, calls the teacher to know the child, enter pedagogical relationship with the

moral purpose of serving the child, and to be authentic in that relationship (Fullan, 2002;

Hargreaves, 1998; Quinlan, 2019).

Praxis as Transformational

Macintyre-Latta and Kim (2010) suggested "professional learning as a way to create the

needed room to claim the space of praxis" (p. 137). We might open a path towards authenticity

and towards transforming what is into what can be envisioned by engaging in conversations

about teaching and by exploring and reflecting on the systems of which we are part. "Praxis

involves a transformation of [a] situation to the end of overcoming oppressiveness and

domination. There must be a collective self-recognition; there must be an interpretation of the

present and emergent needs; there must be a type of realization" (Greene, 1978/2018, chapter 7,

para 11).

Professional learning embedded in teacher identity "comes from the strenuous process by

which [teachers] come to understand their own experiences, influences of history and historical

contexts on their lives and ways to take action so that their own perspectives and voices can have

a determining effect on their futures" (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2021, p. 106). Professional

learning that impacts how teachers understand themselves and their contributions to teaching can

also change the ways in which they understand their own potential to transform the future within

education.

Praxis as Agentic for Change

One way to consider such change is from the perspective of *nesting systems*—a term used

by Sterling (2015) in describing education in an ecological paradigm. Systems within systems

are similar to matryoshka (Russian nesting) dolls—a larger supersystem encompasses all the

smaller systems. A feedback loop is created, such that changes in an inner layer affect the other

layers both inside and outside the nesting system. Changes within the layers of the system are

never isolated, rather they create ripple effects in others (Sterling, 2015).

Because teachers are nested within systems, changes in teachers initiate changes in

systems (Sterling, 2015). Teachers are regarded as an influential part of systems; they are

integral to the continual recreation of education systems. A system is not a removed object with

power over all its parts; it is a synthesis of all the parts (Wheatley, 2008). Consistent with the

belief that teachers are the systems in which they teach, professional learning and evolving

teacher identity can position teachers to see themselves as agents of change. (Cochrane-Smith &

Lytle, 2021; Freire, 1970/2000; Greene, 1978/2018). Transformation of both identity and

practice might also be an outcome of this process.

Professional learning is "an undertaking oriented to empowering persons to become

different, to think critically and creatively, to pursue meanings, to make increasing sense of their

actual lived worlds" (Greene, 1986, p. 72). When professional learning is embedded in identity

work, it can empower teachers to see themselves differently in their contexts, to re-navigate their

understanding of teaching and self, and to move towards praxis and engage in practices as agents

of broader system change (Clarke, 2008). Teaching that moves towards praxis might also be seen

as emancipatory – in challenging dominant views and hegemonic narratives. Coming to a deeper

understanding of how identity is influenced by the narratives in which we live has the potential

to inspirit much-needed system change.

Chapter 3

Perambulating the Landscape: A Methodological Overview

In this research study, narrative inquiry was the guiding method in examining stories that shape identity, in exploring the nexus points of identity, and reflecting personally on how identity informed the participants' entry pedagogical relational spaces. An appreciative inquiry (AI) framework was introduced to participants and helped focus the conversations and provided a structure for thinking about how experiences and relationships had contributed to the teacher identity of each of the participants over time. The following sections describe the methods used for the study.

Narrative Inquiry as Guiding Method

As a methodology, Narrative Inquiry "inquires into narratives and stories of people's life experiences" (Kim, 2016, p. 346). The etymology of the word *narrative* provides valuable insight into how it might be understood as a research methodology: Coming from the Latin *narrat-*, meaning related or told, *narrare*, to tell, and *gnarus*, to know (Kim, 2016, p. 23), it is through the telling and relating of narrative that we come to know. Through narrative inquiry, stories are examined and lived experiences tilled for meaning. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described it, experiences are shared through stories, and narrative inquiry is a way to think about those storied experiences. Narrative inquiry was the primary methodology used to explore the storied experiences of emerging teacher identities with five teachers from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD), including myself, and how their/our teacher identity influenced their/our pedagogical relationships in the various roles they held within the Newfoundland and Labrador education system. The stories told were a way for participants to

share their journeys of becoming teachers; these stories expounded on the dynamic shaping of

teacher identity, the experiences of pedagogical relationships, and identity as pedagogy.

Inquiring narratively opened a way to consider what surfaced from the "living, telling,

retelling and reliving" (Kim 2016, p. 160) of stories. As a researcher, there were opportunities to

look forward, backward, and from side to side (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) at the experiences

of educators as well as to interpret the storied experiences that converge as identity. Semi-

structured interviews (Kvale, 2014) approached as conversations, personal journals, photographs,

artifacts, and metaphors all enriched the stories that contributed to teacher identity as participants

recalled and retold their lived experiences.

Since its emergence, narrative inquiry has evolved. Its use has spread throughout many

disciplines as a type of qualitative-research methodology; as a result, there are diverse

interpretations of what it means to engage in narrative inquiry and of how the methodology is

employed (Chase, 2018). To address how the use of narrative inquiry as a methodology varied

between disciplines, Chase (2018) drew on Thomas (2010) to guide researchers using narrative

inquiry through four key questions that situate studies. Firstly, through which disciplinary

(educational, sociological, anthropological, medical, etc.) lens would I analyze the narratives?

Secondly, what kinds of knowledge would be accessed through the personal narratives of the

participants? Thirdly, what is the ethical stance of the researcher? Finally, how would the

narrative data be analyzed, understood, and shared? By responding to these questions, the

researcher maintains the integrity of narrative inquiry and "holds themselves accountable to the

community of narrative inquirers" (Chase, 2018, p. 550). The following sections situate this

research study accordingly, utilizing Thomas' four questions above.

The Lens Through Which I See

Knowing the stance the researcher takes in their discipline is an important consideration in how they come to the research (Chase, 2018). Qualitative research, under which narrative inquiry falls, "sets the researcher as the data collection instrument" (Bourke, 2014, p. 2); the meaning made from each story shared by participants—and the importance attached to the storied experiences brought forth by participants—is also viewed through the lens of the researcher. The beliefs and values of the researcher impact what is noticed, heard, and attended to. Who I am as a teacher, ontologically, "how I perceive the world, how [I] perceive truth and reality, which includes principles or standards of behaviour, and . . . what is important in life" (Witsel & Boyle, 2017, p. 156), is intricately woven with my beliefs that relationships are paramount in teaching. How pedagogical relationships are understood is informed by teacher identity, as identity is a dynamic nexus of experiences and understanding of the self. My teaching and the research I have undertaken to date, are guided by feminist, critical, and humanist theories as well as by continuity and experience.

Given my foundational belief that teaching is relationship, a research methodology based in relationship was essential to my study. Because narrative inquiry privileges the researcher to enter relational spaces with research participants and to consider their stories, it is important to acknowledge and locate researcher positionality (Burke, 2014). Positionality as a researcher acknowledges the philosophical stance, beliefs, values, cultural background, story, and identity of the researcher, all which influence the research process (Burke, 2014, p. 2). How the researcher is positioned determines the space of listening: what is heard, how it is heard, and how, in this case, it eventually comes to be understood as the story of the research conversations. As I am a teacher, a participant, and a researcher in this study, my subjectivity was inherent and

acknowledged. I approached the research with both an insider's perspective as a teacher and an understanding that journeys of becoming are personally known and unique to each teacher.

I also entered this conversation aware of the fact that even within the constraints of the system that came to be articulated, I experience an amount of privilege as one who succeeded despite the system narratives—this was also the experience of the co-participants. Our privilege acknowledged, there was a clear intention in our individual commitments to relational teaching, to challenge inequalities within the system and help give rise to "individual empowerment and transformation" (Kim, 2016, p. 304).

I was a researcher-participant researcher, entering the space to learn alongside, with, and from participants. Kim (2016) advises novice narrative researchers that proceeding as a narrative researcher involves first thinking narratively and, thus, positioning the starting place of narrative inquiry in "living and telling" (p. 274). Thinking back over my teacher stories gave me a way to also project forward to conversations with the participants, and this better positioned me to listen for the narratives that would emerge. We began the conversations by considering our teacher identities through lived storied experiences. In turn, these stories provided opportunities for us to think about and gain understanding of who we were as teachers, and how we lived in roles and within perceived stories over time. Contemplating our stories reflectively and deliberately offered opportunities to think about how the stories had shaped us from the point of view of the past, how they continued to inform our understandings of the present, and how acknowledging this might influence us as we move forward, individually and collectively, in the future.

What the Stories Might Tell—Knowledge Gleaned Through the Stories

Exploring the stories that contributed to the polyphonies of teacher identity required an awareness of the kinds of knowledge the stories shared by participants might surface (Chase,

2018). The knowledge I sought through these stories was of the experience of becoming a

teacher— knowledge of being. In addition, I thought knowledge of pedagogical relationships in

the context of teaching life might also come to light. Moving back and forth in time, exploring

storied experiences of the past, reliving stories through retelling, and revising understandings of

the self, all enabled me to see the stories in new contexts. The knowledge of the stories could

also reveal insights into how experiences continued to transform teacher identity. In narrative

inquiry, the stories told help explain experiences (Wang & Geale, 2015). To reiterate, the

insights and knowledge I hoped to glean through stories shared in this study centred around the

emergence of teacher identity in relation to stories of the systems and schools in which

participants lived their teaching lives.

I also anticipated that an additional story and another kind of knowledge could emerge

through the narrative inquiry—that of self as researcher. As the inquiry unfolded by defining the

question, inviting participants, and gathering and analyzing data, the stories told by participants

and the act of researching could bring new insights and voices to my own teacher identity as

teacher-researcher. Further, new knowledge could arise through conversing with participants,

living and reliving stories of teaching and becoming as teachers, as well as navigating self-

understanding as researcher. The stories participants shared could also elicit my own stories and

open the space for a reflexive journey of self through which I might discover a version of myself.

Relational Ethics of Narrative Inquiry

Caine and Estefan (2011) wrote that "research is a relational act" and "a narrative inquiry

researcher is, in fact, a 'relational' researcher" (p. 170). Narrative inquiry is "a relational inquiry

. . . that emerge[s] in relation with our life experiences, of living, composing field texts and

research texts in relation with participants" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2009, p. 81).

The relational space between me, as the researcher, and participants had to be "a safe, open space in which teachers could explore their fears, limits, boundaries, and potentials" (Macintyre-Latta & Kim, 2010, p. 140). Adopting a relational research stance means the researcher treats the stories of the participants generously (Caine & Estefan, 2011): "Generosity in a narrative context requires honoring the relational spaces that arise between the researcher and the participant and allowing for the relationship to develop and experiences to be told and lived" (p. 696). I entered the relational space of narrative inquiry much as I would endeavour to enter pedagogical relationships—as an equal with the participants, open to where the conversations would go, and with a keen interest in what participants shared. Being both researcher and participant also meant sharing power. As we came together for conversations, power was held by the group. Conversational interviews meant that participants were not called on or directly questioned; rather, they decided when they wanted to speak, what they wanted to share, and whether they would prefer to be silent. Each participant was also given the option of contributing to an online journal, accessible only to the individual and to me. This discretionary activity was offered to participants who wanted to share thoughts beyond the conversations or if, for example, something arose after our scheduled times were over. No one was coerced to be part of the group, and participants could elect to leave if they felt they could no longer participate.

I approached the study with the understanding that I participated from the vantage point of my own experiences, with preconceived beliefs and ideas about what it means to teach and be a teacher. Thus, to enter the conversations relationally and construct new meaning together with the group, it was necessary that I value how others saw the role of teacher and welcome ideas that were different from my own. In the space of research relationships, I aspired to live alongside the stories and share in the experience of stories as they were told, retold, and relived.

My central aim was to hold space to think about how we viewed and understood ourselves as teachers and how this understanding was informed by our stories.

This holding space for conversations raised an important ethical consideration: It was essential to intentionally create a safe environment in which participants could tell their stories, as telling and listening to the stories was about learning, not judging. It was also important to acknowledge that internal tensions could arise if stories of how we knew ourselves conflicted with stories we wanted to tell. Awareness of that tension was a vital part of understanding the relational space we shared as researcher and participants—we had to be willing to dwell in a tension-filled relational space (Clandinin et al., 2010). It also required that, as the researcher, I ensured no harm came from the questioning, the storying, or the reliving of stories (Magolda & Weems, 2015). Areas of tension can call us to probe further. In such cases, knowing that it was acceptable to stop the conversation, to choose to halt questioning, or to withdraw from the conversation was a way of mitigating harm. This nurtured an atmosphere of trust and rapport among participants, thus creating the conditions in which the sharing of stories was deemed safe.

Unchallenged and untold stories can intersect with our beliefs, influence our identities, and shape pedagogical relational spaces. By bringing stories to light, sitting in the tensions, and acknowledging what hides in the shadows, we begin to reshape narratives and reimagine how we might contribute to a change in a system. Acknowledging that stories unfold over time opened a space to raise and address "disturbing questions . . . and reorient their thinking," or to retell stories upon which the stories continually draw and by which they are defined (Macintyre-Latta & Kim, 2010, p. 139).

Inquiring narratively into the experience of examining the stories that we live, relive, and come to understand facilitated knowing ourselves, our teacher and researcher identity, and our

pedagogy more deeply. Through participating in the research conversations, there were

opportunities to know ourselves differently and to consider, even confront, the self we offer in

pedagogical relationships: the self of pedagogy.

Narrative Analysis of Stories Told

The fourth question Thomas (2010) suggested to situate the research in narrative inquiry

concerns how narrative data is analyzed. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) put forth the idea that

qualitative research allows for the use of "a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices"

(p. 10). MacMath (2009) draws on this idea contending that the same data set can be looked at

through multiple interpretive lenses in order to better understand what is being explored. In my

study, the collection and transcription of data throughout the research process and after each

conversation was followed by narrative explication and interpretation of the experience. Using

paradigmatic, constant comparative and narrative analyses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kim, 2016;

MacMath, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) meaning was constructed from the

data that resulted from the stories.

Paradigmatic analysis aims to discover commonalities by identifying particular themes

and commonalities revealed through participants' stories (Kim, 2016). Constant comparison also

allows for comparison of what surfaces from one data section to another, in order to identify

similarities and differences (Merriam, 2009). Preliminary analysis began during data collection,

as I transcribed the interviews. After each interview, I listened to the conversation again,

recorded what was said, watched the videos to observe participants' facial expressions and body

language, revisiting my own noticings and wonderings. The subsequent interviews were planned

in response to what was seen, heard, and noticed, as meaning from preliminary analysis

occurred, and continued, throughout the process. At the end of data collection, each conversation

transcript was read and reread, first for understanding, then for common themes. Words, phrases, concepts, and illustrative anecdotes were captured, categorized, and finally grouped into themes.

Narrative analysis was used in addition to paradigmatic analysis: What story was told through the interviews that described the dynamic process of polyphonic teacher identity, and how could I best tell it? My task was to configure the data into a coherent, narrative whole (Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Kim, 2016, p 197); in other words, by reading the interview conversations through as a complete set and looking for the narrative arc of the experience it became possible to visualize a plotline that would make sense to others. Also, as I began to think about the research story through the metaphor of a journey, the narrative began to take shape. Little by little, the stories that were shared as meaningful and significant in the polyphonic identities of the participants began to form a story unearthed from the participants' collective experiences.

In situating studies through the questions posed by Thomas (2010), Chase (2018) invited scholars to engage in research that remains faithful to the spirit of narrative inquiry. Rather than being guided by a rigid set of criteria, researchers—including myself—who follow Chase's lead ensure that the guiding questions are addressed and "hold themselves accountable to a community of narrative researchers" (Chase, 2018, p. 551).

Appreciative Inquiry Nested Within Narrative Inquiry

AI is a "relational process of inquiry grounded in affirmation and appreciation" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, loc 332). It is a framework first presented as a four element, or 4-D framework articulated by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). Embedded within the narrative inquiry of this study, the AI framework guided the conversations with appreciative consideration of past experiences, of how the present is influenced by the past, and of how we might imagine

and shape a hopeful future. Narrative inquiry was the methodology used *to interpret and come to understand the experience* of telling and considering our stories. The principles of narrative inquiry guided my consideration of what stories offered, whose stories were chosen to tell, and how narrative inquiry guided me, as researcher, to ethically engage with participants. AI was the framework in which we *told* the stories.

To elaborate, the AI framework evolved from the four phases to includes five phases: Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). The framework continues to evolve with some researchers adding a sixth element—Deepen—to the AI framework (Arora, 2021). Deepen can be woven throughout the phases utilizing empathetic listening and heightened self-awareness "to create an altered concept of the self" (Arora, 2021, p. 85). This research study wove the element of Deepen throughout the 5-D phases of AI into narrative inquiry as a way to tell the stories that intersect with our teacher identities and become pedagogy. Part 2, "The Journey," describes each phase in detail, the conversations that took place during the phases, and what emerged through the analysis of data from the research conversations.

While AI uncovers what is best of organizations and people and focuses on finding a positive core (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), criticism has been levelled that it can be too positive, glossing over areas of challenge and even censoring discourse and stories that linger in the shadows (Fitzgerald et al., 2010); I believe that where there is light there is always shadow. Although the intent of AI is to bring forward what is best, we cannot ignore what causes us discomfort if we are to share stories authentically (Verma, 2020). Fitzgerald et al. (2010) drew on a Jungian definition of the *shadow* as things we might "refuse to acknowledge" about ourselves, group, or organization (p. 221). Openly exploring the shadow can create an honest

space of reflection and provide an opportunity to consider stories of our identity in a broader

context—both those that bring us into light and those that bring us into shadows. AI brings what

is good to the light and offers us a path through which we can also learn from the shadows.

Philosophically, AI is not about the dichotomy of the positive or the negative aspects of life;

rather, it is about inquiry into life and the search for deeper meaning, which sometimes might

involve tragedy (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020b).

When thinking about teacher identities, then, it is important to know and acknowledge

growth through challenging experiences. The counsel that AI is sometimes perceived as more

attentive to the process than to the people engaging the process (Fitzgerald et al., 2010) was

something that I, as researcher, needed to keep in mind too. The recently added Deepen element

addresses the risk of privileging process and surface conversations by embedding attention to

deeply listening and engaging in dialogue (Arora, 2021). It was important to closely examine the

stories told during the research process, both to determine if the stories warranted further

exploration and to ensure that what arose from conversations was given sufficiently deep

consideration. Working through and deconstructing challenges identified in shared stories

uncovered new (and deeper) understandings.

AI also provided a medium through which to think about how experiences inform routes

forward and challenge the status quo with liberating and emancipatory actions. Deficit ideologies

are challenged when brought to the light; reimagined narratives of organizations can then emerge

(Grant & Humphries, 2006). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) wrote, "When people realize

they can and do make a difference in relation to others, they experience true liberation. . . .

Appreciative Inquiry . . . creates a context rich in relationship and narrative that becomes the

path on which the journey to liberation takes place" ("Oppression to the Liberation of Power"

section, para 4).

The use of AI in the current study offered a framework through which to call forward

stories of teacher identity. Throughout the AI phases, powerful and influential experiences that

had shaped us as educators were evoked and considered. The effects such experiences had on our

teacher identities and how pedagogical relationships are entered were contemplated. We

examined lived examples upon which thinking about identity as pedagogy is hinged. As AI is a

participatory action research that is "cooperative and coevolutionary" (Cooperrider & Whitney,

2005, "What Is Appreciative Inquiry?" section, para 4), together, through the conversations, we

constructed a vibrant shared understanding.

Aligning Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Aligning methodology and theoretical framework strengthens a research process. It was

important that the research undertaken here was guided by relational methodology and reflected

my worldview and theoretical positioning.

For me, identity, relationship, and a reimagined system all reflect an ecological paradigm.

Drawing forth Palmer's (1998/2018) description of identity as "an evolving nexus where all the

forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self" (p. 17), we shape and are shaped

by the system of which we are a part. Narrative inquiry and appreciative inquiry sit within such

an ecological paradigm.

In an ecological paradigm, the importance and primacy of relationships are also

acknowledged; the whole of relationship is more than the sum of its parts (Sterling, 2015,

"Whole System Thinking" section, para 4). Relationships throughout our lives, from early

experiences in school to those as experienced teachers, continually contribute to knowledge of

ourselves and our teacher identity. Those same relationships also contribute to how others know themselves—there is reciprocity in relationships. Dewey (1938/1997) referred to this as the interaction of experience, meaning life as lived in situations in which we interact with other individuals and contexts and are constantly making sense of our experiences. As a result, how we see the world around us is directly affected by our experiences. Beginning with relationship, and recognizing we are influenced by and have influence on a system, challenges mechanistic, "banking" education (Freire, 2000, p. 58), and technical rational approaches (Mockler, 2011, 2013; Schön, 1983). When we change who we are in the system and the stories we embody, we disrupt the system, causing change: We begin to re-envision and enact how education *can* be. AI is used to investigate and identify qualities that "give life and strength and possibility to a living system" (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004, p. xii). From a critical stance, emancipation and change are desired outcomes, and both narrative inquiry and AI lead towards potential change.

Dewey's constructivist theory and his philosophy of experience as life and life as experience are foundational to Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin 2019; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 1994) and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 2002; Naude et al., 2014). Experiential continuity (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 28) brings forth the past, present, and future as elemental in life experiences. We live in "an emerging vantage point created with each subsequent situation offering a novel perspective to look back on experiences leading up to, and out of, another experience" (Clandinin, 2019, p. 131). Both narrative inquiry and AI have the theory of continuity embedded in them. During the research conversations, we looked back to early experiences as formative events from which other experiences emerged; considered our current contexts through the lens of our past, and envisioned an un-travelled world in which we would continue to come to deeper understanding (Kim, 2016).

Feminist and critical theory connect to ways in which our ideas and beliefs are shaped by experiences in hegemony (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). In the study, telling and reflecting on storied experiences allowed us, as teachers, to explore and challenge the status quo, and to access counter-narratives. Looking narratively at experiences also brought to light how they contributed to shaping teacher identities. As we shared, we connected to the experiences of others. Within the framework of AI, stories that breathed life into our identities also provided opportunities to acknowledge challenges faced. Fitzgerald et al. (2010) suggested, "The tremendous liberation of collective energy in many AI . . . may have more to do with reclaiming long-neglected and/or silenced aspects of individual and organizational life" (p. 226). The interview conversations, journal reflections and shared artifacts afforded opportunities to think about reclaiming elements of individual and organizational lives by recollecting experiences when they may or may not have been silenced. In addition, the interview conversations provided a space in which to envision opportunities, critically challenge our situations, and honour feminist ways of knowing.

From a humanistic view, our narrated stories were known alongside others and situated the research of identity as a nexus that was "simultaneously individual, social, cultural, and personally historical" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 262). Stories of past experiences that focused on life, strength, and possibility informed the future and also extended a humanist lens; these stories were understood as contributing to, reshaping, and reimagining our world with an aim to valuing and enhancing human development, well-being, and dignity (Aloni, 2013).

The Route (aka Data Collection)

The summer of 2020 arrived on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown of spring. The initial research plan involved sitting together, face-to-face, to share in conversations.

The adage "What stands in the way becomes the way" (attributed to Marcus Aurelius) describes

the solution to many problems. Beginning research in the midst of a global pandemic initially

presented a barrier to bringing people together to engage in conversations. Our professional

realities for the three months prior had been virtual: Participants had connected online with

children and families, colleagues in professional learning and collaboration, and members of

outside agencies. Rather than postpone the study because we could not meet in person, the

interviews were moved to a virtual environment. Changing to an online-meeting platform

brought an added benefit in that it opened the field of participants and the polyvocal group,

initially limited geographically, to include participants from throughout Newfoundland and

Labrador. Because participants had already been working virtually, they were comfortable and

confident in the Google Meet environment, which allowed us to focus on the conversation and

the establishment of a trusting group space.

Data was collected from semi-structured interview conversations. The first interviews, in

the Discovery phase of the AI, were individual conversations. This provided time and space for

each participant to situate their own teaching journey in the research and to establish comfort

with the research process. Following the initial individual interview conversations, three group

conversations and another individual (follow-up) conversation were conducted with participants;

these research conversations comprised the Dream, Destiny, and Delivery phases. Although the

AI framework guided the process, there was some overlap in the conversations; each one built on

what had transpired in the one before and moved organically through the AI phases. Using

elicitations such as videos and question prompts (detailed in Part 2), participants were invited to

reflect and share experiences that had influenced their teaching careers, as well as a) how they

viewed themselves as teachers and b) how they entered pedagogical relationships. Participants

were also invited to share reflections on the sessions, any follow-up on thoughts and feelings

encountered, or topics/conversations they wanted to further address through an online participant

journal, shared only between the individual and I.

All the conversations were video recorded for transcription, and these were the main

sources of data. Supplemental data sources included field notes that documented what was

observed, heard, and felt as participants shared; reflective journaling about the stories told,

retold, and relived; and photos and artifacts. Researcher reflections also documented my

reflexive journey through completion of the research. Beginning with the process of defining the

study focus, progressing through the research interviews and my interactions as a co-participant,

I navigated a parallel path that continued to contribute to my researcher identity.

In Part 2, "The Journey," in-depth details of the AI phases are shared. These include the

structure of the conversations, the elicitations, and the guiding questions that provided flexibility

in the conversations designed to explore teacher identities; how identity becomes pedagogy; and

how the system influences, and is influenced by, our understanding and acknowledgment of

teacher identities. The following overview outlines how the 5-D cycle framed the exploration

and the route taken to gather the data:

- Define phase: This was the process of coming to the question, or what was to be

  explored. It included my teaching journey and how I eventually came to identify identity

  as pedagogy as an area I was drawn to research. The intent of the study, known as the

  positive intention in AI, was defined during this stage.

- Discovery phase: Participants had the opportunity to discover what gave light and

  strength to their teaching and what they continue to pull forward that has nurtured their

  teacher identity. During approximately one-hour, individual, semi-structured

conversational interviews, each participant looked back at their early educational experiences and formative days in the profession to explore what they had understood about the role of teacher. They considered how their teacher identities had informed how they entered the sacred spaces of pedagogical relationships.

- Dream phase: Participants began to think about how they would enter pedagogical relationships if their system realized the conditions that support the sacred space of pedagogical relationships. This phase spanned two conversations, each approximately 1.5 hours long. During these group conversational interviews, participants reflected on grand narratives of the system as they understood them at the time and began to imagine a desired narrative for the system. Through personal metaphors that represented for them how pedagogical relationships would be described in the future system, they also began to envision a reformed system.

- Design phase: In this semi-structured, group conversational interview, which lasted 1.5 hours, participants had the opportunity to describe the system they envisioned. Using JamBoard, a virtual collaborative tool, participants contributed to a shared vision of a reimagined system and the conditions that would support teaching as relationship, where alignment would exist between sacred, cover, and secret stories of teachers.

- Destiny/Delivery phase: Having envisioned a system they hoped to cultivate, participants had an opportunity to imagine themselves teaching in that system. Through an individual conversation of approximately 30 minutes, each participant considered elements of what would be personally required of them to bring the system they had collaboratively reimagined into reality.

AI is localized and specific, depending on the purpose of the study and the particular context and participants (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). As Castle and Johnson (2018) argue, AI is "guided by the emerging learning" (p. 63). Flexibility in the AI framework allowed for recursive reflections on conversations, reflections that were utilized to inform subsequent questions as well as the direction in which to guide the conversations. This framework also enabled rich discussion of identity as pedagogy and of the primacy of pedagogical relationships, as each conversation emanated from and deepened understanding of the one before.

Plotting the Course

A journey begins before the first step is taken. Surveying the landscape of this journey was important as it helped explain the determination of routes and modes of travel. The story of how this journey unfolded is further shared throughout the work as travel journal.

"The Landscape" serves as the introductory section of this dissertation as travel journal, including the focus of the study and journey to be taken in exploring identity as pedagogy. The direction of the journey was shared, as was my identity as traveller, the route to be travelled, the companions who guided our travels, and the means by which our experience(s) of the journey would inform how we continued on as travellers.

In Part 1, my positionality as researcher was acknowledged as being informed through feminist, critical, humanist, and Deweyan theories, and within an ethic of sustainability. Literature drawn on to situate the research study, and key themes that emerged, was discussed. Narrative inquiry was identified as the guiding methodology, with an embedded appreciative inquiry through which the research was conducted. An overview of the phases of AI mapping out the data-collection process was also presented, and an explanation of how meaning was constructed from the data using constant comparison with paradigmatic and narrative analysis was provided.

Part 2, "The Journey," tells the story of the AI, using the 5-D process. Part 2 also explores in more depth what emerged from data analysis, relevant research literature, and discussion with participants. My parallel journey as an emerging researcher is shared as a reflexive exploration of travelling this road with my companions.

Part 2

The Journey
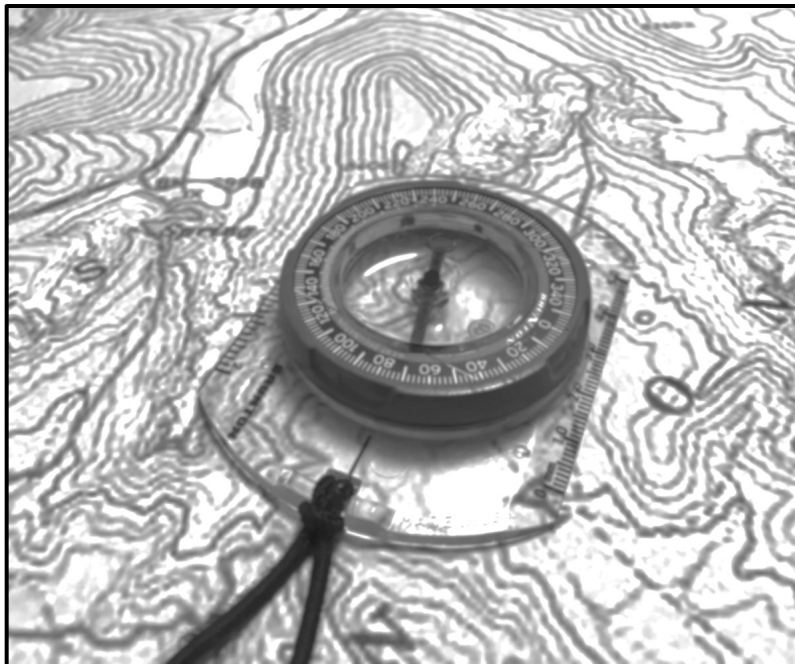
Photo 2. Compass

Overview

A Shared Journey

One's destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things.

—Henry Miller, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*

A new way of looking at things was the intended destination of this journey. Part 2, "The Journey," reports on the investigation of teacher identity through the 5-D Appreciative Inquiry (AI) framework. Each section reports a different phase—Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny/Deliver—and details the exploration of the themes that surfaced. The route along which the participants and I travelled is shared; the places where we paused to appreciate the landscape and insights gained along the way eventually brought us to our destination of seeing things in a new way.

It is important to note that the AI framework is responsive to a study as opposed to being a rigid structure into which a study would be fitted (Castle & Johnson, 2018; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010); this responsiveness affords the possibility of lingering in some phases longer than others. As a result, each phase in the current study unfolded organically and allowed the research conversation to extend as needed. The sections that follow also reflect the flexibility of the AI framework. For example, they vary in length in response to the time spent and data that surfaced in each phase. Overall, Part 2 represents our shared journey.

A Parallel Journey

My parallel reflexive journey to understanding, and to my emerging researcher identity, is also shared in Part 2. I became aware of my personal teaching narrative through the stories shared during the research interviews, and as a result, a new narrative of my identity as teacher-

researcher unfolded. I came into the study seeing myself as a teacher embarking on a journey of research. I soon began to recognize teacher-as-researcher as a significant voice of my identity. My explorations of self as researcher confronted challenges that arose as I navigated the emerging researcher role. The challenge of coming to view myself as researcher was intertwined with the myriad of ways I had previously understood my teacher identity. In turn, the process of listening for new voices in my polyphonic identity was elevated. The writing of my dissertation became an act of recognizing those voices within my teacher-researcher identity as I began to understand that, in the same way we teach who we are, we also research who we are: Who I was as teacher extended into who I was becoming as teacher-researcher.

Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) described writing as a method of inquiry and a way for the writer to "learn about themselves *and* their research topic" (p. 818; emphasis added). As I wrote in response to the research conversations, analyzing what surfaced from the data, a fuller realization of how my experiences have shaped (and continue to shape) my teacher identity became clear. The process also shed light on how I enter pedagogical relationships as well as how I understand myself as an emerging researcher.

"Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 143). Inquiring reflexively into how I engaged in the research, and how I was being changed through the research, informed how I proceeded with the study; through this process, I was "experiencing myself as both respondent and researcher" (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 142). Approaching research reflexively meant I could enter each research conversation with insights gained through the previous conversation. My researcher identity emerged as the research process appeared to emulate the theory of nesting systems; that is, the research conversations were nested within the context of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District

(NLESD), and my reflexive journey was nested within our participant group and the

conversations unfolding there, with each influencing the other. The journey of exploration with

the participant group provided further rich insights into my researcher journey. Experienced in

parallel, this journey continued to offer multiple lenses on teacher identity and pedagogical

relationships.

Chapter 4

Define

Photo 3. Setting Out

The Define phase of an appreciative inquiry is integral to the process and is the means through which the focus of the inquiry emerges (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Sandars and Murdoch-Eaton (2017) suggested that the Define phase of AI asks "is this worth doing?" (p. 124), echoing Chamber's (2004) advocacy for "research that matters" (p. 7). The Define phase of the current study was embedded in the work of articulating the focus and direction of my academic research as a PhD student; it was also a part of my continued journey as teacher.

Defining a research question is a point of departure in any inquiry. Questions might come from our experiences, our historicity, our interests, our stories. Potential explorations speak to us personally and reflect how we understand an aspect of our reality at a given time and place. For example, my personal journey to defining a research question was rooted in my worldview and

influenced by my professional and personal experiences. The central question emerged after a

period of deep reflection and led to an intentional exploration of teacher identity as pedagogy.

This chapter traces the journey of how the research questions took form. It situates the

study in time and place by describing the context of the research study and introducing the

participant group.

Journey to the Starting Place

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"

Taking a step towards working on a PhD was actually not my first step. What one might

call the first step is difficult to determine precisely, as, in my experience, arriving at a place in

life when one is ready to embark on a new and challenging journey is more akin to a fork in the

road—a new direction taken along a twisting and undulating route.

Embarking on the Journey

I clearly remember travelling to North Bay to begin my first PhD residency. The air was

hazy and heavy, waves of heat rose from the asphalt; the humid, Ontario sultriness of summer

made everything move slowly and heavily. Inside my car, the air conditioning made me shiver

and belied the reality of summer outside. I travelled the final few kilometres from Corner Brook,

NL to North Bay, ON along Highway 417, transporting myself from all that was normal for

me—mothering, teaching, partnering, daughtering—to dive into the world of studenting again

after seventeen years. Emotions were high: Anxiety, excitement, uncertainty, guilt, doubt were

prevalent as my mind, my heart, and my body all processed the decision I had made. Extending

before me was a stretch of highway I had never travelled before, and the metaphor of the road for

my impending learning journey was evident. While it was a new road, a new experience, this

would become one of many others on my personal map of roads travelled—and roads yet to

navigate.

My prior experiences in education had taken me from coast to coast in Canada and had

presented opportunities to learn in various Canadian universities and to teach students from

preschool to post-secondary. My work took me from large urban schools rich with the linguistic

and cultural diversity of families who had come to Canada from all over the world, to tiny rural

communities where I was able to learn of local knowledge alongside students and families, to a

post-secondary program where adult students who had recently immigrated to Canada

generously shared their stories. Each stop along my journey had shaped my way of

understanding teaching. The stories of each place in which I lived and learned had offered

alternate stories for me to consider and these offered multi-faceted lenses on how I understood

teaching. I had been fortunate to have those experiences but, moreover, those experiences

shaped and influenced critical ways of knowing myself. They had contributed to the many

threads of my teacher identity, merging and informing who I would become as researcher. This

route brought me to a discernible fork in the road where I would choose a direction, a road less

travelled, and continue on towards a destination as researcher.

Choosing a Path

"You too?" She asked Ruth. "How do your poems start out?"

"They start as a lump in the throat," she said.

—Louise Penny, *The Long Way Home*

Upon arrival at Nipissing, there were discussions about what, where, and how our research would go. My ideas at this time were vague, at best. Commitment to a research idea was not something to be taken lightly. The idea had to speak to both my mind and my heart; it had to be the lump in my throat. I was drawn to investigating a feeling as much as an idea, and my early feeling was to explore what it meant to teach from the heart. My experiences in teaching had provided me with the privilege of interacting with individuals who seemed to teach, lead— indeed, live—as if guided by their hearts. They forged strong connections with children, teachers, parents, administrators; their work was firmly situated in relationship. I knew this, but I could not find words to describe a research question reflecting this feeling. The idea of teaching with heart remained at the back of my mind for much of the first year of the program. As I ruminated on identifying and articulating a research question, an understanding emerged. The colleagues whom I felt were guided by their hearts, I noticed, were people who lived fully in their teaching and shared their selves when they entered pedagogical relational spaces. In other words, who they were—their identity—was their pedagogy. Thus emerged the very kernel of an idea for this research: We teach who we are; identity *is* our pedagogy.

Research Questions

The guiding questions that subsequently emerged related directly to how teacher identity is shaped, informed, and becomes pedagogy: How do our collective, cultural, and personal stories inform our teacher identities? How does understanding the intersection points of identity

change the way in which we enter relational space with students? Can we reimagine our education system by considering stories that bring life to our work? Can considering and confronting our identity-forming stories challenge the grand narratives permeating our education system? If we shape and are shaped by the system, can our rethinking of storied experiences help reimagine a system?

The aim of my research study was to journey with, and tell the story of, a group of teachers as they considered the experiences and influences that converge as teacher identity—the inner and outer forces that make us who we are (Palmer, 1998/2018) and the experiences that transpire in pedagogy. Inquiring narratively through an appreciative inquiry framework, I planned to explore the experience of participants as they considered their own teacher identities: How the stories they drew on, and through which they defined themselves, were lived in practice and emerged as pedagogy. Together, we would examine how we might challenge the status quo of our traditional school system and be agentic for systemic transformation, through the processes of looking inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), and of starting with oneself and coming to know one's teacher identity and stance towards pedagogical relationship. By starting with ourselves within the system, our actions might become transformational and lead to system change.

Surveying the Landscape

Situating the Research in the Historical Landscape

As this research study was conducted with participants from the NLESD, understandings of the unique history of NL, its continued influence on education in the province and on the shaping of narratives for teachers, provides important context. Newfoundland was the last British colony to join Canada. As a colony—and, for a time in the early 20th century, as an independent

country—the development of an education system in Newfoundland lagged behind other parts of

Canada. There was little attention paid to education due to harsh economic realities and a focus

on resource extraction as the primary reason for Britain's continued support of the colony

(McCann, 1998). Until the late 19th century, settlement in NL was seasonal and short term. With

fishers coming from ports in England, Ireland, and France to fish and then return home, there

was little interest in the creation of a robust education system similar to those found in other

parts of Canada. Survival was dependent on everyone, including children, participating in the

fishing production (Johnson, 1985). Furthermore, because the colony's only income was that

which was provided by Britain and a very small taxation system, the economic position of the

colony was usually dire and there was no money to fund schools.

Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, the settlement of permanent communities

led to increased efforts to establish some form of rudimentary schooling system. This was

undertaken primarily by the churches and was yet another detrimental event in education in NL

(McCann, 1998). Small communities throughout the province identified strongly with the church

in the community. As a result, historically, there was extreme tension caused by religious

affiliation—particularly between Catholic and Protestant members, but also amongst the various

Protestant denominations. The control churches had in the communities and the tensions among

the citizenry that emanated from their religious affiliations were such that, when the Terms of

Union were drawn between Newfoundland and Canada, the right for churches to control

education in the province was included (McCann, 1998). A denominational school system, with

churches having tremendous power over the electorate and shaping public opinion about the

purpose of school, continued until the 1970s. It was not until 1994 that the Schools Act was

changed, creating a public school system in NL rather than a religious denominational one.

Another aspect of the settlement pattern of NL was the significant divide between fisher and merchant. There was extreme exploitation of fishers during the history of the colony manifesting as domination and subordination of people that was perpetuated culturally. Merchants, who were brokers of the fish with European countries, traded dry food goods and supplies with the fishers in exchange for their fish. The accrued wealth of the merchants was often to the detriment of the fishers. Merchants, or "townies" as they were known, lived in St. John's, the seat of government and wealth in the province. Typically, fishers lived all around the coastal communities, locally referred to as "around the bay." "Baymen" were disparaged and treated with very little respect; this attitude carried long into the 20th century, and some would argue it still exists somewhat today reflected, for example, in the diversity that exists between urban and rural communities. Such an attitude was a significant cultural factor in terms of education because, as schools were established and teachers were trained, there was a desire for better quality education in St. John's (McCann, 1998). For example, many reports were delivered to the government, dating back as far as 1836 (McCann, 1998), detailing the lack of quality both in the schools and the teachers in the outlying communities, as well as the disparity between what was available in St. John's and elsewhere in the province (Johnson, 1985). Attempts to improve the quality of schools and teachers gave rise to different versions of Normal Schools and teacher training, housed in St. John's. Teachers would spend time in practica in St. John's schools and then take what they had learned back to the small communities. The overall direction of schools was taken from British approaches of the time, which focused on examinations. The task of teachers was, in essence, to prepare students to write the exams and to administer the exam (McCann, 1998).

With the joining of NL to Canada, a new focus emerged: education for the purpose of improving the economic prosperity of the province. This led to concerted efforts to both create and standardize schools throughout the province. The approach was to continue with direction from St. John's, where teachers would go to be trained, often in the summers, before returning to their small communities. Efforts to create a standardized approach led to a tightly controlled system. Public Exams, which all students had (and continue) to write in order to graduate, were introduced to ensure that the education received by students around the province was of the same standard. Inherent in the results of those exams was the assessment of the quality of each teacher.

To situate the participants in this study, it is important to understand the historical context of education within NL because its related effects continue to have implications for educators and education in NL. Cultural attitudes about education are very difficult to shift, and remnants of a system of compliance and control, while being challenged and slowly shifting over time, can still be recognized in the current system.

A System Evolving

As all systems evolve, so has the education system in NL. In 2018, based on a government report (Collins et al., 2017), policy changes initiated system changes throughout the province. For example, a recognized need to move away from a medical-justification model of student support services to a more integrative approach spurred schools to begin shifting to a focus on culture in schools and collaborative structures that support student learning. The changes in policy sparked conversations in schools across the province about the purpose of education and the role of teachers. Simultaneously, the NLESD entered a partnership with Michael Fullan, a renowned educational leader in Canada and around the world. His team committed to working alongside the NLESD for three years to help give rise to a reimagined education system in NL (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The NL system was evidently in the midst of burgeoning change. Nevertheless, while the system had evolved and was ripe for more changes, historical attitudes and beliefs about teaching still influenced the teaching profession in NL. The context in which the current research was conducted was embedded in the grand narratives of the NL education system. Conversations about diversity, inclusion and privilege were also beginning to surface in educational settings in the province. As NL is among the least ethnically diverse provinces in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016) diversity of race, language, or even religion was less obvious in the population. However, conversations interrogating privilege and power emerged in response to more available examples of diversity such as identifying the availability of socioeconomic resources and urban/rural residency. The historical context that was changing and emerging throughout the province and by extension in schools, informed the polyphony of teaching identities of the participants. NLESD was on the cusp of change, and there was clearly an eye to the future and to how education might be reimagined. It was from this changing and evolving system context that participants were recruited.

Historical Influences on my Researcher Identity

The historical context of education in Newfoundland and Labrador also directly impacted how I planned the research study. In considering who to invite to participate, it was important to me that each layer of the organization was represented. I was conflicted about who from the Director of Schools role would fit and meaningfully contribute to the research conversations. The following excerpt from my research journal illustrates my consternation about participants and my experience of navigating an early research dilemma.

> *May 7, 2020*
>
> *As I consider potential participants, I am travelling a reflexive route. In the*
> *same way I believe we bring our experiences and our preconceived notions of*

power, privilege, and the identities of students and ourselves with us as we enter pedagogical relationships, I understand that as a researcher, the same holds true. I think about initiating this research study with a group of participants and the importance of being willing to learn together. I am struggling with the discomfort I feel in response to one layer of the organization. To openly come to a relational space of research and learning, I have to first address my unease with the Director of Schools (DOS) role.

I have spent a great deal of time thinking about whom among the DOSs I might invite as a participant. I have placed the onus of being a "good fit" for the research squarely on them. Historically, DOSs evolved from school inspectors— micromanagers, paper pushers, maintainers of the status quo. I understand those characteristics through system narratives, from a traditional historical role. On reflection, I have recognized my own biases that emanate from how I have viewed the role rather than how I know the people in the roles. As a researcher, my ability to enter the space of relationship with participants is limited by the lenses through which I view them. Simple questions might become a way of finding a route out of doubt and fear to one where I might enter a relationship of possibility. What do I fear? Why do I fear it? What evidence do I have that the preconceptions I hold about the DOS role are accurate? When I look at these simple questions it is obvious that the challenges I am feeling are being created by my own biases. In fact, the problem is not with finding a participant; it is about my fear of an unknown person, my unfamiliarity with the true nature of the role, and my unexamined biases.

The simple solution of looking in the mirror first also becomes a way

forward. I have to address the barriers and explore the shadows of my own bias,

position and privilege. This is an important learning experience for me in my

evolution as a researcher. To enter relational space with an openness to the

participant and to learning from and with each other, the lenses I am viewing the

others through will impact my research relationships. The onus is on me to open

the space of research.

This journal entry from early in the research process was important as it acknowledged

that I would face complex dilemmas as a researcher. For example, the assumptions and/or

potential biases I held, including my ability to recognize my own privilege, might influence how

I heard the stories the participants would tell. I needed to confront and address my biases to

authentically enter relational spaces with participants. To grow in my understanding of myself as

researcher also required I continually reflect on my thoughts and actions in that relational space,

a position clearly illustrated in the journal excerpt shared above.

Travelling Companions

A group of travelling companions were purposively invited to investigate with me how

teacher identity evolves and becomes a driver in entering pedagogical relationships. Fullan

(2018) encouraged educators—classroom teachers, principals, superintendents, directors, or

teacher educators—to consider themselves as teachers and to think about who their class was.

Carefully selected, the group comprised five teachers from NLESD, including the researcher as a

co-participant. As a result, the participant group represented each layer of the organization with a

teacher, principal, program specialist, director of schools, and assistant director of programs. The

roles of classroom teacher and school principal are common in education. Assistant director of

programs (AD), director of schools (DOS), and program specialist (PS) are roles found in

NLESD but not common across jurisdictions (see Table 1). Each participant is personally

introduced in the Discovery chapter, at which point they entered the research study as

participants.

The exploration of teacher identity and how it becomes pedagogy was a shared

endeavour in that the participants and I travelled this learning journey as research companions.

The journey offered an opportunity for personal and professional growth; this growth was

nurtured by sitting alongside each other, deeply listening to the stories shared, and contemplating

roads taken in our respective teacher journeys. The diverse perspectives held across the NLESD

and presented by participants provided insights and a more complete picture of the influences of

the system. Having all layers of the organization represented in the conversations created an

opportunity to think collectively about our individual actions and how they might contribute to

positive change in the NLESD.

Table 1

Positions Specific to NLESD

Position	Description of the Role
Assistant Director of **Programs (AD)**	● member of the senior executive of the NLESD ● works directly with CEO and AD (associate director) ● has regional responsibility for all programs ● works directly with directors of schools (DOSs), program specialists (PSs), itinerants, and school administrators
Director of Schools	● district administrative position ● works directly with school administrators ● member of regional senior leadership team

(DOS)	● responsible for a regional family of schools
Program Specialists **(PS)**	● regional curriculum specialists ● support teachers and administrators in schools in professional learning ● responsible for areas of K–6 curriculum, K–12 Reading, K–12 French, K–12 student services, and 7–12 curriculum

Looking Back, Moving Forward

There is a saying attributed to Lao Tzu: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Defining the direction and embarking on an exploration of identity as pedagogy was my first step on this research journey. I see this research as a continuation of my journey, which began long before my arrival at Nipissing University. By examining the understandings of who I am as a researcher that emerged as part of the process of conducting this study, I increasingly came to realize that—just as we teach who we are—when research journeys take us to deeply held places of the heart, we also research who we are.

Essentially, the Define phase of this journey was the process of coming to a question. It also served to confront some of my own barriers and biases and, thus, to better prepare me to enter sacred relational spaces alongside the other travellers with acceptance and openness. As a result, throughout the Define phase, I began to gain an in-depth understanding of the landscape, decide on a destination towards which to travel, and to contemplate how I might traverse the road ahead.

The following chapter, "Discovery," shares the journey taken during the Discovery phase. It explores and reflects on the themes that surfaced in our conversations, themes that—through data gathered, analyzed, and synthesized—examine who we are and where we have come on our teaching journeys.

Chapter 5

Discovery

Photo 4: Up the Gulch

Discovering

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is premised on our ability to understand "human existence as relational and to truly see others as vital co-creators of our mind, our self, and our society" (Sampson, 1993, p. 109). In AI, knowledge is socially constructed through dialogue; while this gives rise to shared understanding, participants also make personal meaning. Participants co-construct and "create knowledge in relationship" (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008, p. 195).

The Discovery phase of this AI was the point at which participants entered the study as partners in dialogue. In the Discovery phase, participants had the opportunity to find their paths into the research, and to consider what brought light (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) to their teacher journeys and, thus, became contributing voices in their teacher identities. Discovery was a grounding opportunity for participants to reflect on their storied experiences and to position

themselves within the questions of the study. Their reflections were guided by opportunities to

(re)consider the teachers they became, the people who had profound influence on their teaching

identities, and the formative experiences in their teaching lives.

The intent of questions considered in this phase was to look backward at our collective

stories (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, loc 2370), inward to draw on how those stories shaped

and changed how we understood ourselves (loc 2375), and forward to how we might act on the

learning gleaned from those stories (loc 2379). The questions helped us come to further

understand our "positive core" (loc 2614) or beliefs that are fundamental to our work. Our

consideration of the guiding questions also offered opportunities to think about what was learned

from challenging experiences and shadows, and to appreciate the "muscle of hope" that emerged

from darker times (McNerney, 2020) and buoyed us forward.

As previously referenced, Dewey's theory of continuity of experience also provided a

lens through which we viewed experiences as a continuous journey. Explorations of what led us

to where we were, as teachers, at various times and places along our journeys, began with our

early experiences in school and extended to experiences that continued and evolved throughout

our teaching careers. Continuity was essential as, being dynamic, teacher identity draws on many

experiences and encounters. For example, reflecting on lived experiences and learning through

them grounded subsequent understandings of our teacher identities.

The following sections detail the Discovery phase of the study. Themes arose from the

interviews/conversations in the Discovery phase, and these themes are discussed as a journey of

defining and understanding who we became as teachers. Our journeys are examined through the

lenses of Dialogic Self Theory (DST) and understanding of identity as polyphonic, as identified

in current literature and scholarly work related to teacher identity. I intentionally use *we* to underscore that I was both researcher and participant.

Routes of Discovery

Fellow Travellers on the Road of Discovery

     The four fellow travellers purposively invited to participate in the research study were all teachers and colleagues from the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). I had encountered each of the invited participants through my work at NLESD, in professional learning opportunities, while serving as members of committees, as leadership in the district, and as a staff member at the school my children attended. Through those encounters, I deduced that they placed relationships with children and colleagues at the centre of their work: They were thoughtful and reflective in their work, critically questioning how they contributed to the lives of others, reflecting on their own power and privilege, and committed to challenging the status quo of the system to create conditions for students to thrive. What I had observed in their practices and noticed during our interactions informed the decisions to invite them to participate in the current study. A description of the roles each participant held in NLESD is provided in the Define chapter (see Table 1, page 68). Introductions of the individuals (referred to here by pseudonyms) who comprised the participant group and brief explanations as to why they were purposively invited to participate follows:

- **Tory**, a teacher at a school in a semi-rural area of the province, had moved to Newfoundland and Labrador as an adult, having completed university and begun a teaching career. Her experiences as a student growing up in another province were a comparative perspective on the NL system. Her teaching experiences in northern communities had initiated her critical reflections on the privilege she held and continued

to inform her reflective teaching practice; thus she brought valuable cultural insights into the conversations. I met Tory through regional NLESD work and in supporting some teacher professional learning in the school where she taught. Having observed her engage with colleagues and work with children, I believed relationships were central to her beliefs about teaching.

- **Lina**, a school principal in a rural community, brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the research conversations. Lina started her career as a student assistant and then spent time in roles of every layer of the NLESD organization, from classroom teacher to Director of Schools (DOS). Lina brought another valuable perspective to the how the system functioned and on how power was experienced throughout the system layers. When the study was conducted, she was a school principal. Lina and I had worked on committees at the Ministry of Education as well as in district work. The ways she spoke about children—placing them at the centre of decision making—and supported professional learning of teachers—through invitation rather than insistence—indicated to me that relationships guided her practices as an educator.

- **Rex**, a Director of Schools (DOS), taught in both rural and urban communities throughout the province of NL. He, too, had held a broad range of positions within the various layers of the organization, including classroom teacher, administrator, guidance counsellor, secondments with the Ministry of Education, and leadership roles in NLESD. I first encountered Rex through my children in his role as guidance counselor at their school. Stories that came home of Rex at school always positioned him in a relational way with all children. He was also well-respected in the community and among his colleagues for his efforts to confront systemic barriers that existed in the school for families experiencing

poverty and the challenges of poverty that arise for the children. I had further

opportunities to engage with Rex through district and ministry committee work, where

relationships took a central place in conversation; reimagining the system was seen as a

consistent driver in his work.

- **Nel**, an Assistant Director of Programs (AD), had also experienced a long and winding

  journey in education. The roles of classroom teacher, principal, program specialist, DOS,

  and AD, contributed to her broad view of the educational system in NL, and of how one

  role informs and deepens understanding of others. My interactions with Nel were during

  her role as a district leader. Witnessing Nel's interactions with people (teachers, leaders,

  and children) across the organization affirmed for me that relationships guided her work.

  Nel was also committed in her role to the complex work of dismantling system barriers

  that existed for children and families and challenging the way things were with a view to

  the way things could be.

- As a co-participant as well as researcher, my role in the organization of Program Specialist

  (PS) was also considered as part of the polyvocal participant group. In the role of PS, I

  worked with teachers throughout the western region of the NLESD. The roles of

  researcher and participant merged during the study as I engaged through both these roles.

Each of our paths was unique yet shaped by experiences that brought us to our current

places in NLESD. As travelling companions, we began a quest to better understand how our

identities shaped ways we entered pedagogical relationships and, over time, became pedagogy.

Our divergent stories converged for a period of time, intertwined, and then diverged once more.

After the research conversations concluded, a new thread in the tapestries of our teacher

identities emerged, one that held the shared story we had created together.

The Discovery Interviews

To enter research conversations with participants it was essential to create a milieu of comfort and safety in which the conversations could unfold and research relationships with and among participants could evolve. Actions that served to foster such conditions are detailed in the following sections.

Establishing a Safe Environment

Conducting interviews necessitated consideration of the kind of interview methods to employ and the space in which they would happen to facilitate a "humane, intersubjective and responsive encounter" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 577). Semi-structured interviews are defined as interviews "with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the lifeworld of the interviewee" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.6). In other words, the semi-structured interviews were intended to open spaces of conversation and story sharing through which an understanding of the lived experiences that informed participants' teacher identities might emerge. Aligning the structure of the interviews with narrative inquiry and AI required "a flexible structure to allow participants to guide the conversation with their contributions" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 578). The semi-structured interviews I planned to conduct were more akin to conversations or storytelling that "positions the researcher as a participant . . .[so that] both parties become engaged in a collaborative process, the relationship builds and deepens as stories are shared" (Kovach, 2010, p. 43).

In all interview settings it must be acknowledged that an asymmetrical power relation exists (Brinkmann, 2018). As the interviewer, I initiated the research relationship through the invitation to participate. To establish a sense of shared power in the interview setting, the designated time of the interview was determined by the participant(s), as I was mindful of their busy schedules and the personal time they were committing to the research project. As with any

interview, the stories they shared were of their own choosing. It was also made clear that their

consent could be withdrawn at any time during the research study. Inherent in the position of

researcher is perceived power: "It is illusory to think of the interview as a dominance-free

dialogue" (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 588).

Establishing rapport was also essential to mitigate the perception of power and to create a

space for dialogue that reached towards shared power (Fortana & Frey, 2007, p. 708). The

interviews in the AI phases were responsive to the intention of each phase and, as such, both

individual and group interviews were used. The intention in the Discovery phase was to provide

participants with an opportunity to begin to connect their own experiences to the research;

therefore, individual semi-structured or conversational interviews were planned. Individual

interviews were also planned as a time to establish an element of trust and rapport between me,

as researcher and co-participant, and the participants. The intimacy of individual interviews

created a safe space in which to initiate our journey before coming together as a research group.

Another important consideration when beginning interviews was the physical location

and space. In this study, the interviews were relocated to a virtual space due to the COVID-19

pandemic shut-down. Fortunately, each of the participants had developed an increased level of

comfort with virtual environments during the shut-down. Further, even before the pandemic,

virtual tools were widely used within the NLESD as a means to mitigate the challenges a vast

geographical region presented. As a result of the participants' and my own familiarity with

virtual meetings, we found the Google Meet setting to be familiar and comfortable, which

allowed us to focus on establishing rapport and connection with each other.

Beginning the Conversations

The individual interviews were scheduled for approximately one hour. Prior to each of

the interviews, each participant was provided with background information about the interview,

an elicitation inviting reflection, and the questions that would focus our conversation (see Appendix B—Interview Protocol). For the Discovery interview, the elicitation was Parker Palmer's video *We Teach Who We Are* (2007), in which he offered a definition of teacher identity. With Palmer's definition in mind, the focus of the interview conversation was to think about what had shaped our identities, what had contributed to how we understood ourselves, what were the "inner and outer forces" (Palmer, 1998/2018, p.14) that made us who we are, and what, at that moment in time, influenced how we entered pedagogical relationships.

Interviews began with an invitation for the participants to share their stories of moving into education and eventually landing in the places they were at that point in their career as teachers. During the Discovery phase interviews, we also discussed the purpose of the study and what I hoped to come to increasingly understand through engaging in this research. The interviews were an opportunity to closely examine and discuss how experiences of the past became the stories we drew on when we considered our own selfhood, our identities, and the teachers we had become. Interview questions inquired into what had guided participants in becoming who they were as teachers: Participants were invited to cast their minds back over their teaching journeys, from their student days and on into their teaching careers, to identify influential people and experiences—voices in their polyphonic teacher identity. The following three guiding questions focused our considerations of teacher identity and pedagogical relationship in the Discovery research conversation:

- Who are we—including our roles in education, our educational background, and our teaching experiences?

- What are some of the voices in our polyphonic teacher identities?

- How do our teacher identities influence our pedagogical relationships?

Each of us entered the space with wisdom gleaned from our educational journeys, our families, and our teaching experience, as well as opportunities that further shaped how we understood ourselves as teachers and how we came to understand the context in which we taught. Despite our unique journeys, common influences—of families, early teachers and experiences, and mentors who inspired and guided us—and approaches to challenges emerged throughout the interviews. An underlying commonality from the shared stories was that our identities evolved in response to the polyphony of voices from our experiences—a polyphony that continued to inform how we entered into pedagogical relationships.

Expanding Polyphony

Readying myself for the initial interviews required both practical and personal preparation on my part; it was necessary to consider both what I needed to do and how I needed to be. While thinking about how to ensure that each participant felt comfortable and that enough space and time was made available to consider the questions and reflect on what the study was about, I also reflected on the study as my formal initiation into academic research. The following excerpt from my research journal paints a picture of my process as I prepared to make my academic research debut.

June 25, 2020

The research interviews begin today; I am nervous and full of self-doubt. I question whether I am ready to enter this space as the researcher and to guide these conversations in a good way (Kovach, 2010). On the cusp of beginning the interviews, I realize the novice I am. The challenge to find participants open to engaging in conversations about identity and, even more, willing to enter the space as a learner alongside me has found me questioning how things will unfold.

Now that the search for participants has been completed, the light has turned back on me and I wonder if this is a realistic journey upon which I have embarked.

Feelings of doubt are tied to my evolving identity. All disruptions to how we know ourselves cause angst—they are places of tension. I am learning to see myself in a new way, adding voices to my polyphonic identity. I am reconciling how I view the role of researcher with what I believe about myself. I am trying to reposition myself to hear another voice singing. The goal for me in this space of researcher is to be authentic, not perfect. For participants, this first interview is an opportunity to discuss the research and find their place in it. For me, it is a time to lean into this new definition of myself. Researcher. It doesn't fit comfortably yet.

Stepping into the role of researcher involved locating a changing nexus point in my teacher identity. Adding to my polyphony was the voice of teacher-researcher. Clearly, by acknowledging my doubt and unpacking what was uncomfortable, I began to understand how I needed to be in the conversational space as co-participant. There was a direct connection between my own beliefs about how to enter pedagogical relationships and how to enter research relationships; they both required showing up with ears attuned to the voices I needed to hear.

Emergent Voices

Conversations during the individual interviews looked back to the beginning of our journeys of becoming teachers and to early experiences in school. Experiences of being in school as students ourselves and then moving to the days as early teachers had long-lasting effects that impacted and shaped our teacher identity and informed how we enter pedagogical relationships.

Upon completion of the four individual interviews, I began engaging with the data through ongoing, constant comparative analysis, "comparing one segment of the data to another to determine similarities and differences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). Each interview was video recorded, enabling me to intently rewatch and relisten to the conversations without the pressure of listening to respond or probe, as was the case during the actual interview. In addition to noting the stories the participants told, while rewatching, I could be more attentive to facial expressions, pauses in speaking, and the ways they told the stories. I also transcribed the conversations so they could be reread in order to construct meaning from what was said. By revisiting the interviews through the recordings and the transcripts, and by noting common or recurring words, ideas, and similarities in the threads of the stories, I began to code and create categories (Glaser, 2008) to identify common ideas that had been expressed. In analyzing the data from the individual interviews, four initial themes surfaced:

1. **early school experiences:** Our early school experiences began to inform how we understood what it is to be a teacher.

2. **the influence of people who mattered:** There were people in our lives whose influences were significant in how we understood and defined ourselves as teachers.

3. **early experiences in the profession:** Early experiences in the profession were powerful forces in giving shape to our understanding of teaching and our movement towards who we believed teachers to be.

4. **experiences of the system:** Our experiences of the system as practicing teachers continued to affirm and challenge how we knew ourselves as teachers and were able to be our authentic selves.

Further explanation of the four themes and supporting literature follows. Excerpts from the transcripts of the Discovery phase interviews are included to illustrate stories that emerged.

Early School Experiences

Teaching is a unique profession in that when we enter the field we have already spent a considerable amount of our lives creating a picture of what teaching is; this picture is shaped by our personal stories of education (Olsen, 2008b, 2016). Teacher identity does not begin to form as we enter the profession, or even as pre-service teachers; rather, it is lifelong learning embedded into our teacher identities. This apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), strongly influences how novice teachers develop their understanding of the role of teacher and how teacher identity is developed over time (Vinogradova & Ross, 2019; Westrick & Morris, 2016).

Voices of their student selves, from early years through to university, contributed to the teacher identities of participants. This contribution could be seen, for example, in what participants remembered and/or found noteworthy about their early school experiences; while participants recounted strong memories of the feelings their teachers' actions generated, little about curriculum or the stuff of formal learning was shared in the interviews. Early educational experiences as students also contributed to, informed, and shaped growing understandings of teacher identity. Lina shared one of her earliest expressions of an emerging teacher identity:

> I have my yearbook from kindergarten and all the kindergarten students had their pictures and their ambitions written there. I said I wanted to be a teacher. I often say had I known at 18 what I knew at five I wouldn't have taken the long route around. But, I never would have been the teacher or the person I am now if I hadn't had those experiences.

Even in kindergarten, Lina recognized there was something about the role of teacher that appealed to her; she envisioned herself as a teacher. In school, as students watched and engaged with teachers, ideas and opinions were formed that contributed to an evolving understanding of the role of teacher. While at five years old Lina did not understand, from a teacher perspective, what it was to be a teacher, she engaged in what has become known as the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), and she began to form an understanding of what she thought teaching to.

Tory recalled how she began to develop ideas about the role of teacher through what she saw in her early teachers and how those teachers made her feel. She shared:

> I don't remember any classroom instruction. Nothing. The only thing I remember
> is curling her hair with a pencil. That was my image of a teacher. That was it . . .
> What I would call one of my role models was my Grade 9 teacher. Again, I don't
> remember a lot of content but he trusted us. . . . I do remember him teaching
> history. I remember that he told stories and it wasn't just dates and facts; it was
> stories. He was probably my biggest role model in my K–12 school.

Tory called forth memories of how she experienced the pedagogical relationship—welcomed into the intimacy of personal space while curling the teacher's hair, feeling trusted. In her experiences, Tory understood that the teachers welcomed personal connection. By extending trust to the students in Tory's Grade 9 class, the teacher communicated to the students that they were valued and honoured. Our recollected experiences of pedagogical relationships as students offered insights into how we might enter similar relational spaces when we became teachers.

Constructing an understanding of the role of teacher, from a student's perspective and through experience, continued throughout our formative years. Nel spoke of university

professors who entered into relationship in such a way that their impact on students was clearly felt. She reflected, "The teachers and professors I'm recalling, I can't say anything about the curriculum or the content or even the course . . . but . . . when I found myself in those classrooms I was in a good spot."

Conversations also touched on negative experiences of pedagogical relationships where the interaction between student and teacher was harmful to the student. Nel relayed an experience with one of her high-school teachers that caused us to consider negative relationships and their impact on how, early on, we grew in our understanding of the role of teacher. She shared: "In one of my courses in high school, I didn't go into the room; he didn't want me in the room, and I didn't want to be in the room. I showed up to do the tests. That was it."

As Nel shared the story of her high-school teacher, I also remembered my junior high social-studies teacher. I was thirteen years old and struggling to find myself. At parent teacher interviews, he outright told my mother he did not like me; he did not want me in his class. The memories of these teachers were vivid reminders for participants of lessons learned about teaching through negative student experiences. Pedagogical relationships, whether experienced positively or negatively, impacted how we came to understand the role of teacher. The experiences of being rejected by a teacher required we go into the shadows to explore them. Bringing them into the research conversations here provided an opportunity to look at them in the light and think about what more might be gleaned as teachers. Examining experiences that have long remained hidden in the shadows might lead us to make different choices than those our teachers did, learning, from their mistakes, to teach differently. We could come into pedagogical relationships in ways unlike the events we had experienced.

Our early school experiences also drew on what we witnessed in the lives of other students or those of family members as students. Vicarious experiences contributed to our understanding of what it meant to be a teacher. As an example, Tory remembered questioning the treatment of her friend who was in a remedial setting. She recalled:

> I was aware of students who weren't able to do the same work I was able to do, and being conscious of not making them feel bad. My high-school years were at the time when we had . . . Alternate 10 at my school. And I was really good friends with someone who went into that classroom and I could see his strengths even though it felt like he was in a classroom that didn't seem to challenge him in the right ways . . . it seemed like he was looked down on and it wasn't right.

Experiences of watching how other students were treated also contributed to shaping a teacher identity. Tory's recollection of her peer communicated unease with knowing that students were not always valued. The experience of watching someone close to us suffer the ill effects of school and pedagogical relationships was seen as influential in how each of our teacher identities emerged.

As teacher identities were evolving, we were also encountering system values that we would have to reconcile with our internal beliefs and experiences. Discomfort arose when who we were as individuals conflicted with communicated system values and gave rise to inner tension. The challenging experiences and resulting turmoil often remained unaddressed in the shadows. As Palmer (1998/2018) wrote, we are the result of all the things that happen in our lives, both good and ill. Similarly, the full breadth of our ongoing experiences was regarded as contributing, in varied ways, to our emerging identity as pedagogy.

The interviews consistently revealed that early school experiences were formative in shaping a narrative of what it was to teach and how one entered pedagogical relationships with students. Teachers who entered the space of pedagogical relationship with us as students communicated our deep worth; there was a knowing of the sacred through pedagogical relationships. Experiences of disconnection that revealed shadows to be exposed in the light—and learned from—were also discussed. Beginning at school entry and continuing through to graduation, students gather stories of lived experience through which they begin to define the teacher role. Considering the stories shared by participants in an appreciative way helped articulate what gave light to our teaching and generated voices in polyphonic teacher identities, and the underpinnings of pedagogical relationships.

Teaching as Relationship–Relational Research

The stories participants shared were "not external to participants' experiences, but are lived in some way by everyone who comes in contact with them" (Casey & Schaefer, 2016, p. 125). Parts of those stories were lived by others in various ways. During the conversations, I often found myself connecting to the stories, remembering experiences of my early years, and beginning to make connections to how I see teaching and see myself in teaching. I would often begin questioning my connections to the shared stories and, then, as a relational researcher, recognize the importance of those connections in effectively sharing the stories that would be offered to readers of the dissertation. The journal entry below serves to illustrate the process I engaged in to navigate my responses to the shared stories and reposition myself as participant researcher.

July 6, 2020

As I ponder the transcripts of the conversations about our school

experiences, I am continually enveloped by the stories of the participants.

Initially, I thought that it was best not to share my own connections with the stories of the other participants, but I am both a participant and a researcher. My stories are part of the uncovering of the experience of becoming a teacher. The stories of the other participants impact me, too, as I am travelling on this journey with them. It is difficult for me to sit in my own reaction to the story Nel told of the teacher who didn't want her in the room. I imagine how my mom. . . felt having a teacher say they didn't like her child . . . the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach in thinking about what if it were my child.

As I consider my reaction to Nel's story, I also think about what it is to be a relational researcher. I still hear remnants of a positivist paradigm that harkens back to objectivity and a researcher stance that is detached and objective; objectivity is not a goal in this work. I would put forth that I am fully invested in the stories and see the way my connections to the stories bring to the surface connections to the other stories in my experience and the experiences of others. I am beginning to understand that my connections to the stories, allowing myself to feel the stories, is also what will allow me to tell the stories in ways that others might also enter them. It is becoming more clear to me that research, like teaching, for me, is relationship. I bring who I am, my stories, my feelings, my early experiences of the journey, to the research relationships.

Morcom and Freeman (2018) wrote about differentiated meanings of *we* in Anishinaabemowin in her writing about building non-Indigenous partnerships. I see connections to her writing in so many other situations too, including the current research. There is *niinwi* meaning we, but not you. There is *giinwaa* meaning you all, but not us. Then there is *giinwi*

meaning you and me/us together (p. 815). I drew on this definition as I began thinking more about research relationships as a way of being with each other, learning from each other, and understanding that we can share each other's experiences. We, you, and me/us, together. I believe research that is shared and enters the sacred space between lends itself to being understood as giinwi.

The Influence of People Who Mattered

Another theme that surfaced from the stories shared in the interviews was of people whose influences were significant in understanding and defining ourselves as teachers. These were people who mattered to participants in significant ways, and their influence on our teacher identities was strong. From a Dialogic Self Theory perspective, these people were supporters (Vandamme, 2015)—people who helped us revise how we understood ourselves and view our own identities. As we engaged in conversations about family experiences—how they shaped our self-understanding and, by extension, how we came into teaching—their significant influences came to the fore.

For example, Lina described two people with whom she came into contact early in her career and who showed similar characteristics in how they interacted with others:

> They were similar, I guess, in their way. [Their] interactions would be the same
> really. . . . And, it's just caring and compassionate people. Caring, compassionate
> people, good listeners, who were able to make that connection with people. They
> are able to make that connection with people and build relationships with people
> in a very short time that could have such great impacts (on other people).

As she spoke of influential people in her life, it became apparent that attributes such as care and compassion and the ability to connect with people were very important to Lina. She

went on to recall that, when she worked as a student assistant, the teacher she worked with

encouraged her to consider pursuing a career as a teacher. She recalled the words of the teacher:

> "You know, you really have to go and do your education degree. There is nothing
>
> wrong with being a student assistant, I am not saying that there is anything wrong
>
> with that, but you need to be a teacher in a classroom."

That teacher's words of encouragement led Lina to pursue teaching. The way the teacher had

entered into relationships served as an example of how one might make a difference in the life of

another via the space of relationship.

Lina's stories about people in her life who were influential in how she saw herself and in

decisions she made about teaching also illustrated the profound effect seemingly insignificant

and casual interactions can have. She reflected: "There is so much about what happens in

education that is about the conversations that you are having with people that you don't even

realize how much it is going to impact or influence their life." In entering relational space with

each of the teachers Lina shared about, she described how she was impacted by what the teachers

said to her, how they treated her, and how they entered relational space with her. They took on

the role of supporters for her, affirming who she was and who she could become; in short, they

affirmed her ability to be a teacher of influence. Clearly, they became prominent voices in her

teacher identity.

Some participants also spoke of the significant influence their families had on their

views of education and teaching, and by extension, on the teachers they became. For example,

Nel shared:

> Both of my parents came from impoverished homes and they saw education as a
>
> journey out of poverty. They wanted their children to be educated so they

wouldn't have to live like that. I never got into education with a passion to get

kids out of poverty, but that notion that education could change lives was a

powerful presence in my family upbringing.

Nel highlighted understandings that came from interactions with her family. Nel's family

believed that education could be life-changing and therefore it was valued in their family.

Education offered a way to build a good life and to help others. The views of education held by

our families influenced how we understood being a teacher and understood the roles we might

play in the lives of others.

Rex also talked about the influence of his family, specifically about character traits that

he felt defined him—traits he was unwilling to compromise. In speaking about the teacher he

became and how he entered pedagogical relationships, authenticity was foundational to who he

was. He also knew and identified his family as the source of that foundation. He shared, "Oh I

can tell you, they [authenticity, humbleness] came directly from my dad."

The participants' desire to act in response to the effects negative experiences had on the

influential people in their lives surfaced throughout the conversations. For example, Tory shared

about her father's school experience. "He hated school," she said, vehemently. It was evident

from her tone that school was not a good place for him. She went on to say, "I always wanted to

be a teacher . . . almost to prove to him [dad] that teachers weren't such horrible people."

Knowing that her dad's experience of school was negative, Tory was emphatic she wanted to be

something very different from what he had known a teacher to be. His experience, like many

others for whom school was difficult, was not a light by which to be guided; rather, it was a

shadow to explore and from which to learn.

Mattering

Participants identified people with whom they had a significant relationship and who influenced both their decisions to go into the teaching profession and their ongoing journeys of becoming a teacher. The words and actions of people who mattered, the stories they shared, and the narratives exposed through their stories consistently highlighted that the extraordinary impact these people had on our lives often happened in ordinary situations and with unexpected results. The participants' stories of people who influenced them also prompted me to think about influential people throughout my teaching. Furthermore, I also began to realize the influence the participants' voices were having on my own thinking.

> *July 5, 2020*

> *Lina's description of the special people who influenced her along the way is also profound for me in what I learn about myself through these interviews— "You never know the impact they will have." Her words also lead me to think about my own impact. What might be the impact of how I enter the relational space with the participants? How do I show my respect for their stories? In these relationships, how do I open myself to learn from what they share? What am I learning through this experience that is shaping who I become as a researcher? I am coming to realize the way we open ourselves to the stories more fully is by learning to listen more, speak less—to step into the space of relationship with open eyes and ears so I can be open to what their stories are telling me. Active listening is hard work. It requires that I stay in the moment and not jump ahead to what I want to ask or how I want to respond. It requires that I sit with the ideas, hold space, let them take shape. Being in a research relationship where I am sitting with participants as a participant means I also need to open the space for*

each one of them. Going back to Lina's words, "you never know the impact you

might have"—I am learning I never know the impact the words of the participants

might have on me as a researcher.

Meier and Geldenhuys (2017) reflect on the power of AI to "become a joint transformative force" (p. 9) when participants openly engage in the process. As I reflected on the participants' stories of people who mattered to them, I visualized their transformational journeys as teachers. I also began to understand more deeply the impact their stories had on me and the (potentially) transformative power of research on the researcher. The potential of transformation was there if I could enter the research relationships openly, willingly accepting the learning offered through the privilege of being both a researcher and co-participant.

Early Experiences in the Profession

By the time we began our first teaching jobs, most of our lives had been spent in formal education. We had definite ideas about what teachers did, what students did, and the culture of school (Olsen, 2008b). Through processes of un-learning and re-learning, our thinking about the role of a teacher shifted; we saw things in different ways. Although the changes in how teaching was understood began in pre-service, our teacher gestalt was interrupted when we walked through the school doors as hired teachers. Contradictory messages of what it meant to teach had to be confronted and often contributed to arising uneasiness between perceived and experienced realities (Vandamme, 2015). From the research conversations, it was clear that participants' early experiences in the profession were instrumental in the formation of their teacher identity. Moving into the formal role of teacher, beliefs about teaching that had developed as an observer were compared to what unfolded from an inside vantage. Sometimes the observer and insider

perspectives were aligned and at other times they were misaligned. As a result of new

experiences within the system, however, the nexus points of teacher identities began to shift.

Tory described a powerful early professional experience that communicated what was

really important to her in teaching:

> It was one of my first staffroom experiences. I remember having a sharing circle
>
> where we talked about feelings. I'd never been in a school that talked about
>
> feelings before or addressed any issues like that! The only experience I had in a
>
> school was curriculum. . . . It was implied that this was a community. We were
>
> there to support each other. It wasn't just that we were all in this building and this
>
> is the curriculum we teach. It was very much about taking care of each other.

Tory's account of her first staffroom experiences as a teacher highlighted an early change in

thinking. As she recalled, "The only experience I had in school was curriculum." She was

referring to teaching in terms of a technical rational approach to the delivery of information

through technique and prescription (Hunt, 2019; Schön, 1983). The dichotomous position Tory

identified emanated from previous experiences in which rational approaches to teaching were

privileged; instead, she was experiencing teaching that started from a place of care. Noddings

(2013) put forth the idea of teaching from an ethic of care, which offers a change in how we

think about education and how we enact "pedagogical caring" (p. 69). Tory describes such a shift

of thinking early in her professional experience when she says, "It was very much about taking

care of each other."

Tory also shared how she felt when she found herself in a situation in which the way she

acted as a teacher was not how she believed she should. She said: "I felt horrible the whole year.

. . . I knew it wasn't the right way but I couldn't, somehow, get past what I was doing to do the

right thing." Tory's beliefs about how she should act were in contradiction to what she did, and the result was a full year of inner turmoil.

Participants acknowledged that, as novice teachers, they were placed in situations where what was believed and envisioned in the role of teaching was challenged by what was encountered in life in the school. From Tory's perspective, the contradictions were seen as positive; she was initiated into a world of teaching that started from a place of care and relationships. However, she had to navigate her beliefs when she found herself acting in ways that were not aligned with who she was. Participants also observed that experiences of this nature required finding a place of comfort, a stance that reflected personal beliefs and values, and one that may have been in opposition to what we were seeing enacted around us.

Novice teachers are confronted by decisions to either do what others do or to make different choices in how and who they will be as teachers (Olsen, 2008a). As discussed in the interviews, this often meant reconciling the discrepancy between how we saw ourselves and how we saw the system. Through the language of DST, this meant a third position came to light, a position where we not only acknowledged our own beliefs but also knew that it was necessary to find and take a different stance from what was being communicated by the system. Over time, we moved to new positions where we could both hold on to our beliefs and find comfort in our context.

Lina recalled gaining insight into teaching through what she witnessed as a young teacher:

> I saw lots of good teaching . . . and I also had experiences where I observed
> people and I thought . . . I am not going to do it like that . . . it came down to the
> way she interacted with those children, the way she cared for them . . . no one was

going to be embarrassed or not treated fairly. They were taken care of and knew

that they had a place, a safe place, in that classroom.

Lina's statement, "I am not going to do it like that," represented an important turning point in her

thinking; Lina decided that in her own practice she would challenge what she saw in her early

days of teaching. As novice teachers, the participants either found their practices affirmed by

those of other teachers, or they established themselves by carving a different route from what

they saw. Early teaching experiences are replete with instances such as Lina's described

experience. As a result of experiences, novice teachers find voices in their teacher identity; these

voices help construct a revised way of seeing and understanding who they are as teachers in that

particular place and time.

Along our road of self-reflection, it was important that we both understood teacher

identity as dynamic and continuously evolving in response to our experiences and looked back to

what guided our teaching journeys. Experience added to our polyphonies; early experiences

shaped and influenced our early thinking about teachers and teaching.

Continuous Early Experiences

The influence of my own early experiences in teaching continue to surface in teaching

and to inform the voices of my teacher identity. In reflection on the conversations with

participants, I began to draw on those early experiences and consider how they continued to arise

as my teacher identity shifted to include the voice of teacher-researcher. My thoughts about the

role of researcher were unfolding from my understanding of myself as teacher.

July 7, 2020

I am thinking back to my first teaching job. I had just finished my B.Ed that

spring and was hired at Simons Valley Elementary in Calgary. Offered the job on

the Friday before Labor Day, I hardly slept that weekend. I was so excited, so

nervous, feeling so incredibly lucky. That feeling of good fortune was not

misplaced. I met people who would inspire and support me at that school, and

who have journeyed alongside me throughout my career. The culture in that

school, where I was initiated into teaching, was built on relationships that

brought both teacher and student into a sacred space. Children were at the centre

and learning thrived when the conditions of the heart were at the core of our

work. I was only on staff at Simons Valley for three years. However, moving to

other places and other school settings was difficult because never again did I

have that Camelot experience in teaching.

Twenty-five years have passed since those first days, and now I am moving

into the role of researcher. Listening to the conversations in the interviews,

hearing of early experiences that were both inspiring and challenging, I think

about what I am learning through this process. I have reflected deeply on why my

experience at Simons Valley was as it was. It came down to the people. They

willingly entered the space of relationship with me. They were respectful,

honouring, kind, and caring. They were invested in my growth as a teacher. To

prioritize relationships and be authentic in this role, I need to genuinely enter the

space with participants in the way the teachers at Simons Valley entered with me:

respectfully, with honour, kindly, and with care. This is the researcher voice I

want to hear soaring above all others.

As I engaged in this research study, hearing the stories of participants, I also recalled

formative stories of my own early days as a teacher; I was fortunate to have been in a school

where the beliefs about teaching were steeped in relationship. The relational stance of the staff

and ethic of care that guided their work became a resonant voice in my teacher identity—one that I recognized as also emerging in my teacher-researcher identity. Noddings (2013) wrote, "How good I can be is partly a function of how you—the other—receive and respond to me" (p. 5). My openness and ability to step into a research relationship with participants will impact how those participants are able to open and share their experiences with me as co-participant/researcher. My own early experiences, and the spaces that were open to me to enter teaching, were tangible as I navigated how I understood myself in the role of researcher.

Experiences of the System

For participants, experiences of the system when we were students, when we first taught, and of which we were currently a part formed the context of the stories that informed, shaped, and contributed to further understandings of teacher identity. *System* here refers to the organization in which we taught, the beliefs about teaching and being a teacher communicated through policies from the ministry, and the stories of the districts and schools that both explicitly and implicitly define the paradigm in which it exists. The values and beliefs of school systems are manifested in schools, administrative stances, school cultures, and teacher practices; this is also the milieu in which teacher identity evolves and pedagogical relationships exist. Beliefs and values become the sacred stories of teaching (Clandinin and Connolly, 1996).

Within any system there is complexity. Stories of the system create a context in which teachers navigate complex relationships. The participants in the group who began their teaching careers in NL entered a denominational school system that had existed in the province for many years. Expectations of teachers were influenced by expectations of the church that governed it. Rex described how he discerned the complexity of such a system:

When I entered education we still had a denominational system. You could really

feel, I'll use the word *hierarchy*, for lack of a better term. The old expression of

who, not what, you are and those kinds of pieces never really sat well with me. I

don't think people should be judged for who they are; it's about understanding the

person and what they bring to the situation.

The words *hierarchy* and *judged* represent oppression, and indicate Rex's recognition

that teachers had to negotiate their teacher identity within a complex organizational culture. Such

systems, built on hierarchies and judgement, created conditions that forced teachers to grapple

with the inner conflict of conforming to system expectations. Hierarchy and judgement also

extended to pedagogical relationships, as how teaching was understood was informed through

the culture of the system. Rex used the phrase "never sat well with me" to refer to the idea that,

within the system, "who you were"—meaning who you were connected to— and "where you

came from"—your social status and the like—were critical factors in your acceptance and

success within a system. Rex clearly described a system that rewarded privilege and a resulting

tensions that existed for him. In other words, there was constant mediation of identity within a

social context; across the school system, there was a continuous process of positioning and

reconciling our teaching identity with expectations imposed by the system (Hong et al., 2017;

Toompalu et al., 2017).

Administrators played significant roles in how the participants, as teachers, came to

understand the systems in which they taught and their place in them. During the research

conversations, the notion recurred that principals, senior teachers, administrators, and system

leaders impacted teachers throughout their careers. Leaders were instrumental in interrupting

what teachers had learned about the education system as students through, for example, the

apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), and in helping them re-learn the system as a

teacher. Values, beliefs, and priorities were communicated, implicitly and explicitly, by those

leaders. Tory described an important lesson she learned by observing the treatment of a child in

the school where she first taught:

> I remember a student came to school dirty and hungry, hadn't slept because of
>
> whatever had happened in his home. Quite quickly, he was given food, he was
>
> given a cot to sleep on and so those needs were taken care of first. And so I think,
>
> implicitly, it was communicated what was the most important thing and the
>
> teaching could come later.

This powerful statement about what was important in that particular school emphasized

that care was the starting place for pedagogical relationships. It also described a school where

there was awareness of social conditions that were barriers for students, and specific attitudes

and actions of the principal that demonstrated how such inequalities might be addressed. As Tory

shared her story, it was evident that care was woven into the fabric of the school and was the

stance of the principal. Teaching, in that school, was about more than content and mandated

curriculum. The sacred story being crafted was about seeing the student first as human and

entering the pedagogical relationship from a place of care.

Some experiences in the system in which participants taught had positive impacts, such

as the guidance received from Tory's school administrator. However, conversations also

revealed that not all experiences were positive. For example, some stories highlighted a

disconnection between what was communicated about teaching through the system and what

participants themselves believed about teaching. To navigate the gap between the sacred story of

school and the participants' beliefs, they often lived secret stories (Clandinin & Connolly, 1996, p.4) in their classrooms. Rex described such an experience:

> I worked with a couple of difficult administrators in my career who didn't share
>
> the same beliefs and philosophy. I guess, for me*, all I could do at the end of the*
>
> *day was go into my classroom and be myself*, be authentic, and do what I could
>
> for those children who were entrusted to me.

It was important to unpack and discuss the challenges that resulted from suppressive situations in which the beliefs communicated by the system were misaligned with our own beliefs. At times, misalignment was addressed in our classrooms, in secret. As careers progressed, however, and people moved into leadership roles, this became more difficult; it was harder to simply follow what one believed when one was expected, as a leader, to uphold system values. Lina shared an example, related to her experience of being a principal, of the elevated importance placed on common, provincial assessments:

> That was a difficult spot to be in . . . because it flew in the face of what I believed
>
> about education and learning and priorities and how things should be happening
>
> in schools. We were very much top-down approach . . . and it was all about
>
> numbers.

Lina articulated a reality that existed for her as a principal who was expected to enforce the system expectations that "flew in the face" of her own beliefs about students and learning. In response, Lina listened to another voice that helped her navigate a different path forward. She became a buffer between the teachers on staff and messages generated by the system:

> I tried to protect teachers, and be honest with them, to keep it all in perspective.
>
> Not to be negative about it, because I didn't want to put it off as not being

important at all, because as a province that was important at the time. Just to keep

it in its place.

Lina's teacher identity, and the voices that emerged, guided her to reframe what she asked of

staff and to support them to be authentic in their teaching. While she acknowledged that the

assessments were important in the province at that time, for Lina, they did not take precedence

over the well-being of the teachers and students. Lina adopted a third position (Vandamme,

2015); rather than being someone who directed the work of teachers, she became someone who

compassionately supported the teachers in developing their practices.

During the conversations, consideration was also given to how participants responded

when tensions arose. Part of the process of reconciling identity within complex contexts involves

responding to tensions that inevitably arise. Furthermore, how we respond is both reflective of,

and contributes to, an evolving teacher identity. The need to be authentic and to serve more

children effectively was a driving factor in evolving teacher practices; this was highlighted in the

responses some participants shared. A common thread in these responses was that, in situations

in which beliefs and values differed from their own, the participants took steps to navigate the

tension. For example, Rex summarized his reaction to challenging situations:

Not being true to myself is one thing that doesn't work for me. If I can't stay true

to myself and stay firm in my values, then either the system needs to change such

that I can co-exist, or I need to move on and be somewhere where I can be my

authentic self.

For Rex to enter the sacred space of pedagogical relationship he needed to be authentic. Through

his words it was clear that he would try to make situations work, enacting small changes that fit

with who he was. If that did not work, he moved to a different role, which sometimes involved a

different school or location, where a greater sense of authenticity was possible.

Nel also shared why she made moves within the educational system; her desire to connect

was both a contributing factor and core to her teacher identity:

> I always progressed to reach some point where I thought I would help more
>
> people. If I was in this position, or if I was a principal I could help more students.
>
> Or as a principal, I could help more teachers, then I could help more students. Or
>
> a program specialist would allow me to help more teachers . . . or a director of
>
> schools . . .

Nel's desire to help students linked back to another voice that sang for her, the one professing

that education was a means through which people could be lifted out of poverty. Underlying

drivers and voices in polyphonic identities served as impetuses to find places where authenticity

and greater efficacy in pedagogical relationships were possible.

As teachers within an historical NL system, there were conditions throughout the

participants' teaching journeys that caused them to experience visceral tensions between their

own beliefs and the system stance. These tensions arose while they were classroom teachers,

school leaders, and system administrators. To address the discomfort felt in their roles and to act

in ways that honoured what they believed, participants made decisions about directions they

would take in their teaching lives. There were times when they stayed in the school but acted in

ways that they were comfortable with and that aligned with their beliefs in their secret stories in

their classrooms. In other instances, they left their positions in hopes that a new role or location

would be a better fit. They also moved into more senior roles in which the ability to shift the

system seemed possible. Participants underwent change in response to the tensions created by

situations in which authenticity was not possible These changes contributed to their teacher identities as they reconciled who they were in new places and situations.

Continuous Experiences on Changing Landscapes

As a co-participant, there was much to consider and reflect on throughout the research conversations. Looking back on how and why I made certain research decisions, it was clear to me that my own impetus for change was intertwined with the desire to listen to the compelling voices of my polyphony. At one point in the interviews, Nel responded to another participant by observing, "You said you had to step out of your comfort zone. As you were articulating what you did, it struck me that you stepped IN to your comfort zone." Nel's statement seemed to summarize many of the responses that challenged or created places of tension for us as we traversed the landscape of teacher identity; we all sought the comfort of authenticity and of being fully ourselves in the spaces of pedagogical relationships. I, too, was prompted to think about how I responded to internal tensions that arose throughout experiences on my teaching journey.

July 7, 2020

In poring back over the interviews, I am struck by the realization that moving to comfort, looking for the place where I would finally be comfortable, does not just drive my teaching—it has been the push for major life changes for my family. I think back to moving across the country in an effort to find a school system that aligned with my beliefs about education and teaching. What is glaring at me from the pages of my journal and from the interview transcript is that the struggle to be authentic, to honour one's teacher identity, has also been an experience of others. For some, that struggle has led to changes in schools or positions. For me, in addition to moving into different roles within school systems, it has completely

upended our family reality in hopes of getting closer to what I know can exist and

I hope to find.

     Now I have taken on a new role, that of researcher. An obvious question

pertains to if this is another move towards contentment. I believe it is, and

strangely, after engaging in this Discovery phase, I am not unsettled by that.

Rather I am reassured. I am reassured because, in this role, I have an opportunity

to share these stories that question and challenge the system, infusing new stories

within the system. I can share the stories of participants who entered the realm of

discomfort in order to reconnect their work with their beliefs, to contribute to the

enormous task of never-ending change that all systems require, and to find the

voices by which to be guided in their journeys. The stories offer fuel for thought;

sitting with stories of this nature can light paths forward that might inspire

learning; and living through and navigating tensions will forge a new path, a

third path. I am learning that my desire to research, to uncover stories, is a voice

that has been singing softly all along, and to it I am becoming more attuned.

Perhaps a third path emerges from my researcher identity?

Moving into the role of researcher has brought further opportunities to reflect on my

teaching journey and how it has shaped my teacher identity. Looking internally at my challenges,

my tensions, and my responses has also prompted me to consider how leaning into the tension—

or, as Nel phrased it, "moving into comfort"—as a researcher is essential. Much can be learned

from looking back to move forward.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

Now I have become myself. It's taken

Time, many years and places;

I have been dissolved and shaken,

Worn other people's faces

—May Sarton, "Now I Have Become Myself"

In the Discovery phase, participants and I shared and explored personal journeys that

shaped our teacher identities. It was a time to reflect on the processes of our becoming as

teachers and the significance, for each of us, of identity as pedagogy. We had opportunities to

hone in on the voices that comprise each polyphonic composition of teacher identity. Four

themes surfaced from the constant, comparative analysis of interview data. These themes

described major influences on teacher identity: early experiences in school, people who mattered,

experiences moving into teaching, and experiences of the system. To reiterate, I also considered

the many faces I have worn in my own becoming, the discoveries I am making through research,

and through conversations about my own teacher identity and emerging understanding of myself

as researcher.

In the next chapter, "Dream," participants began with a side-trip into the shadows; we

sought to interrogate and explore the grand narratives that permeated our current system

(NLESD) in order to understand the starting place of the dream. From there, we worked to

imagine a system in which pedagogical relationships were paramount and the sacred was felt and

understood by all those who were part of the system. Through the sharing of personal metaphors,

we proceeded to describe, consider, and imagine how teaching might be if, as in Palmer's

metaphor of the Möbius strip (Palmer, 2014), what existed on the outside of our Möbius strip—

the system—was considered in harmony with what was embodied on the inside—our teacher

identities.

Chapter 6

Dream

Photo 5. Misty in Fox Valley

In the Dream phase of an AI, participants begin to imagine and articulate conditions in which they would thrive. In the current study, envisaging conditions needed to thrive involved first acknowledging the current conditions in which the participant group taught and where pedagogical relationships occurred. Through extensive contemplation of how we, individually and collectively, experienced and responded to the current system, we also began to orient our thinking towards the future.

This chapter describes the Dream phase. First, considerations are given to grand narratives that historically permeated the NL system, some of which directly influenced our ideas of the current nature of teaching, learning, and pedagogical relationships. The chapter then

moves to routes we had yet to explore as we imagined a system that might better nurture

pedagogical relationships.

Roads Travelled and Routes to Forge

Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness can we discover the

infinite power of our light.

—Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly*

The central intention of the Dream phase is to turn towards an inspired and hopeful future

(Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) and consider how to create a reality in which those dreams

might manifest. A Möbius strip is a "single-sided surface with no boundaries" (Alagappan, 2021,

para 1) that is formed when a rectangle is twisted once and attached to create a continuous side

that is sometimes on the inside of the strip and sometimes on the outside. Palmer (2014) used the

metaphor of the Möbius strip to describe the way in which our inner life sometimes becomes our

outer life and also the converse. The outside surface (events, experiences, feelings) is influenced

by the conditions around us—the context here being the beliefs and values of a system. Such

conditions can cause pressure on individuals to act in ways reflective of those systems. Tensions

then arise between what is on the outside and our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on the inside. In

short, when inside and outside voices are in harmony, we are better able to be our authentic

selves.

To begin thinking about a system in which pedagogical relationships would thrive,

participants were asked to view the video *Life on the Möbius Strip* (Palmer, 2014). In the video,

Palmer contemplates the experience of the inner and outer alignment of the Möbius strip in life.

To extend the metaphor of the Möbius strip directly to our inner and outer lives, the participants

and I first looked to define the outer space. Knowledge of a system is communicated in the

messages, values, and theories that deeply are embedded within the system (Clandinin & Connolly, 1996). Such knowledge, understood through the sacred stories of the system, becomes part of the consciousness of teachers. To explore how we understood the system in which we all taught, we looked to describe the grand narratives that permeated beliefs and actions of teachers, students, and families within the current NL system.

Although AI positions inquiry as looking to a positive future, there are also times when it is important to journey into the shadows of our experiences to find our way to the light (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020a; Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Grant & Humphreys, 2006; McNerney, 2020; Verma, 2020). Explorations of the system of which we were all a part, combined with critical considerations of how it informed our thinking, were important to set a context for considerations of the future we would envision. Thus, we began with an openness to enter into the shadows too, not only acknowledging challenges of the system, from which we could learn, but also identifying the kind of future we hoped to create. In other words, to bravely move forward, we had to own our own story (Brown, 2010) and authentically approach the future with understandings of the past (Verma, 2020).

Roads Travelled

I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live.

—Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*

In contextualizing the research conversations of the Dream phase in the current system, the influence of the history of education in NL was continuously apparent. King (2010) wrote that stories can chain us, making it difficult to move past them, and themes that surfaced from

the data of the Dream conversations clearly underscored that the NL system was chained to some historical stories that were infused in both individual practices and the system as a whole. Lina articulated her feeling that some of the challenges in the system existed because attitudes and beliefs were

> so deeply embedded in our culture of education for so many years, the
>
> experiences of our parents and grandparents, and the way that things have
>
> happened for so long. [It would take] a whole cultural shift to make a move that
>
> would change the grand narrative of what we're doing as educators and of our
>
> system.

Although the system was undoubtedly evolving, the research conversations regarding the challenges of working within the system revealed three overarching themes:

1. **system as hierarchical**: The system positioned people within hierarchies with school board/ministry personnel at the top and students at the bottom.

2. **system ensconced in technical rationality**: The system emphasized a prescriptive curriculum and a technical understanding of teaching steeped in technical rational approaches (Mockler, 2011, 2013; Schön, 1983 Tan, 2020).

3. **teacher as maintainer of the status quo**: The system was focused on equality rather than equity.

The following sections explore these three main themes in more detail and demonstrate how the NL system was understood by participants, particularly in connection to the historical context; how the themes have influenced teacher identity; and how we, as a group of educators in the system, were positioned to enter pedagogical relationships within that system.

A System of Hierarchies

From an historical point of view, it was understandable that the educational system in Newfoundland and Labrador evolved from and sustained hierarchical structures and attitudes. As described in "Situating the Research in the Historical Landscape" (Chapter 4) the establishment of schools in NL was largely directed by church oversight (Johnson, 1985; McCann, 1998). Over time, a central authority was established that was dedicated to creating equal economic opportunities for both rural and urban children through a common curriculum and public testing. (Johnson, 1985; McCann, 1998).

Through the research conversations, it also became clear that understandings of power and historically established narratives continued to influence the identities of teachers in the NL system today. Nel spoke of being aware that hierarchical understandings still existed in her interactions as assistant director:

> Just that statement that I am someone's boss—I have a lot of trouble living in that
> world. What I'm finding is that it means a lot to some people, people who work
> with me and people I work for. Sometimes, because it means very little to me, I
> might cause confusion, or people might need to see it in some different kind of
> way. For us as a region, to do what we need to do, we need everyone on deck. We
> need everyone to paddle in the same way. If we go at it from a hierarchical
> perspective . . . no one's going to do anything unless the AD tells them to.

Nel evidently recognized the remnants of a firmly entrenched hierarchical system in how people saw her, how power was interpreted, and how there was adherence to an historical system structure. She also brought to light the need to reimagine the system as a flattened organization with shared power and everyone involved contributing to instigate much-needed change.

Rex also highlighted the hierarchical structure of the system and how it impacted his ability to make a difference in his various roles. He explained the challenges that arose for him:

> And because I'm not one who believes in this hierarchy, I don't see myself as being better than anybody else because of my position. Titles don't mean anything to me. I'm in a job and I'm trying to make a change, trying to make a difference.

Hierarchical approaches to leadership involving power and position minimized Rex's ability to contribute and make a difference. As a result, tensions arose for him in how he was able to fulfill what he saw as his purpose in education.

The shared narratives of the system communicated and reinforced understandings of how to live one's role within the system. For example, the hierarchy described in our conversations was regarded as oppressive (Freire, 1970/2000), exerting tremendous power over those within the system, including teachers and students. In the experiences of both Rex and Nel, decisions were imposed from the top levels of the system, leaving teachers and students with no voice. The ability of teachers to act in authentic ways sometimes required navigation of difficult conditions.

Our research conversations extended beyond the potential oppression of a hierarchical system into considerations of the difficult road trodden to navigate teacher identity within that system. Freire (1970/2000) provided insight into who people become within an oppressive system, arguing that the oppressed tended themselves to become oppressors. Participants noted that navigating the space between what was expected and who we knew ourselves to be was, at times, very difficult. For example, Tory highlighted the way expectations of the system permeated understandings of leadership. She shared a personal and painful reflection of how system expectations had influenced her own initial leadership stance:

> I felt like I had to be the leader, meaning I had to take control and I had to do
>
> everything. I was not a compassionate person. I was pretty judgmental . . . I've
>
> never thought of myself as better than anyone, but I acted that way that year. I
>
> was not open, I didn't share concerns, or if I did, they were superficial. I checked
>
> on that person's work. I was not who I wanted to be as a colleague.

Through her lived experience, Tory had unconsciously developed critical understandings of how leaders behaved in a hierarchical system. Although Tory had witnessed other examples of leadership, her own actions still did not reflect "who she wanted to be" in that role; rather, they demonstrated how she understood who she was *supposed* to be in such a position. Through sacred stories (Clandinin & Connolly, 1996) that Tory, as a teacher in the system, came to know, she described an implicit understanding of what was meant by leadership within education and discussed how this understanding manifested itself as she moved into an early leadership role. As Freire (1970/2000) indicated may happen, Tory subsequently adopted a style of leadership whereby she exerted power over others. Only when she was able to step back and reflect deeply on how she was enacting a leadership role herself was she able to challenge the narrative by being and becoming more authentic and relational.

Nel also recounted an experience that brought to light the top-down nature of hierarchy that extended to decisions made for and about students. Her story created a picture of the lack of power students had at the bottom of the hierarchy:

> I think of one particular student when I was principal of a high school. There was
>
> a lot of poverty. Her dad died and her mom was unable to look after her. She
>
> ended up living in a home with her brother and it was a home that, for lots of
>
> reasons, I thought placed her in a fragile position. She was living with her brother

and through the course of information we received and working with social

services, I entered into the space where I had her removed from the home. When I

was finally able to repair the fractured relationship, she communicated to me that

that was the safest time she had ever been in her life. Her brother was the one

person in her life with whom she felt safe—the source of security. And so,

although her lived experience was nowhere near the lived experience of *my*

children, it was what she wanted and needed at the time. I was part of a system

that disconnected her because I had an opinion about what was better for her.

In the situation Nel described, the student had no voice. Well-intentioned but potentially

misguided decisions were made for and about her (even by Nel), without an opportunity for her

to add her voice to her own story.

Experiences of teaching and of entering pedagogical relationships within a hierarchical

system involved reconciling the inner and outer forces along our personal Möbius strips. We

learned to make decisions because of our positions in the system. Yet, upon reflection, we often

came to points of tension because our actions, as Tory described, were not always congruent

with who we wanted to be. Pedagogical relationships—in which we see the other, honour each

other, and act with care and humanity—were also regarded as difficult to forge when coming

from a position of power and judgement. Reflectively and reflexively thinking deeply about our

experiences within a hierarchical system, and about how we might break those patterns of

hierarchical relationships, opened paths for us to think about how we might enter pedagogical

relationships differently in a system we envisioned and dreamed together.

Navigating Personal Hierarchical Landscapes

Hierarchies permeate systems in subtle ways, including through language. Through word

choice, inflection, humour, and tone, messages are communicated about values, beliefs, and

expectations. It is critical that a researcher consider how to create an environment of safety and comfort that enables participants to authentically engage in conversations. As we sat together as a group, remnants of an historical system were never far from mind as we all brought our lived experiences into the space.

July 13, 2020

As I sit in the research conversations, I can't help but be transported back to our work roles and the conditions that continue to exist there. I think about being in meetings where I hear language that reflects a culture reproduced. The conversations of leadership still reflect a language of top-down management and ownership, even though the desire to move beyond that culture exists. I hear phrases like "my teachers," "in my school," and "how can I get my teachers to . . . ?"—language that positions principals at the top of the school pyramid. The pyramids within the system have various top layers—principals in schools, District leaders, the Department of Education—each positions students at the bottom and communicates a narrative of power over others.

I wonder how the participants are influenced by the system hierarchies upon entering the conversations of this research study? I think we have entered not as positions but as learners and participants. I think they are feeling safe in this space. However, there are reminders that occasionally surface for me, that this person is my boss or this person is a principal. I try to create and recreate conditions where we see each other through a lens of learners alongside, not through the hierarchies we know. Through my researcher lens, I also need to remind myself to come back to a flattened view of the organization; we are all just

people in roles. We are learning together and the voice of any one participant

doesn't hold more weight simply because of the position they hold.

Recognizing the influence the system had exerted on my own thinking and attempting to address this were important considerations for me, as researcher. The influences of the historical NL system continue to present challenges for all of us—challenges that must be navigated, for example, by disrupting thinking that veers in the direction of hierarchy, and being willing to enter the uncomfortable spaces anti-oppressive teaching and researching call us to reside in.

A System Ensconced in Technical rationality

The roots of education in NL reflect a positive intent; the goal of increasing education levels and bolstering economic prospects without financial means or infrastructure presented a daunting task. The system that emerged depended upon churches to make educational decisions (Hillier, 2011)—decisions more often made "to safeguard denominational interests than to promote sound educational principles" (Wilson, 1968, p. 5). Such a structure made the progress of the education system difficult and inequitable.

In efforts to ensure students from all areas of the province had equal access to an education, prescriptive measures were employed. A technical rational approach to teaching was adopted to solve perceived problems of education. The approach focused on technique, on following a procedure or rational series of steps to continually achieve the same outcome (Wen & Kim, 2016). Initiatives were adopted that standardized *what* was taught through prescriptive, mandated curricula and *how* it was taught through the purchase and provision of authorized resources; it was perceived that all students in the province had equal access to the same education. To further ensure that conditions were the same for all students, regardless of context, oversight of teachers by school inspectors was increased, and public exams were administered.

Teachers were held accountable by the amount of information students were able to recall on provincial tests, tests that, at various points in time, were worth one hundred per cent of the students' grades. While the provision of education for students throughout NL was an admirable goal, the actions taken to achieve that goal focused on technical and rational approaches; that is, teachers taught curriculum, not children.

Data surfacing from our conversations made clear that sacred stories of the system still related directly back to school inspectors and public exams; the system continued to be focused on the dissemination of information through prescribed curriculum, and public exams still tested how much information students retained. Students were awarded, rewarded, and ranked according to their ability to take tests, and teachers bore responsibility for how students performed. In short, the system was (and is) focused on teaching as a technique and sustaining a testing culture that assured that technique was successful in delivering learning. Tory captured the projected responsibility of the teacher this way: "I thought my role was to teach curriculum, not teach children." Within the system, a focus on children was removed from the centre of teacher practice and replaced with technical tools that would allow teachers to measure the success of their teaching, first and foremost, through the success of students on provincially administered tests.

As Nel recalled, this focus on technique and testing was reflected in the system culture from primary to high school:

> For me, a grand narrative is that the public exam is a true measure of a child's
>
> success in school, K–12. And that narrative permeates through our entire system.
>
> We have teachers in elementary school who think they are preparing kids for the
>
> public exams (publics). We have teachers in Grades 7, 8, and 9 who think their

> job is to prepare the kids for the publics, and then teachers in high school who
>
> think their *only* job is to prepare kids for the publics.

Nel's comment illustrated that the public exam was of such importance that all teachers across the grades worked to prepare students for it. Beginning in the early grades, children were taught information and tested on their recall as the measure of learning, a method that culminated in the public exams. Throughout the system, it was implied that the public exam was the ultimate measure of learning. Students who scored well on those exams were awarded scholarships, and their teachers were elevated in status. The success of the teachers came from fidelity to the model set forth by the authorities—a model to which teachers were mandated to adhere.

Lina discussed how messages regarding what was of value and what to focus on were transmitted from within the system to teachers, and highlighted the public judgement that followed when students did not perform well:

> I sat in rooms when schools were all ranked and you know, put on the screen.
>
> This is where our school was and within that school if there were multiple classes,
>
> well then it was the teachers and the names of the teachers, you know it was the
>
> top scores in the school, to second, third and that kind of thing. So it pushed
>
> people to do some things that I don't think they really believed about education.

The evident tension teachers felt was apparent in Lina's words. The value placed on the exams led teachers to question and perhaps discard elements of teaching that they knew supported children in their learning. Tensions also arose around pressures to disregard what was known intuitively and through reflective practice (Schön, 1983). Teachers acted in ways that were different from what "they really believed about education"; their actions were not aligned with their beliefs.

Sitting within places of tension, teachers were faced with the difficult challenge of reconciling the misaligned beliefs of the system with what was known and understood about the children whom they were teaching. Some teachers, as Lina indicated, did things they in which they did not believe. Others moved out of grades in which there were full district assessments with public sharing of results to grades where they could have some anonymity, even though the exams were supposedly a reflection of the work being done across the school, not in singular classrooms. Rex recalled the effects the pressure had on teachers. He shared, "I remember CRTs [the district assessments]. The poor teachers would be stressed to the hilt. I'd have to do counselling with teachers, trying to get them through it." High levels of stress were common among teachers, and could be attributed both to judgement that would be heaped upon them based on student results (as observed by Rex) and to the need to do things they didn't believe in (as observed by Lina).

As our conversations unfolded I reflected on an experience I had that affirmed that, while things were changing in the system, there was still a lingering belief that we could direct and prescribe away all the challenges that were present. I recalled a conversation that highlighted how persistent the belief in the effectiveness of a technical rational approach to teaching continued to be: In a school I supported as a reading specialist, the administration was focused on reading scores they felt needed to be addressed. The administrative team's strategy for addressing the perceived gap was to insist that all teachers use a specific commercial program for literacy instruction. The message delivered by the principal was that this program—not something that merely looked like this program—would be adhered to in every classroom. Further, the commercial program was to be delivered with fidelity and not watered down. For example, when the administrator walked into any classroom in the school and asked students

what they were doing, he wanted them to be able to name one of the program's stations. The

administrator's insistence on use of a specific program reaffirmed the practices of the past and,

for me, demonstrated a complete faith in a technical rational view of teaching.

A desire to create equal access to educational opportunities for children throughout the

province appeared to be the impetus for reliance on technical rational approaches to teaching.

The problem, however, was that, rather than help the system reach its intended outcome of

opportunities for children, a technical rational approach was a wrong driver or "a deliberate

policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired result" (Fullan, 2011, p. 3). What

ensued instead was a system in which the expertise of teachers appeared to be measured only by

whether they delivered curriculum in a way that enabled students to demonstrate their learning

by scoring well on exams. In sum, the focus of education shifted away from students, and

teachers' professional and practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1997) was discounted.

The sacred space of pedagogical relationships is sullied when there is judgement and fear, and

we cannot be our authentic selves. The group consensus here consistently reflected the view that

authentic pedagogical relationships cannot exist where children are seen, not for their inherent

value, but merely as the means to validate teacher expertise.

Navigating A Technical Rational Understanding of Teaching

The reliance on technical rational approaches has been written about extensively (Hunt,

2019; Mockler, 2011, 2013; Schön, 1983 Tan, 2020; Wen & Kim, 2016); it is by no means a

challenge faced solely by the NL system. During the entire research process, I continued to

reflect on how I too have been influenced by beliefs about technical rational approaches, and I

sought to recognize how such beliefs might also show up in my research.

July 13, 2020

I remember when I was a new teacher being evaluated by the assistant principal of the school. Although emergent curriculum drove the learning culture among teachers in the school, hidden deep in my understanding of teaching was a belief that teaching was a technical rational exercise. For the observation day, I reverted to telling teaching, following a script, covering curriculum, rather than providing space for children to uncover and discover; a belief in the technical rational approach was wired into beliefs I had about real teaching. I was fortunate to be in a school where I was also being coached. The assistant principal, Jane, sat with me and together we compared how the students had been learning all year and what I had planned for the observation day. She challenged me to show who I was as a teacher. This was at the beginning of my career when I did not have years of teaching experience to unpack, but I had years of student experience through which teaching had been observed, and a technical rational understanding was infused in my beliefs.

Ensconced can mean both embedded and hidden. As I think about how insidiously the belief in technical rational was embedded in my understanding of teaching, I also wonder if it is hidden in my understanding of research. Following a framework could make it difficult to also let the conversations go to the places they need to. As I am listening for meaning, reading and re-reading transcripts, thinking about what is said, I am coming to realize the importance of holding space with participants. There is a temptation to move the conversation along, but the importance of ebb and flow in conversation will bring deeper, personal understanding. I am also reminded to check myself to make sure that the hidden

belief in a technical rational approach is noticed and acknowledged if it creeps

into my thinking as I move along the path of researcher. I have permission to

follow many paths and find the story this study tells and to also find who I am in

research. Just as permission and understanding were important to interrupt my

thinking as I became a teacher, they are important now as I become a researcher.

Katz and Dack (2013) describe learning as a permanent change in behaviour that often

requires an interruption in thinking patterns. Interrupting a reliance on technical rational

approaches can lead to changes in teaching and in research. In turn, rather than imposing a route

from the outset, these changes may help navigate a way forward that responds to the paths

students, and participants, guide us towards.

A System in Which the Role of Teacher Was Maintainer of the Status Quo

In the same way reliance on a technical rational approach to teaching emanated from a

positive intention of the NL system, so too did the understanding of the role of the teacher.

Returning to the historical beginnings of education in NL, a common challenge was that the

teachers had little or no training, and their own education was often limited (Higgins, 1997).

Hence, a heavy reliance on oversight and management of the teachers evolved to ensure they

followed the prescribed curriculum; the role of the teacher was to deliver a curriculum and

ensure students who made it through the grades were able to pass the public exam. As Nel

described it, "We could police ineffective strategies and pedagogy; we could police them into

good pedagogy if we had some way to measure teacher success." Teacher effectiveness, or

perception of a lack thereof, was directly linked to and measured by the students' success on

public exams.

Historically, the role in which teachers were positioned was a conduit between decision-makers at the top of the hierarchical pyramid and the students at the bottom. As teachers focused on curriculum rather than children, and prepared students for tests by giving more tests, the intended outcome of educational opportunities for all students ultimately excluded many students. The barriers created by a testing culture acted contrary to the purpose for which the system was created, which was to ensure all teachers taught a common curriculum, thereby hypothetically affording all students equal educational opportunities. Instead, the opposite effect ensued; by enforcing practices with narrow measures of assessment that carried high stakes, the system privileged certain learners and disadvantaged others. Elements of such a system continued to hold; teachers, and the system that was created to help improve lives, became a way to maintain the status quo.

While the sacred stories of schooling were derived from historical influences, it was also acknowledged that remnants continued to be felt by both teachers and students throughout the system. Nel articulated it this way:

> When I look at our system, collectively, I'm just so disappointed, most times
>
> about how the story that I don't believe is just still so prevalent. And we have
>
> so many kids who don't want to be in school, who see no purpose in school.

While it was difficult to accept that schools still carried stories that challenged us as teachers, it was important to acknowledge that those stories still existed. Immense work was invested in creating a system of education in NL that offered educational opportunities for all children. Although a heavy hand and a desire for uniformity had the unintended consequence of further disadvantaging and disenfranchising some, the system was very firmly established. Unintended effects continued to be felt by students and their families, and teachers continued to interpret a

story that did not honour those who did not fit within the strict parameters of how success was

defined. Inevitably, many of those students saw no purpose or hope in school.

Rex shared a story about teaching in a small community early in his career that highlights

a lack of recognition of what students could do outside of school learning:

They talked about some of the kids in a community who, if you looked at the

report cards, weren't doing well academically. But, an older gentleman once said

to me, "You know, if you talked to him he can put an ass in a cat." And that's

how they looked at it because this young fellow had very limited reading and

academic skills, but you put a piece of machinery in front of him, and he could

take it apart, put it together, and get it to work. So he had skills and they valued

that. . . . They looked at learning differently. And I think in some respects,

because of the assessment culture that we've created in the system, we beat that

focus on learning and the individual out of people.

It was evident that the child Rex spoke of was an avid learner. However, his opportunities might

have been limited by how learning was viewed and measured in the education system. Rather

than education providing opportunities for this student to excel by harnessing his passions, Rex

felt it took opportunities away by focusing on his perceived deficits. Narrow views of learning

placed teachers in a position to maintain the status quo.

Clandinin and Connolly's (1996) sacred, cover, and secret stories describe how teachers

negotiate their teaching lives (Aoki, 2010; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019; Song, 2016). The

educators in this study talked about the tensions often found in the difference between who they

wanted to be as teachers, and what the system dictated and valued. Secret stories, composed as

teaching, were personally lived, sometimes in opposition to the sacred stories of the school

system. Rex shared his experience of negotiating the secret and sacred stories he was living:

> I just got to the point where, yeah, this was not working for me. This was not what
>
> I signed up for when I signed up to be an educator. So I had to be authentic and
>
> figure out how to do that, or I needed to leave the profession. So I just figured out
>
> a way to do it . . . I just made choices in positions and to allow me to get to a
>
> place where I felt like I could do the things I needed to do, be authentic.

The words "this is not what I signed up for when I signed up to be an educator" described the

struggle that Rex had to confront. His sentiment resonated with other participants, as it was a

common experience across the group. As teachers in various school contexts, the stories that

permeated the system created personal tensions. These tensions resulted in dilemmas that lead to

hidden teaching practices, or secret stories lived in classrooms. To address such dilemmas

required either a shift in the conditions or the context or an acceptance of the status quo.

Maintaining a rigid system was difficult, particularly when its ineffectiveness was

highlighted by countless children who did not meet with success in the system. The stark reality

was that what was intended–to afford better opportunities for all–was not what resulted.

Complete faith was placed in the system to work for everyone. To deflect attention from the

system's ineptitude and effectiveness, when a child could not fit the system, blame was placed

squarely on the children and families. The placing of this kind of blame was reflected in Rex's

comments on situations that unfolded as recently as the pandemic lockdown of 2020. In his role

as a director of schools, he had conversations with schools about the need and ability to reach

families, particularly families of children who were in complex, and sometimes precarious,

living situations. He lamented:

> There was a lot of blame on families, a lot of blame. And it was sad. It really was
>
> sad to me. During the COVID situation, you're looking at people trying to work
>
> with excuses. Professionals in the system who were saying, "Well, that family
>
> didn't reach out to me. So, what did you expect me to do?" And I said, "Keep
>
> reaching out to them. Just because they didn't answer you the first time doesn't
>
> mean they won't the second time. They might not be in a good place; they might
>
> just need somebody to say 'Hi, how are you doing?'"

Rex's words captured an unfortunate reality: Professionals in the system appeared to have

neither relationships with the families nor pedagogical relationships with the children. Phone

calls to families were made merely to follow a directive, rather than to genuinely connect and

ensure the pedagogical relational space was nurtured even in the absence of time together.

Brown (2012) wrote, "blame is the discharge of discomfort and pain" (p. 105). The system, so

ingrained in the culture, shamed teachers and, thus, created conditions of discomfort and pain—

conditions with which teachers had to find ways to cope. Participants shared their perspectives

on one such coping response—blaming families and others for making it difficult for teachers to

do what was expected—that illuminated the uncomfortable situations in which teachers found

themselves in the system.

Biases against certain communities, parts of town, or families further complicated

matters, as they became part of the story teachers told to explain and rationalize the failings of

the system Rex was witness to such biases:

> I saw so many kids that were basically written off because, you know, they had a
>
> learning disability or they had a cognitive impairment, they lived in a certain part
>
> of town. People were under the belief that well, there's nothing we can really do

for them anyway, like, you know, this is as much as they're ever going to be able

to do.

This implicit bias, of which teachers were largely unaware, influenced behaviour and attitudes towards people in subtle ways (Reinholz et al., 2020). In education, implicit biases impacted how classrooms were structured, what expectations were placed on children and their potential for success, how they were disciplined, and how pedagogical relationships were entered with them (Staats et al., 2020). Students whose learning needs were not met by a prescriptive one-sized approach could be impacted by implicit bias, as teachers who did not feel emotionally safe or supported in their practices tended to blame the students and their families for conditions over which they had no control.

As the research conversations consistently highlighted, the intended system goal of educational opportunities for all students was undermined by the prescriptive ways in which teaching had been historically positioned—that is, as merely following directives. Following directives did not translate to a shared moral imperative. The result of a sustained hierarchy and technical rational understandings of teaching and learning had essentially created conditions wherein teachers within the system were positioned and conditioned to maintain the status quo. It was in the secret stories of classrooms and pedagogical practices that the sacred stories of the system were challenged. However, in keeping the secret stories untold, the system was sustained. In bringing secret stories into the light, the narrative of the system could be interrupted and a potential counternarrative in which relationships were foundational could begin to take shape. A new narrative might also bring harmony between inner and outer stories along the Möbius strip.

Navigating The Road Toward Change

Action research, which includes appreciative inquiry, has an element of emancipation embedded in it (Cordeiro et al., 2017). *Emancipation* is defined as creating "knowledge for an

individual/community's own benefit concerning some kind of improvement" (p. 400). As I

considered the nature of research that informs practice, I also wondered about capacity for

developing the ability to engage in research in a way that brings about emancipatory results.

July 13, 2020

Karla is a colleague and a leader in a district in which I worked. She refuses

to remain silent when questionable decisions are made. Through Karla, I learned

about teaching, leading, and being a colleague. I also learned what can happen to

teachers and leaders who challenge the hierarchy and do not maintain the status

quo.

As a leader, Karla challenges through a relentless pursuit of what is best for

children. In her pursuit, however, rather than being seen as one who creates

forward momentum, she is seen as one who creates disturbances, and has been

frozen out of conversations. As a result, she has left the district and the

profession. As I think about her experience, I can see the influence of hierarchy in

the system in her story. She has challenged those who are at the top of the

pyramid and has tried to change the status quo. In a hierarchical system,

challenges to the top, or drive for change from the middle, are not always well-

received.

The story Karla lives also makes me think about my own critical lens in

research. How does one ensure that boundaries are pushed, attitudes are

challenged, and change happens without isolating oneself or being shut out, as

Karla was? It seems there is a fine line between travelling a road with integrity,

naming what we see, and challenging entrenched systems, and pushing people so

far that they cannot recognize the value of what is being said—worse still, being

no longer part of the conversation. I cannot unknow how the system has been

influenced by the past, but I also understand the delicate dance change requires.

Emancipation requires one to see through a rigorous, critical lens, to see where things need to be challenged, and to recognize the difference changes might make in the lives of others (Cordeiro et al., 2017). As my researcher identity continues to emerge, increased knowledge of how to engage in research with a methodological lens and developing understandings of the political landscape of research are surfacing as important voices in my polyphony.

Looking Back on the Travelled Path

Pedagogical relationships are based, ideally, on what both the teacher and the student bring to the relational space. When relationship creates a space where what each person brings is cared for, valued and honoured, welcomed and accepted, there is no place for judgement and shame. The historical influences on the NL system have given rise to a focus on hierarchy and technical rational approaches to teaching. This, in turn, has placed constraints on how teachers understood and behaved in the role of teacher; they became keepers of a system. Relationships within such contexts were marred, as the teachers navigated conditions where external pressures emanated from a narrative of control. Only in the secret stories were relationships able to thrive.

While it was important to explore the paths that brought us to where we were in our system from an historical perspective, it was not the place in which we wanted to stay. The Dream phase of AI presented us with an opportunity to envision a more positive future, drawing on what we believed was possible and articulating that vision. Knowing the landscape of the system in which we were starting the journey offered a departure point for the many routes and paths we might forge to a more welcoming, inspired, and reimagined future.

Routes to Forge

The Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri says that "In a fractured age, when cynicism is

god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or

another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are

also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We

live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If

we change the stories we live by, quite possibly, we change our lives."

—Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*

To elicit a vision of conditions in education where pedagogical relationships would

thrive, each participant shared a metaphor that captured their ideal reality and supported

changing the story we were telling about teaching. Based on the research conversations from the

Discovery phase, and the underpinning belief that teaching is relationship, participants were

invited to consider how our system could look if ideal conditions became reality and exquisite

care and nurturing were the focus of each of our pedagogical relationships. In that reimagined

reality, we would come to pedagogical relationships with our Möbius strip aligned, meaning our

inner and outer conditions would be in harmony. In pedagogical relationships, students would be

met with open hearts and open minds, and "deep to deep" (Palmer, 2007) connections would

allow learning to thrive.

Metaphors as Guide

In narrative inquiry, language devices such as metaphor "allow participants to derive

meaning from complicated reality" (Jensen, 2006, p. 40). Kim (2016) also quotes Lakoff and

Johnson (1980) who wrote that we

seek out metaphors to highlight and make coherent our own pasts, our present activities,

and our dreams, hopes and goals as well. A large part of self-understanding is the search

for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives. (p. 232).

Metaphors are often used as a tool in AI as a way to generate new ways of thinking and being

(Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Metaphors are "powerful devices for shaping perception and

experience. If we change the metaphor in which a concept is expressed, we change the frame,

making it possible for the concept to be understood differently" (Owen, 2001, p. xv). Schön

(1987) used the language of reframing when referring to finding alternative ways to explore

practice. He proposed that reframing was an important part of reflection-in-action as it opened

ways for teachers to view their practices in novel ways. As the participants shared their

metaphors, their reframing of complexities of teaching presented alternative ways to think about

pedagogical relationships, giving rise to consideration of how identity as pedagogy influences

how the spaces of pedagogical relationships are entered. "The language we use shapes the way

we think" (Kovach, 2005, p. 25).

As the conversations in the Dream phase began to turn to imagining a future, the

participants shared metaphors to initiate a shared vision of a new system. The metaphors were

highly personal and represented their ideas of what teaching and learning might look like if the

conditions existed for them to be more authentic in their teaching and pedagogical relationships.

Participants were invited to bring an artifact (found or created)—a quote, a song, a poem, a

paragraph from a book, anything that spoke to them deeply and epitomized their dream of

teaching as relationship. The metaphors and artefacts shared suggested personal, interpersonal,

and institutional aspects of teacher identity and, more specifically for the purposes of this study,

identity as pedagogy. The metaphors participants shared were as follows.

The Ocean and the Shore. Rex's metaphor compared pedagogical relationships to the interconnection between the ocean and the shore, drawing on how each shapes and is shaped by the other (see Figure 1). As a reciprocal relationship, there is redefining of both the shoreline and the shape the water takes when it reaches the shore. Extending the metaphor, both teacher and student grow and are transformed in pedagogical relationships. Rex used the term "always evolving" to describe the sea and the shore and those who enter pedagogical relationships.

Figure 1

Rex's Metaphor: The Shoreline

A Mariner's Compass. Also drawing on the ocean's influence, Lina shared a mariner's compass as metaphor (see Figure 2). Lina articulated her metaphor as an inherited system in which every teacher had been expected to employ prescriptive teaching that fit for only some children. Charting a course that guided the child, seeing the route as evolving with the child, resonated with Lina and was symbolized in the compass. She said, "There's so much potential for them to go in whatever direction they want to go. So you're fostering and enriching all those directions that they can take in their life." That is to say, teacher and child are guided through the pedagogical relationship.

Figure 2
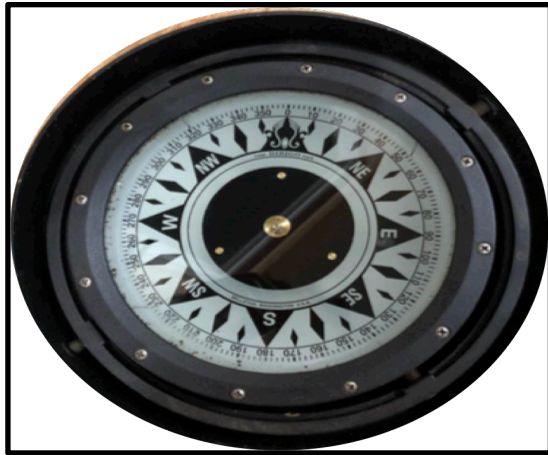
Lina's Metaphor: A Mariner's Compass

The Seeds of the Apple. Nel related how she was strongly influenced in her career by a quote she first heard from Noah benShea: "Though you can easily count the seeds in an apple, it's impossible to count the apples in a seed" (see Figure 3). For Nel, pedagogical relationships could have positive or negative impacts that are far-reaching. Teachers are often left to wonder about the nature of their impact as students move through life. Nel shared, "You really never know the impact that you can have or how many apples you, as a seed, as an educator, can bring. into the world."

Figure 3
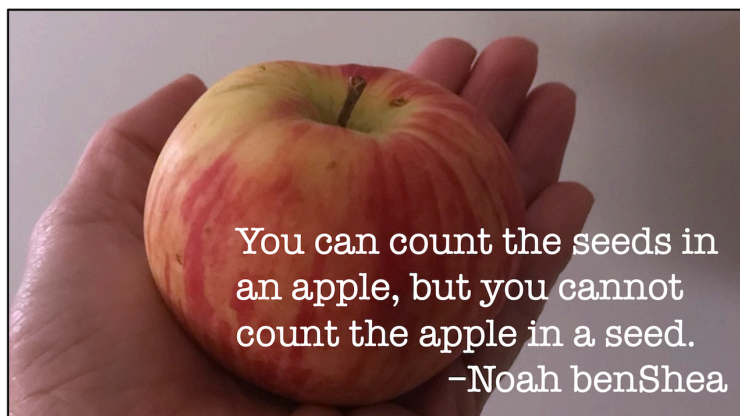
Nel's Metaphor: The Seeds of an Apple

Accepted. The metaphor Tory shared demonstrated that inspiration in life and in teaching can come from many places. Her metaphor came from a college comedy movie, *Accepted* (Shadyac & Bostick, 2006; see Figure 4), which she watched with her son. The main character in the movie does not get accepted into a university. To ensure his parents' approval, he falsifies a college acceptance letter and schemes with some other students to create a fictional college that evolves to be the college of their dreams. The significance of the movie for Tory was that the story highlighted how "tradition was humiliating people who were different," thus underscoring the importance of challenging practices that permeated our systems simply because they were traditions. The way the students in the fictional college pursued learning, by following their passions, was an example for Tory of "exactly what we want education to be."

Figure 4
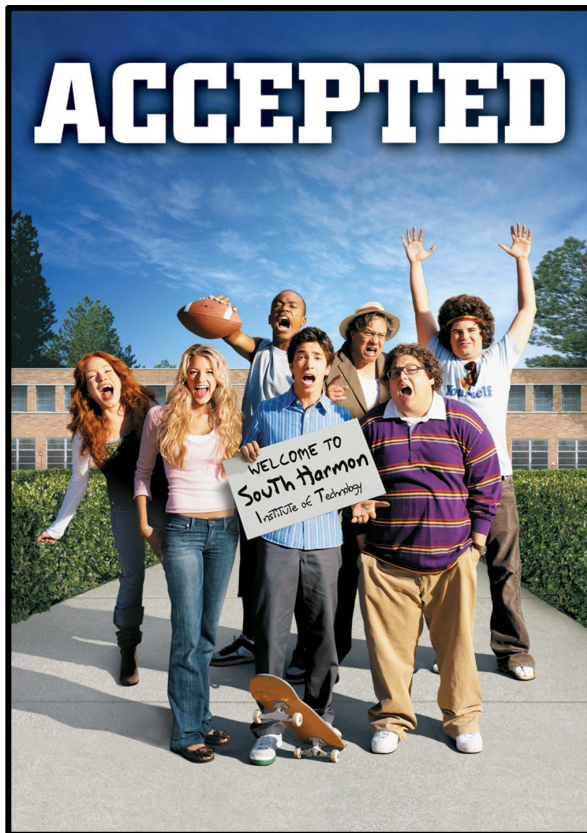
Tory's Metaphor: Movie as Inspiration (Google, 2006)

Sawubona. The final metaphor around which we based our vision for a reimagined system was my own. It is the Zulu greeting *sawubona*, followed by the response *yebo sawubona* (see Figure 5). The metaphor symbolized seeing the whole student, not just their face but their hopes, their dreams—how far they have come and where they can go. This notion is found in van Manen's (1994) description of a pedagogical relationship as one in which the student is seen as all that they are now and all they can become. Yebo sawubona describes the response of the student, knowing that they are seen and feeling acknowledged.

Figure 5
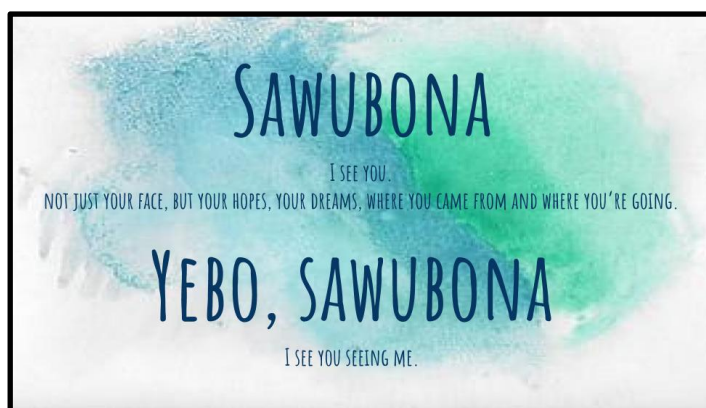
Allison's Metaphor: Zulu Greeting

The sharing of metaphors was a powerful springboard that directed our thinking towards imagining conditions that would give rise to a system in which pedagogical relationships were central to teaching. The conversations that ensued focused on dreaming how pedagogical relationships might look in an evolved system.

Finding a metaphor became an act of reflection and connection as participants sought to identify artifacts that would encapsulate their thinking about teaching and pedagogical relationships. Lina shared, "I gave this a lot of thought. . . . I really reflected on what would be most representative of what I thought it might all be." Each of the shared metaphors also resonated with the other participants; although diverse, each metaphor spoke to pedagogical

relationships that highlighted mutual respect and honouring the dignity of each person. Attributes of an ideal pedagogical relationship were reflected in each metaphor: both student and teacher evolve and grow; both student and teacher learn from each other; and both student and teacher enter the relational space open to what could emerge. The metaphors also highlighted our belief that the moral purpose of the teacher is to nurture the student. The following section explores themes that emerged from the rich conversations that ensued as participants shared and considered how their metaphors impacted thinking about pedagogical relationships.

A New Landscape Envisioned

The articulation of meaning of these metaphors elicited visions of a reimagined system. I continued to use constant comparative, paradigmatic, and narrative analysis of the group conversations while rewatching the video recordings, listening to the audio recordings, rereading the transcripts, and studying the metaphors and journal reflections. Through this process, themes of transformation surfaced that clearly illustrated the imagined reality of participants. Three key themes in the data evoked the potential for transformation of the system:

1.   **evolving from hierarchy to reciprocity**. With pedagogical relationships as the foundation, teacher and student are shaped and influenced by each other.

2.   **moving from technical rational to a common moral purpose with children at the centre.** Teaching is understood as finding paths forward with each student and guiding and supporting them in their quest.

3.   **shifting from maintaining the status quo to seeking equity.** All students are seen for who they are, and the paths taken in learning and living create the conditions in which all flourish.

Evolving From Hierarchy to Reciprocity

A system based in reciprocity rather than hierarchy was highlighted, over and again, as a necessary condition of a reimagined system in which pedagogical relationships were central. In a hierarchical education system learning is transmissive; the teacher holds all of the power of the knowledge that is imparted to the student. The system the participants all envisioned evolved from current conditions—in which there was *power over* others from top to bottom of the organization—to a reciprocity in which *power with* others was present across the layers of the entire organization. Dale (2017) described reciprocity as "a potentially transformational social relation based on acting 'with' and not 'for' others, decreasing traditionally hierarchical roles and replacing power with shared responsibility" (p. 64). When reciprocity is the foundation on which the system is constructed, students, teachers, and leaders all contribute to, and benefit from, being a contributing part of the system. Imagining a system that would evolve from one in which all the power sits at the top to one in which it is shared among those participating in the system was seen to enable everyone to be a partner in learning rather than subject to learning.

Dispersing power creates conditions that foster trust, empowerment, and efficacy (de Cruz, 2019), and an anti-oppressive stance in teaching (Potts and Brown, 2005) is a path forward that explicitly challenges oppressive, hierarchical conditions through our actions. Participants also acknowledged that, in order to change how pedagogical relationships were viewed and cultivated, trust, empowerment, and efficacy needed to be reflected in the system and power shared among all voices in authentic, anti-oppressive ways. For example, Lina described conditions in a system of education that would reposition and empower everyone:

I think we (need to) go into that space as a learner, and somehow, very quickly, our students and our children or our teachers, or whoever sees us all as learners

together, that no one is the holder of the knowledge and the answers—we're all

learning and exploring and inquiring together.

The system Lina imagined departed from one in which the teacher is the keeper of knowledge

transmitted to them by others, which they then impart to students. In essence, Lina imagined

everyone positioned—and acknowledged—as learners, learning from each other regardless of

the place in the system that they occupied. The system would thus evolve from a hierarchical

structure to one of shared power, with all members creating conditions of learning in which

children and teachers thrive (Rincôn-Gallardo, 2020).

The pedagogical relationships within a system also reflect the attitudes of the system. If

relationships are understood through a hierarchical lens, they will be reproduced at all levels in

similar ways. The importance of including multiple voices and perspectives to create healthy

system change has been well documented (Hargreaves, et al., 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan,

2016; Pink, 2009; Rincôn-Gallardo, 2020). When those in the upper portion of the pyramid are

positioned and regarded as those with knowledge and power to be transmitted and imposed on

those below, a system of hierarchy is able to sustain itself. It is when there is a crack in the

structure—when members of the system, from leaders to students, all begin to see themselves

differently—that the system harnesses real potential for change.

In elaborating on his metaphor, Rex described a system where relationships are

reciprocal:

[It's] the ocean and the waves and redefinition . . . working in harmony. . . .

There's so much potential because there's so much unknown but they still work

together and there's an impact. So then on my second sticky note I wrote down

"always evolving" because I evolve . . . that image of the ocean and the waves

and redefinition but still working in harmony. So one carving out the other, you

know, the shoreline, constantly being changed through erosion.

Rex emphasized that, in reciprocal relationships, both the student and the teacher evolve.

The intent within such a relationship is not to intentionally change the student, but for the student

and the teacher to be transformed as a result of the pedagogical relationship. In a system where

reciprocity is central, pedagogical relationships are consistently nurtured over time. In the system

re-envisioned by participants in the current study, meaningful pedagogical relationships are

spaces wherein both teacher and student are impacted, changed, and honoured in who they are

and who they can become.

Reciprocity as Research

Dale (2017) wrote of reciprocity as a reflexive practice in teaching,

Like any other type of learning, a desire to continuously improve one's own

teaching means talking about it, writing about it, and examining one's practice.

Reciprocity can only be achieved through a teaching practice that is subject to

ongoing reflection and examination. (p. 69)

As I think about becoming a teacher-researcher, many of the attributes I value in who I

am as a teacher today will be equally valued and relevant to my work as researcher tomorrow.

For example, reciprocity, the sharing of power, is something I strive for in my work as a teacher;

I increasingly recognize this trait emerging as an important aspect of my being a researcher. Potts

and Brown (2005) encourage researchers to recognize that we all have the potential to be both

oppressor and oppressed and that we "have the capacity to act and alter relations of oppression in

our own world" (p. 258). Seeing reciprocity as research is yet another way to enact that agency.

August, 2020

As I engage in this research, I wonder if I am using power over a group as a

researcher? I understand the importance of learning from and with each other,

and I wonder if the other participants feel valued, that they have a voice as we

construct a shared understanding? I use the phrase other participants in

describing the invited participants to indicate that I am also a participant. As

participant-researcher, I am trying to develop the stance of being in the research

with participants, not directing the research from outside the participant group,

of being one with rather than one over. I want to begin with situating myself

among, with, and as one of the participants. Eyes, ears, and heart wide open.

Giinwi, together (Morcom & Freeman, 2018).

Engaging reflexively throughout my research journey pushed me to name places of

discomfort I found myself in as an emerging researcher. "Reflexivity also means acknowledging

my own limitations and missteps, regardless of good intentions" (Dale, 2017, p. 69). Addressing

power and trying to ensure I enter spaces respectfully and openly was becoming ever more

important to me; I wanted to construct understanding together with participants in research,

rather than impose my perspective on a group. Moving forward as a teacher-researcher, and

ensuring that reciprocity guided my research and practice, would require that I continuously

engage in reflexivity to broaden my understanding of how being reflexive might be embodied in

research.

Moving From a Technical Rational Approach to a Common Moral Purpose With Children

at the Centre

Emanating clearly from the data was a picture of a system that has been guided by both a

technical rational approach to teaching and a narrow definition of learning. As we collectively

imagined a future in which pedagogical relationships could flourish, it was important to

participants that the focus of teaching move towards a common moral purpose that placed

children at the centre and created conditions in which students might thrive. Lina shared her

vision, in which there is "No 'owner' of the knowledge. All are respected, included, and valued.

Every learner is visible in the learning space (wherever and whatever space that is)." This ideal

was in direct contrast to the notion of teaching as banking (Freire, 1970/2000) and to the

historical "transmission-and-testing" approach in the NL system, in which students are faceless

and learning is impersonal.

Teaching with moral purpose is about both the means and the ends (Fullan, 2001, p. 130).

In the case of the NL system, many of the prescriptive practices supported by a strong reliance

on technical teaching were implemented with the goal of creating equal conditions for all

children across the province. The means, however, did not achieve the end, as some children

were marginalized, rather than well served, by the practices. In other words, the means to

achieve the desired end—in which all students' lives are improved through educational

opportunities—did not start with the system seeing children as protagonists of their own learning

(Malaguzzi, 1993). In our reimagined reality of school, both the means and the end were more

closely aligned. Further, in an effort to create conditions for students to thrive in life, the

conditions in school would, ideally, reflect a tangible moral purpose.

Tory articulated a shift that originated in her thinking about teaching, one that essentially

moved from a technical rational stance to one that started with children at the centre of her

practice, "I think it made me think about the children being the centre more . . . I had thought of

the children before but not always." As Tory spoke, she captured the significant shift we all felt

was important for transformation of the system to occur: a shift in which the focus at the centre

of practice was on supporting the learning of children rather than on delivering curriculum. Tory went on to describe what she felt was important in the system we were envisioning, sharing the idea that, under ideal conditions, we understand that "everyone has a story . . . different experiences, strengths to build upon." When we act with a moral purpose in teaching, the way in which we achieve our goal is as important as the goal itself. Placing the story of the child at the centre of teaching and learning means responsive teaching and moving beyond teaching every child with the same technique. When teacher and child enter into pedagogical relationship, it is incongruous to move the child toward a predetermined idea of what the teacher has determined they need to be. Adhering to a moral purpose guides the teacher to help the child uncover and discover what is in themselves.

The importance of a shared moral purpose was clearly reflected in the explanation Lina shared regarding the compass metaphor:

> We're trying to build the relationship between teacher and student, and you want
>
> to foster the directions that they'll take and build their intellectual compass and
>
> their moral compass. And you know, there's so much potential for them to go in
>
> whatever direction they want to go and we want our students to go. So you're
>
> fostering and enriching all those directions that they can take in their life. And it
>
> takes a lot. You have to be critical. There are many, many directions on the
>
> compass. We think of it as north, south, east and west, but there are so many more
>
> points in between.

As Lina indicated, there are many routes a child's learning life might take. We agreed our reimagined system would be guided by a common purpose and the route would emerge from the

conditions. Our reimagined reality would also challenge the notion that there is a predetermined route that every child would follow. Nel extended the metaphor:

> What strikes me is in the marine environment and industry, everyone believes in and uses the same compass. It is systematic. It is known to be used even above and beyond the electronics and the technologies; everyone knows they have to have a compass.

Nel drew our attention to consider how we would navigate the path forward with a child in a responsive, not prescriptive, manner, so the child would feel guided, not forced; pedagogical relationships would be broadly understood as the way in which we guide. She also pointed to the fact that, in our reimagined system, working towards a common purpose, sharing a moral purpose would be a system condition—"[we would use] the same compass."

The envisioned system underscored the importance of moving from a technical rational view of teaching towards one that responds to children as who they are. In such a system, teachers would enter pedagogical relationships with students in ways that are guided by a moral purpose to foster conditions in which they thrive; children would thereby be supported to find their individual routes in life. Ongoing analysis of data provided evidence that being guided by a moral purpose would be an important aspect in a reimagined system.

Engaging Constant Common Moral Purpose

Fullan et al. (2005) wrote about eight forces in leadership for change, the first of which is engaging through one's moral purpose. They stated, "the first overriding principle is knowledge about the why of change namely moral purpose. Moral purpose in educational change is about improving society through improving educational systems" (p. 54). As I contemplated my own why of education, I saw that it extended to how I thought about being a teacher-researcher;

clearly, it was about improving educational systems and, more specifically, improving conditions within those systems for children. My journey through this research study involved stopping often to consider how I was embedding what I knew and believed about teaching into how I was engaging as a researcher.

August 6, 2020

Barb, my first principal, often comes to my mind. Barb's focus in her leadership is a reflection of who she is; elegant and generous. There is refinement and grace to the way she engages with others, her work is intentional and purposeful, but never heavy handed; her work is through relationships. I see very clearly that who Barb is as a teacher is also who she is as a person. As a staff, as her class, we are supported to find our voices, to bring our own gifts to teaching, to thrive as teachers, to bring who we are to teaching. As principal, the focus on relationship and on helping us uncover the best in ourselves, is the same as it is when she is working with the children. It is her moral purpose.

As I think about how Barb embodies teaching, I think about how it extends to the many roles she takes on in education; it is with a moral purpose. I am also thinking now about my own role—and that of becoming researcher. It is not entirely separate from who I am as teacher. It cannot be. What I believe about teaching will surface in how I become a researcher—from how I interact with participants to where I choose to focus my attention. Qualitative research invites the researcher into the research; our stories, the lenses through which we see the world, are acknowledged and accepted because it is impossible to untangle the intricate web they create. Who I am as a researcher is not about following a

technique, rationally approaching participants with if-then expectations. For me,

it is about entering research relationships, gleaning meaning from our shared

stories, and considering how I might adhere to my moral purpose in contributing

to conditions that support children to flourish.

I learned much from Barb by watching her interact with the teachers on staff, the students in the school, and the families. As I pivoted to find my footing as a teacher-researcher, I realized that who I am in my relationships with people is who I can be as a researcher. Ultimately, by bringing my authentic self to the research conversations with my participants, there was no pressure to become another, contrived, version of myself to fit the situation. Rather, entering these spaces authentically meant allowing myself to be guided by the moral purpose of creating conditions for change.

Shifting From Maintaining the Status Quo to Seeking Equity

As we reflected together on the NL system, it was clear the group felt teachers had little autonomy within a confining power structure. Experiences shared described conditions that were controlled, punitive, and prescriptive. Challenging the system could involve risk of professional discipline and ostracism and create inner tension for teachers. Such constraints led to the continual reproduction of the same conditions. In the prescriptive system studied here, the role teachers played was to ensure that all policies and procedures were followed in an attempt to create equal opportunities. The goal of improving life for all children through education was a noble goal. However, a system focused on equality, on ensuring all children received the same educational opportunities, was insufficient as a means to achieve that goal. "Equal education is inherently unequal" (Cramer et al., 2017, p. 484) and thus ensures the status quo is maintained.

In the system we envisioned, the conditions would not be equal; they would be equitable. While the demand for equal educational opportunities for all children marginalized many students and created conditions that precluded them from finding success, education approached from a stance of equity "responds to the contextual pluralities, differences, and needs of students and teachers as individuals" (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018, p. 138). Lina described the kind of change we wanted to see, and it was directly linked to the understanding that treating all children the same does not open doors for all children to thrive:

> If we're truly going to see that everyone thrives, we have to be very much open to
> what that means and how that's going to look. And when it's for everyone to
> thrive, everyone is not going to thrive in the same way. So we need to very much
> value differences rather than trying to fit everyone into the same mold.

Lina prioritized the distinct understanding that shifts us from equality to equity when she said we must "*value* difference." Moss (2010) reminds us that "despite much talk about the importance of diversity and real progress in removing some forms of discrimination and accepting some differences in ways of live, diversity (or rather valuing and practicing diversity) remains the exception not the norm" (p. 10). In the historical NL system, it was recognized that there was diversity, or differences among students and families. The response, however, was the oppressive work of forced conformity to ways of learning and knowing. The system of which Lina spoke moves from recognition of differences to valuing those differences. Such a shift embraces the differences inherent in being human and experiencing the world through uniquely critical lenses.

In the system we were envisioning there was value in the differences, recognition of the need to value each person as unique, and value in the path we needed to uncover with each child. The belief that a child and their journey is of value would come from acknowledging the inherent

deep worth of another person. Participants accepted that institutional policies could communicate

similar beliefs and values and create the conditions where the beliefs of both teachers and policy

makers in the system were closely aligned.

The metaphor of sawubona, the Zulu greeting that loosely translates as *I see you*, also

spoke to an underpinning of equity. In our conversations, we accepted *seeing* to encompass not

just the child in front of you but all that child brings with them. In our re-envisioned reality of

education where relationships were at the very heart of teaching, seeing a child meant knowing

about them holistically, knowing their story. It also meant seeking to know as much as possible

about what each student required from us, as teachers, and having the ability to respond in ways

that met their needs; it meant seeking to create conditions in which students thrived because they

were known. In this way, sawubona was considered as a pathway to equity—arising from seeing

the student for who they were and striving to enter into pedagogical relationship in ways that

honoured and met them where they were. Teaching and learning would happen through more

equitable practices.

Yebo sawubona, the response to the greeting sawubona, was also important for us in

reimagining our system. Yebo sawubona means *I see you seeing me.* In conditions wherein a

student thrives, they know they are valued. As Nel reflected, "They know that who they are is

okay. We do not need to change them." Educational policies intended to effectively meet the

needs of students and to change conditions have focused on human taxonomies, delineating

characteristics and identities of children and addressing various experiences of being human

(Pomeroy, 2020). When we truly recognize a student for who they are, not a group they

represent, the pedagogical relationship is authentic, and the path forward can be forged together.

Alternatively, a system that positions teachers to maintain the status quo and to reproduce conditions that diminish who the child is, fails to acknowledge the transformative power of relationship. Drawing on Rex's metaphor of the ocean and the shore, pedagogical relationships shape both who the child becomes and who we become as teachers. Pedagogical relationships develop from each person valuing, responding to, and understanding who the other is. It must be said, we did not set out to imagine a system in which all things are static and perfect; rather, it would be dynamic, shifting and changing over time. Rex articulated it as "there's erosion, and there's a redefinition . . . always evolving." Our reimagined system would not maintain the status quo. Rather, it might create a path that led teaching and learning to flourish through equity, through fully seeing the other and feeling fully seen, and through entering authentic pedagogical relationships.

Seeing Participants, Seeing Myself

The idea of sawubona resonated strongly with me. I was acutely aware, for example, through the experience of finding a Director of Schools to invite as a participant, that I held preconceived ideas and barriers to seeing that needed to be addressed. Some of those barriers related to my perceptions of others in the system; some barriers related to my perceptions of myself. As researcher, I also began to consider the importance of mitigating the risks of these in the research process.

> *August 8, 2020*
>
> *I am looking back at my research journal, specifically my notes that*
>
> *document my struggle with the Director of Schools role. I recognize the clouded*
>
> *lens through which I was thinking about that role and how it was impacting my*
>
> *ability to enter the space of relationship with them. It is obvious that my barrier*
>
> *was a problem of perception but that is the challenge I was facing—what I*

perceived clouded my vision. I now also realize the same problem of perception

might also have been a factor in how I am able to see all the participants. I know

the role of teacher from the inside through my personal teaching journey. I know

the roles of principal and assistant director from the outside, as a result of my

interactions with people in the role. Just as the role of teaching is not the same for

any two people, that would be the same for the other roles; they are extensions of

who we are and, as such, unique to us.

I also think about being a researcher and how a clouded view of a particular

role can inhibit my ability to see myself in the role and grow in it. I am

recognizing a challenge in seeing myself through a lens and how that could

change how I enter spaces to listen, see, and feel what participants are saying.

We are all more than what is on the surface, the shoes we wear, the roads we

travel. Those things are important, but more than that, we are the experience of

all those things. Fundamentally, I am realizing the importance of checking the

lens with which I am viewing both participants and myself. As I move forward on

this journey of research I travel with a broadened understanding that I need to

constantly check myself and my "lenses," i.e., questioning whether I am seeing

who is before me or seeing who I think is before me. Am I seeing myself as I can

be? Once again, eyes wide open, ears wide open, heart wide open.

Becoming a researcher, like becoming a teacher, was about much more than learning

about the techniques to ask questions and the methods to follow to elicit information and uncover

meaning. Becoming a researcher was about seeing an honest version of myself and knowing that

the experiences I have had will influence how I come to the relational space of research, in the

same way as experiences influenced how I entered pedagogical relationships. Seeing myself

through the lens of sawubona allowed me to accept that I bring my history and my future to

research relationships—currently, and in the future. Palmer (1998/2018) wrote, "When I do not

know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the

shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well"

(p. 3). I believe Palmer's words can be extended from teaching to include research. It is my

intent to enter spaces of research with a constantly evolving lens through which the world,

myself, and research participants will be clearly seen.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

Life is divided into three parts: that which has been, that which is, and that which

is to come.

—L. Annaeus Seneca, *Minor Dialogues*

In this chapter, "The Dream," we began by entering the shadows of the past to navigate

our way towards the light. We explored the external forces and grand narratives of the historical

context of education in NL—narratives that created perceptions of misalignment and tension

with inner forces as we considered our Möbius strip(s); we contemplated not only how those

forces informed our teacher identities but also how identity became pedagogy.

We then drew on individually presented metaphors that were personally meaningful for

us in describing a reimagined system in which relationships were paramount and foundational. In

this reimagined system, the hierarchical structure we recognized from the past would be

transformed to one where power is dispersed and shared, and relationships sit in reciprocity.

Furthermore, the system would evolve to be guided by a common moral purpose, rather than by

a focus on technical teaching and rational methods, and equity (rather than equality) would

challenge the status quo and ensure that the conditions for learning supported each child and

enabled them to thrive. In a system broadly described by these ideas, we felt attention to our

Möbius strips would begin to align, and teaching practices would be better understood as sacred

spaces of pedagogical relationship.

In the next chapter, "Destiny and Delivery," understandings of our impact, our actions,

and our intentionality are explored. In the Destiny and Delivery phase of the study, we looked

forward, individually and collectively, to consider how our small actions could be interruptions

of the current system, and could help bring about changes as we change. After all, we are both

the system *and* the change.

Chapter 7
Design and Destiny

Photo 6. Summit: Gros Morne (Reproduced with the permission of A. May)

Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who

looks outside, dreams: who looks inside, awakens.

—Carl Jung, *Letters, Volume 2*

The Design phase of an appreciative inquiry expands what was discovered and dreamed

in the corresponding phases of Discovery and Dream. During the Design phase, participants

articulate the conditions that describe the ideal organization they wish to create (Whitney &

Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The Destiny phase explores how the Design will be delivered

(Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In the Destiny phase, participants consider what actions they

might take to bring to life the conditions they imagined.

The Design and Destiny phases of this study were folded together. Drawing on the

malleability of AI, it was fitting that Design and Destiny flowed one into the other. This fluidity

allowed participants to imagine and articulate the conditions of a reimagined system and to

consider how they might make those conditions the destiny towards which they would work. The

Dream phase was an opportunity to envision what the ideal conditions *could* be, the Design

phase articulated what the conditions *would* be, and the Destiny phase situated the participants'

actions in bringing the dream to life.

The following chapter describes the process of the Design and Destiny phases. To

facilitate these phases, a group interview was conducted as a catalyst to envisioning a NL system

we hoped to bring to life. Individual interviews offered participants a further opportunity to

explore their commitment to bringing our envisioned system into existence. In the individual

interviews, participants also had the opportunity to reflect on personal learning and insights

gained by having participated in the study. The opportunities for reflection in the group and

individual interviews, the questions explored, the positive propositions that were inspired, and

the ways of being to which participants committed, all focused us towards a system we hoped to

inspire.

Destination by Design

In this phase of the study, participants designed a reimagined system, deriving their ideas

from the reality they imagined during the previous conversations in "Dream." For example, they

considered what would constitute the underpinning beliefs of the envisioned system, how they

would describe the nature of relationships, and what the experience of students and teachers

might be. Participants were invited to consider the following: If teaching is relationship and the

space of pedagogical relationship is where teaching and learning happen, how does that ideal live

in, and shape, our system? Through the ongoing research conversations, participants defined

what they felt were important principles upon which the system would rest. By articulating a

vision of what they saw as ideal, participants could begin to align their work towards creating the

system they felt would nurture pedagogical relationships and allow further alignment of their

Möbius strips. The guiding questions that focused the research conversation through Design and

Destiny were these:

- What narratives do you think underpin the reimagined system?

- How do you envision the focus and nature of pedagogical relationships

  throughout the layers of the organization?

- In our reimagined system, how do you think students and teachers experience

  pedagogical relational spaces?

Building on the Dream phase, participants were invited to share the conditions they

envisioned using JamBoard, an online brainstorming tool. Similar to an in-person brainstorming

session in which participants place sticky notes on posters to record their thoughts, JamBoard

allowed participants to stick notes on virtual posters. Each virtual poster contained a question to

prompt our thinking about the conditions necessary to design the reality we felt would nurture

pedagogical relationships and support teacher identity to authentically emerge.

With responses on the JamBoard to prompt our thinking and imaginations, our ensuing

research conversations became an opportunity to explore the questions and consider the ideas of

the other participants and, thus, begin to shape a vision of the NL system as we collectively

imagined it could be. Provocative propositions or statements articulating the conditions of the

ideal organization (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, loc 3298) were crafted using analysis and

synthesis of the data from the JamBoard, the metaphors from the Dream phase, and the research

conversations. The provocative propositions were initially drafted by me, as facilitator-

participant of the AI. They were then shared with the participants for their feedback and

suggestions in order to ensure that statements reflected our collective thinking; thus, the

statements also acted as member checking (Birt et al., 2016). The provocative propositions

focused on areas within the social architecture of the organization that could bring about desired

changes and create conditions in which what we dreamed became our lived reality. Each of the

provocative propositions epitomized our thinking about pedagogical relationships, feelings of

agency, and thriving as learners—all central to the education system we reimagined. Three

provocative propositions were crafted: Pedagogical Relationships, Feelings of Agency, and

Thriving as Learners.

　　　　In the following sections, each provocative proposition is articulated fully and explored

in detail under the theme from which it emerged, and considered as a condition that would be

essential in our re-envisioned NL system.

Provocative Proposition 1: Pedagogical Relationships

　　　　In the education system we envision, pedagogical relationships are at the heart of

　　　　the system. All stories, perspectives, gifts, talents, and experiences are valued. It

　　　　is understood that everyone is interconnected, interdependent, and seen for all

　　　　they are and will become. Relationships are entered into authentically, open to

　　　　each other, accepting of what makes each person who they are, and guided by

care. In all layers of the organization, we enter spaces of pedagogical relationship

by seeing the other and allowing ourselves to be seen.

Teaching as relationship was clearly a foundational belief of participants in this research

study. In our envisioned educational system, pedagogical relationships would be the

acknowledged heart of the system. Beginning teaching from a relational stance and cultivating

strong pedagogical relationships with students— from very young children through to

adolescents—is positively correlated with learning; this position has been widely accepted

among researchers (Clinton, 2013; Dietrich et al., 2021; Høveid & Finne, 2014; Høveid, 2012;

Malaguzzi, 1993 van Manen, 1994). Here too, in beginning to envision a transformed

educational system, relationships were of central importance.

Discourse on relationship in education presents a distinction between the experience of

the relationships by the student and by the teacher (Aspelin, 2021); the student is to learn and the

teacher is to teach. Considering pedagogical relationships as they might exist in our reimagined

system, another possibility emerged—one experienced by both student and teacher in the sacred

relational space between them. Drawing on Buber (2002/1947), Aspelin (2021) describes

pedagogical relationship as "a relationship between two people who together experience an event

in which one or both are active and share elements from the other . . . moving toward mutuality"

(p. 591). Aspelin further describes the roles of the teacher and student in relationship, "teachers

seek to guide the student; students seek to find their own path" (p. 591). The notion of the

freedom of the student to create a path forward was integral to our vision of relationships in our

envisioned system.

Tory articulated her vision of how pedagogical relationships are entered: "We think that

we might know best for students, but they have to decide what's best. They have to figure out

their path. It's really about valuing everything they bring with them, without judgment." Rex

reiterated the importance of the student and teacher uncovering a path forward together, rather

than the teacher guiding the student onto a predetermined path. Rex suggested that authentic

relationships are not about "imposing our perceptions and our opinions and our judgment and our

expectations on someone else." Rather, entering pedagogical relationships without judgement

and without having a preordained destination in mind for the student was essential to our vision

of a reimagined system; this, in turn, reflected the absence of power over another person and the

establishment of mutuality in the relationship. Returning to Lina's words (p. 144), within the

pedagogical relationships we envisioned, differences were valued.

As we spoke about how we enter pedagogical relationships from a place of acceptance

and mutuality, Nel observed that an important aspect of relationships that reach such a point is

that they involve "the teacher knowing themselves and knowing their why—why are they doing

certain things?" While there is an intentionality in the relationship, it is not to force the child into

learning; the intent is to enter the space of authentic relationship and support—or facilitate—

learning. Moving into pedagogical relational space involves understanding "teaching as a way of

being" (Feldman, 1997), moving from seeing the role of teacher as separate from the self, and

letting go of the control of the relationship. Feldman looks to Stengel (1996) to explain what

teaching as a way of being entails:

> To Stengel, a person's way of being is the sum total of his or her experience, and
>
> the set of intentional states—dispositions, talents, interests, fears, and visions—
>
> that locate the person and point him or her in one direction or another. (Feldman,
>
> 1997, p. 764)

In our collectively reimagined system, the teacher in relationship is continuously coming to know themselves. That is, the teacher is becoming more attuned to their identity and to the realization that identity shapes the nature of their pedagogical relationships. In such relationships, pedagogy is intricately interwoven with how we know ourselves.

A further aspect of relationships that emerged as a critical part of our envisioned educational system was that educators in every layer of the organization would take a relational stance in their work. Fundamentally, teaching as a way of being would flatten the hierarchical structures of the historical organization. Instead, relationships, interwoven and interconnected, would underpin all work. Lina described the envisioned shift:

> The same thing [relationships] applies to me as an administrator as it does to the teacher in the classroom, the need to really build those relationships: learning where they [the teachers] all are in their learning process and what they're going to bring to the classroom; really listening, and giving everyone a voice, encouraging them as learners; . . . trying to have the kinds of conversations that we're having now about how they're going to best meet the needs of children or their students and or learners in their classrooms; . . . [and] encouraging questioning, "am I meeting the learners, the *teachers as learners,* on the staff?" Like [Nel] said before she left the meeting, we all are with our classes, because really that is what it is—we all have our different sort of "class," but the same rules apply in many ways, whether our class is five year olds or fifty year olds.

Lina's words gave a nod to Fullan's (2011) idea that in a learning organization we all have a class, a group of people with whom we will enter pedagogical relationships. Whether that class is children just coming to school or teachers/leaders in the organization, we envisioned a system

that acknowledged the importance of authentically entering the space with the class as a learner, learning from them and with them, and valuing what they bring to the space and who they are with openness and acceptance. When such a system is inspirited we are open to the other, to entering relationship with them, and we are reflective on our own learning to ensure that we continue to grow through the relationships as well.

Provocative Proposition 2: Feelings of Agency

In the education system we envision, educators and students have agency. Each person is the author of their own story. Within the system, people are responded to by others in personally meaningful ways. Beliefs and values guide their actions and contribute to sustainable conditions that benefit and support all members of the system. Reflective practices support becoming more aligned with who we are as teachers and how we enter relationships with our students.

Agency refers to the "capacity to make choices, take principled actions and exact change" (Anderson, 2010, p. 541). As we re-envisioned the education system, we identified the essential need to be free to act in ways that would be aligned with our beliefs, would be principled, and would help create conditions for children to thrive. Teacher agency arises from many factors, including teachers' beliefs about children, themselves, their roles in education, and the purpose of education (Biesta et al., 2015). Also arising from agency is self-efficacy, a belief that the actions one takes will have an effect on the intended outcome (Donihoo & Katz, 2019). Alternatively, when teachers feel their ability to act is hampered by social and political conditions, they do not feel they can impact students as meaningfully as they might desire. The research conversations unveiled the belief that, while large-scale changes might not result from individual actions, trajectories could positively change for some children based on the

relationships they might have with teachers. For example, Lina shared her thinking about the

impact teachers can have:

> You have that ability to make a difference to people. And there's so many factors
>
> at play. And it's the little things that can make big changes. You're not going to
>
> change the world with little things, but you can change *somebody's* world.

The participants shared instances in their teacher journeys in which they had not been able to be

the teacher they wanted to be publicly and instead found themselves chained to an historic story

that did not align with their own beliefs. Having agency as a teacher to act with moral

conviction, while working towards a system with a shared moral purpose, had the potential to do

what Lina suggested—to change somebody's world.

Agency is infused into teacher practice rather than being something that teachers might

have (Biesta et al, 2015, p. 626). It is practiced when teachers are able to make choices in their

teaching and, thus, take stances that affect their work and identities (Eteläpelto et al., 2015, p.

662). Lina suggested that in our reimagined system, in making decisions to act on their beliefs

and respond to students in relationship, teachers might also help students find their own personal

paths. She articulated what we hope for students: "We want everyone in our system to take

ownership of their own stories, to make the best choices, and to write their own narratives." The

idea of "writing their own narratives" is directly tied to agency, on the part of both the student

and the teacher; the student has freedom to find a path forward and the teacher, in pedagogical

relationship, is able to support the student in ways that are personal and individual. As we

envisioned the system we would bring into reality, an important consideration was that both

teachers and students understood their agency.

Consideration of teacher agency links directly to the transition discussed in the Dream chapter, that of working towards a common moral purpose. Being a professional is inherently woven into being a practitioner and doing the kind of work that is guided by "systemic expectations, institutional contexts, and personal orientation" (Molla & Nolan, 2020, p. 69). As we imagined an ideal education system, it was system-wide beliefs that contributed to the changed reality, and a common moral purpose was very much a part of that system focus. Continual growth as a teacher in such conditions comes from deeply reflecting on *how* the learning journey is being taken in addition to *where* it might be headed. For the group, teaching without agency was akin to working through a to-do list of material to be covered. However, when there is agency, there is also reflection. Nel described being agentic:

> It's a process of reflection. Sometimes, as the year is unfolding, things come up that you need to learn in order to respond and to be effective in that time. There are always things you need to learn that you can't anticipate. Then, looking back, you're able to say what you did as you were engaged in your learning journey as a teacher, and how it contributed to the culture of the school. And also to ask, did it contribute to students that you work with?

Taking principled action to bring about change, having the ability to respond to situations that were unanticipated, knowing the freedom exists to draw on your own strengths and background to support students were all essential underpinnings of the system change we envisioned.

Teacher identity in a system that is open to the strengths and gifts of all teachers and students creates a space where the inside and outside conditions of their Möbius strips become aligned. When teachers are able to act in agentic ways, drawing on their experiences and beliefs, their identity as pedagogy is more fully available to them and to the system. In a system where

there is a common purpose of education, the agentic stance of teachers is the desire to ensure that

the children in our system have opportunities to create a reality for themselves that is reflective

of what they need.

Provocative Proposition 3: Thriving as Learners

The education system we envision is a learning organization in which there are many

paths leading to success. Students, educators, and leaders view themselves and each other

as learners and co-learners. Their interests, passions, and talents are valued and nurtured.

They see themselves and others as capable and competent and as contributors to a

dynamic and evolving learning system. Thriving is understood as fully participating in

learning and life, and experiencing well-being.

Lina described the system we envisioned in the following way, "Everyone learning

together at all levels of the organization (students, teachers, administrators, program staff, DOS,

AD, etc.), meeting all learners where they are, and valuing that place." She went on to say, "We

need to enter all of this, whatever aspect of your life you're in, as a learner. Wouldn't that be a

powerful message for our students and our staff to see themselves in every situation like that?" A

learning organization is one where the focus of all participants is on learning to bring to fruition

a better world (Fullan, 2002, 2011, 2018; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Senge et al. (2012) demarcated

the difference between traditional schools and learning organizations: In a traditional school

"adults seek to cause children to learn," whereas a learning organization "demands learning from

everyone" (p. 566). Acceptance that what is learned in school extends far beyond the canons of

knowledge that is traditionally defined as important and tested as evidence of learning, also

creates an understanding that learning organizations are in continuous states of learning—that is,

students and teachers are committed to learning about the world, themselves, and the interconnectedness of each.

When we envisioned a system in which everyone was a learner, it was agreed that conditions of greater equity could also result. When equitable conditions underpin a system, what each person in the system requires in order to thrive is recognized and acknowledged. Lina spoke to her understanding of thriving as being tied to what is valued: "Not everyone is going to thrive in the same way. . . . We need to very much value differences rather than trying to fit everyone into the same mold; therein lies one of our biggest shifts." In other words, thriving means children "are able to meet their potential, to be happy, healthy, joyful, curious and strong" (Lombardi, 2019, p. 4). When success was viewed as the achievement of predetermined, common outcomes demonstrated by all students through the same narrow measures, participants reported some students thrived while others did not. Over time, systems have implemented strategies to accommodate different learners, but these efforts have still resulted in some children being viewed as less capable than others. Inequitable conditions have arisen as systems continued to highlight the privilege of some and the struggles of other students. Thinking about a system that would support all students in their ability to thrive also required us to rethink what we viewed as success. Rex said: "If we shift the narrative of what we believe thriving is, everything changes." Shifting our thinking about learning—what is important in learning and how learning is demonstrated—by viewing learning through a lens of thriving requires honouring the interests, passions, and talents of students; doing so helps forge a path forward to success for all.

Nel spoke in the research conversations about the many times she had engaged with system leaders, principals, and teachers in attempts to come up with a shared definition of

learning. In doing so, she found that the groups often came up with rich descriptions of learning that resonated with the conversations we had as a research group. Among members of the system, there is a tangible belief that we need to be a learning organization in which everyone is committed to learning. She shared, "That's what they believe, that's their story. But somehow, they're in a system that doesn't allow them to live that story." As we imagined an ideal system, Nel's astute observation reflected much needed change. A system that understood learning differently would open a space for closer alignment of beliefs and action. Furthermore, a system focused on authentic learning and growth might free teachers to view students differently, recognizing talents and passions.

As an example, a significant change in the system we reimagined was in the stance of teachers as life-long learners rather than keepers of knowledge. Nel described the shift:

> It's all about learning and we never stop (learning). That is *so* important. I feel
>
> educators have to see themselves as learners along with their students, the
>
> learners, in their classrooms. We're not the holders of the knowledge, we're not
>
> the holders of the content. We are there to be lifelong learners, to investigate, and
>
> to be curious along with our students.

Being a learner is essential to working towards thriving, to teaching with a moral purpose. Teaching is not a terminal destination at which all there is to know can simply be acquired and stored. We cannot know in advance what each student will need from us; we cannot know when or what we will need to know to create the conditions of learning for students or just how we will help each student realize their talents and gifts. Teaching with a moral purpose also requires that we engage in critical reflexivity through that learning, increasingly understanding he ways in which our teaching, knowingly or unknowingly, continues to reproduce conditions that

negatively impact students. Viewing teaching through relationship and a continuous reflexive quest to learn about ourselves, others, and the world was an important condition in our envisioned educational system for NL.

In reimagining conditions of a new system, the polyphony of teacher identity is also influenced, and new voices emerge. As identity is influenced by the sacred stories of organizations, when the sacred stories undergo change, identity also evolves. In the stories we imagined that would create the conditions to which we aspired, identity and pedagogy would be hopeful, focused on relationships, and underscored by a confident stance towards transformational change and learning forward together.

Awakening Destiny
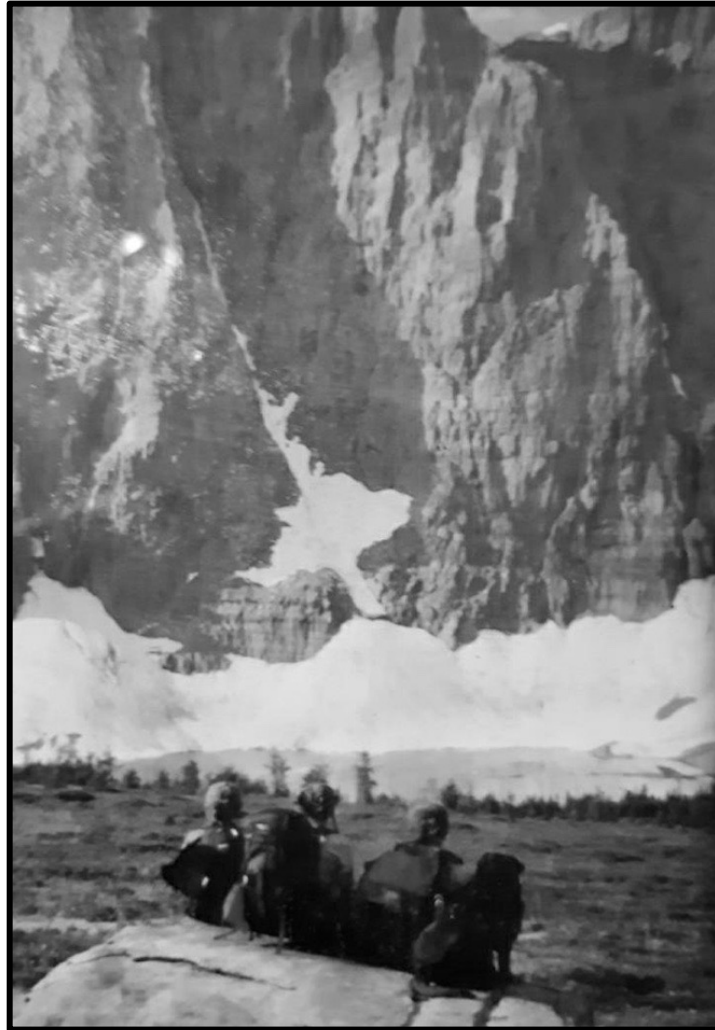
Photo 7: Regrouping at Floe Lake

Our dream of the designed reality extended to a consideration of how our actions and behaviours in the envisioned system would be changed. A traditional, mechanistic view of education systems involved a factory approach, in which children progressed through a set process and were formed into an educated person when they emerged from the system (Robinson, 2010, October; Senge et al., 2012). A mechanistic view disconnects the system (an entity) from people. Senge also explains that such systems are derived from a Newtonian scientific view and are determined, predictable, and work to recreate themselves. As was shared

in the Discovery chapter, and is common across other systems, the NL education system, through

many reiterations, was firmly established among generations of people who experienced a

similar kind of schooling and routinely expected education to continue to look that way. Simply

stated, a mechanistic approach to school, a one-size-fits-all, hierarchical structure was generally

accepted and valued. Changes to such a system can be difficult to achieve because the process is

often approached as bringing about needed change to a large and unwieldy system. However,

widespread disruptions to the order of the system frequently lead to disorder, and as such, the

system cannot function (Wheatley, 2008). It is sometimes difficult to see how to begin bringing

about system change through personal actions because, for so long, systems, when disrupted by

behaviours advocating for change, recalibrated and re-established the previous order.

A change in how systems—from mechanical to living—are understood offered a

different way of thinking about change. To elaborate, new scientists such as Ilya Prigogine

(1917–2003) and Fritjov Capra (1939–present) challenged Newtonian views and presented

systems in living and complex ways (Wheatley, 2008). Living systems have complexity that

comes from many moving parts, which are all somewhat unique and are also based on

relationships that exist among the parts (Senge, et al., 2012). Rather than seeing the system as

something external to the people in the system, the people *are* the system. Complex, living

systems change when the individual parts change. As a result, the disruption that occurs causes

the system to respond and recreate, continuously reshaping itself (Wheatley, 2008).

Freedom to act with the belief that change can emerge from within can come from

changes in thinking about systems. If we believe we are simply cogs in a machine, then agency is

less likely, if not impossible, and freedom to act in ways that bring about system change is

difficult to harness. By internalizing a belief that we are the system and that our actions

contribute to the dynamic evolution of the system, we can also believe that change is possible. It was with this hopeful stance that we began to envision the system of which we were a part and to consider how we could bring about a rebirth of that system and how our work might be experienced differently if that system was indeed our reality.

Reconsidering Paths

Prior to the final group interview, participants were provided with three video elicitations, and asked to view one that, either from the title or length, appealed to them. The videos were *How Wolves Change Rivers* (Monbiot, 2014), *The Butterfly Effect* (Open Your Reality, 2020), and *The Flight of the Hummingbird* (Yahgulanaas, 2008). Each of the videos presented metaphors in which seemingly small acts bring about change. When thinking about the system we would design, we also considered how our work might be different. The JamBoard used to capture ideas about the reimagined system also had sub-boards to prompt thinking about the nature of our work, our pedagogical relationships, and how we might invite others to bring about a changed system. This example of actively engaging in work that challenges established systems, that walks alongside others who are engaged in the work of liberation and taking up anti-oppressive practices underscored "a matter of choice amid various constraints" (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 258). Contemplating how the system might be changed through our small acts was an initial step towards making those choices and bringing the system we designed into a shared destiny. Over time, by committing to think deeply about how our actions moving forward might be different and might thus initiate changes articulated in Design, we could begin to move towards Destiny.

Steps to Take

Creating a vision for a system that would encapsulate participants' beliefs about children, learning, and the purpose of education also entailed giving serious consideration to how our work might look in such a system and how our actions might bring the envisioned system into being. While each participant thought about their own professional context, our notions of how we could act to bring about change also generated discussion of commonalities. These commonalities consistently reflected the provocative propositions and the ways in which our actions might spark movement towards them. As Lina put it, "It is one thing to be reflective, but then to be reflexive and put that into action is taking it another step." Thinking about our future actions was the next step.

Re-Think, Re-Member, Re-Story

Surfacing throughout our conversations was a realization of the stories that had chained our system for so long. It was evident during the research conversations that we needed both to consider to how those stories continued to impact teacher identity and pedagogy and to think more about how to release the chains. Rex shared:

> The whole thing around story and the stories we tell ourselves and how that
>
> influences what we do or what we don't do. That has really kind of hit me. It was
>
> probably the biggest takeaway [from the research process] for me.

Sacred stories of the NL system have impacted our teacher identities—perhaps in terms of not only how we understood teaching but also how we perceived freedom to act with authenticity. The challenging of sacred stories might also create a shift in how we understand our own stories and understand the nexus of voices in our teacher identities. Absolon and Willett (2005) explore the practice of "Re's…to look twice" (p. 108) to consider what can be learned

from looking a second time at stories, experiences, histories, and lives. As we examined how we

might understand the stories of the NL system as they were embedded in our teaching as

pedagogy, engaging in Re's was a way we could move forward. Re-thinking the stories might

also be a way to debunk some of the constraining narratives communicated in the sacred stories,

to challenge how they have been understood, and to examine the impact they have had on us. Re-

membering, or socially exploring the ingrained stories of the system (Gunn, 2014) can reposition

power as reciprocity. Re-storying (Lyle, 2018) might be another way through which we can

begin to know ourselves differently within a new system. Nel challenged us to "move into

comfort," to begin acting in ways that aligned with the stories that we wanted to tell rather than

with those into which we had to uncomfortably find our ways; this, Nel argued, involved a

commitment to finding new stories to live by.

Immersion in Relationships

The importance of relationships in the system resonated over and again throughout the

conversation. Shifting thinking to a system of relationships and understanding that the life of the

system is forged in the relationships inspired further thinking about how we would approach

enacting change. The group continued to acknowledge relationships as the heart of teaching; we

committed to immersing ourselves in relationships, understanding these as the heart not only of

teaching but of the very system we hoped to create, thus anchoring relationships as the epicentre

of our work. When the stories of the system change—whether because existing stories are re-

membered or because new narratives emerge—how we understand ourselves in the system, and

the ways in which we see ourselves enter relationships also changes. Central to this conversation

was the nature of our work in a reimagined system and the ways in which we might enter

pedagogical relationships differently. Nel described one important shift, that of knowing that the

other person in the relationship feels honoured as essential to our authentic ways of being in

relationships—"students actually seeing you seeing them is an important piece of learning that I

took in." In feeling seen, the teacher and student in the sacred space both know that who they are

is part of what truly shapes that relationship. Feeling seen also indicates that the person with

whom the relationship space is entered comes without judgement, without bias, and with an

openness to fully accepting the other person as they are.

Reaching In, Reaching Out

In reflecting on the process of the AI, we acknowledged some of the most significant

ways in which we envisioned the system evolving and our potential contributions in bringing that

new system to light. Tory captured a fundamental understanding, one we all agreed on:

"Everything connects to knowing who you are." Our conversations had touched on being a

learner and entering learning spaces with an openness to learn and a willingness to actively listen

in order to hear the perspectives of others.

For most of the history of formal schooling in NL there has been a mandated curriculum

for students. Professional learning targeted weak spots in teaching identified by the data gathered

on students' test scores. Decisions were made for the children and the adults in the system. Such

decisions positioned only a few people to make informed decisions for themselves and, for

example, to act on what they knew about themselves as learners and professionals. Honouring

others in pedagogical relationships, acknowledging their right to autonomy and agency, requires

that we look closely at how we enter those relationships—including the level of control we exert

over others. Nel suggested we commit to inviting others into pedagogical relationships as

opposed to demanding that they be there. She described the approach as:

entering a space with people understanding that I don't need to know it all, I don't need to have the answer. I have to start the conversation . . . it's not my role to police someone into a practice that I want, or I think is better.

Her vision would support learning together and including all learners, acknowledging that all have valuable contributions to make. She would start with the nature of the relationships at the core; she envisioned the teacher role not as moving others towards a goal that we have decided for them but as helping students find their way into learning. Lina added, "Sometimes it's just about opening the conversation and not being afraid of where those conversations are going to go." Reaching in, knowing ourselves, and reaching out, trusting others, were recurrent ways in which, as a group, we felt we could commit to bringing about the system we envisioned.

Education as Life

I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.

—John Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*

There has long been a societal narrative about education that it is to prepare students for real life, for something they will encounter as they age and mature. This attitude about learning suggests that one can learn all there is to know about life, or a trade, or a profession, before one enters it. Once engaged in that activity, all that is required is that the individual draws on the learning they gleaned during the training phase and subsequently know how to skillfully *be* in that role. To share an example, my own personal thinking about being and becoming a researcher has been constantly challenged through the research process, and I increasingly see the connections between education *as* life—not education *for* life—and research *as* life.

July 10, 2021

Whenever I am involved in conversations about what school could or should be, I am always struck by the disconnection that exists between what so many people believe and what continues to be the experience of school for children. We continue to function as an organization focused on preparing students for life, but we are serving students who are living life. Going back through the JamBoard and the interview transcript to our discussions about our ideal system, I see the vision of what we believe would be a better lived reality for students. If children experienced life at school in a system steeped in relationships, honouring who each learner is and believing that our actions can bring about change, perhaps we would create the conditions where life simply continues and happens in different contexts. I am also thinking about how this further informs my work as a researcher. If, as a researcher, I explore and document life as it is being lived, envision and articulate reality as it might be hoped for, challenge and re-story the narratives that have tethered us and help tell a different story, might I contribute to bringing about a change to thinking about education as life lived? I do believe committing to change is also part of life lived. As I have come to see it, research, like teaching, is about imagining and embarking on new routes, and refusing to continue to travel the same, well-trodden path.

I, therefore, find hope in the design of a better future reality as envisioned by the participant group. I also find hope in shifting my focus as a teacher-researcher to research as life. In the work I do, whether teaching or researching, I can genuinely approach, and understand, my work as a way of being in the world.

Proof of What We Believe

Rex shared a quote from Sinek (2009) that links our actions to what we believe:

Those with an ability to never lose sight of why no matter how little or how much

they achieve, can inspire us. . . . They hold themselves accountable to how they

do it and what they do serves as the tangible proof of what they believe. (p. 182)

As we thought about our actions and the creation of a reimagined NL system, the challenge we

faced was in listening to the voices that comprise the polyphony of our teacher identities. The

beliefs we held about a living system open to change as we change and evolve, of relationships at

the heart of teaching, and of knowing how we enter relationships, were and are manifested in our

actions. When we believe that how we enter pedagogical relationships is inevitably shaped by

our teacher identity, the many stories that influence how we show up in the world need us to be

open to changing truths, meanings, and relevance. Being open to questioning and looking at the

stories of our system that come to life through different lenses may confirm, strengthen, or

challenge our beliefs. Being able to open ourselves up to the views of others and to what they

bring to relationships might also allow us to reflect on how we view the world and, as a result,

what we bring to relationships. In the final analysis, being able to look in the mirror and critically

examine who we are could allow us to reach out further in welcoming others into pedagogical

relationships.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

The Design and Destiny phases of this appreciative inquiry provided an opportunity to

build on the Dream phase, to take what we believed was not only necessary but also possible in

the NL system and create a vision of the future towards which to move. As presented,

provocative propositions captured our thinking about how the future might look if pedagogical

relationships were at the heart of teaching and teachers were change agents in the stories of the system. Drawing on the themes of the Dream phase, the provocative propositions articulated a vision of an educational system rooted in pedagogical relationships, where teachers and students were agentic in change, and in which all individuals thrived. In direct response to the provocative propositions, the actions to which we committed—starting with ourselves, accepting others, and carefully considering the stories of the system we hear and tell—were seen as helping bring the envisioned system into a living reality.

Looking forward to the final part of this research journey, Part 3 will share what was learned along our paths, and what we gleaned from having travelled together.

Part 3

The Journey Continues

Photo 8: Gros Morne Guide

Chapter 8

Where to From Here?

The Road to Here

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

It is often said that travels change us by allowing us to see our world in a new way. We set out on a journey of exploration and upon our return home, we see things differently than we had known them before—we know our place again for the first time. So it has been with this journey; we arrived at the place where we started—with ourselves—differently.

The journey of this study was embarked upon to explore teacher identity. Identity was understood using Palmer's (2018) definition of "an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self . . . [the] intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human" (Palmer, 2018, p. 14). When viewing teaching as relationship, we engage in pedagogical relationships with our students, entering a shared, sacred space. Who we are informs our encounters in the space and how we bring ourselves to the pedagogical relationship—the lenses through which we view our students, the beliefs we hold about teaching, and the way we understand ourselves: We teach who we are. Herein lies the essence of considering identity as pedagogy.

In the current study, teaching who we are was also understood as being guided and informed by the experiences that shaped how we viewed the world and ourselves; the stories that

shaped us reverberated in our teaching. Some of those stories sat boldly in bright light, their influence obvious on who we had become. Other stories hid in shadowed places and required us to first locate them and bring them carefully into the light in order to learn from them. All of the stories we carried were voices in our polyphonic teacher identities and thus became our pedagogy. As we explored and considered our stories, we came to understand anew our identity as pedagogy.

Through narrative inquiry, we sought to understand our journeys of identity by delving into and storying our teaching experiences. Nested within narrative inquiry, appreciative inquiry (AI) provided a framework through which to ponder our experiences and how they intersected as identity. By engaging in semi-structured interview conversations guided by the phases of AI, considering elicitations and shared stories, and reflexively journaling, we were able to examine and deepen our understandings of our teacher identities as pedagogy. Making the decision to use the AI framework assisted in bringing forward into the future the best of "what gives light" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 7) to our journeys so that we might be guided by that light in generating positive change.

The travellers along this journey were a group of teachers from various organizational layers of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD). As all participants were from the NL system, close consideration was given to the impact of the stories of the NL school system on our teacher identities. Once we better understood and acknowledged the province's education history and its continued influence on the system, we began to envision a new reality coming to fruition as a result of actions we might take. That envisioned reality would place pedagogical relationships at the heart of the work, create conditions for reciprocity and relationships, and aspire to equitably honour each individual's journey. Over the duration of the

study, as we reflected—inward, outward, backward, and forward—on our own stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), we perpended how our actions might be transformational in our pedagogical relationships and might contribute to system change. We also imagined ways in which the change might best manifest and unfold.

Our shared journey culminated with newfound understandings of who we were as teachers and of our stories—the ways we had been influenced by people in our lives, our lived experiences, and the contexts in which we had lived our lives as teachers. When we arrived where we had started, many of those conditions had not radically changed along the course of our journey. However, we saw for the first time again, through our own changed lenses, a world that looked different because we understood our stories and ourselves—our identities—differently.

This final chapter tells of the lessons learned along our shared journey: Lessons others might encounter and from which they might learn. While the lessons were ours, they are shared in the hope that the insights we gained might better support readers in understanding their teaching stories and encourage them to consider their own teacher identities as pedagogy.

Beginnings of a Path Forward

Storytellers and narrative inquirers attempt to "frame fragments of experience in order to remind us that there is significance in the moment, in the particular, in the mundane" (Leggo, 2008, p. 5). These framed fragments and moments give us much to consider and have much to teach us. Although each educator experience is unique, there are times when we see our experiences reflected in the framed fragments and stories of others. Such instances remind us that our stories can be framed for others and connected—sometimes by a delicate thread and other times more substantially. A precious gift of stories, both our own and those of others, is as

Bishop (1990) tells us of children's literature, they can function as mirrors to reflect our stories back to us, windows through which we can view the stories of others, and doors through which we might enter to create a new story. The stories we tell and the stories we are told can offer us a different view of the world, each other, and ourselves. Kimpson (2005) wrote,

> …I remain, as all writers do, exquisitely conscious of my potential audience. I am cautious about summarizing or drawing out themes from this story for your benefit and wonder about the wisdom of distilling the text in such a way. Like myself, I know that you will also make your own meanings from the text and I encourage you to do so (p. 91)

Bits of conversations have been framed (Leggo, 1990), windows, mirrors and doors presented (Bishop, 1990), and as through the resulting shared stories readers will make their own meanings and embed that meaning into their own reflections.

This study was conducted with a small group of people in a localized context. As such, we had an opportunity to sit with ideas, delve deep in our exploration of our questions, and take side routes that offered rich insights into the stories we were exploring. Generalizing the results was never the intention. As stated, others might connect to these stories in many ways and make their own meaning, our connections are personal and individual. However, implications might be revealed through the relevance and meaning of the study to others and to the literature. That said, the research journey taken accentuated four contributions across our collective experiences and are presented as follows:

- professional learning
- opportunities to consider one's story of teacher identity as pedagogy
- ways to consider the stories of a system
- a hopeful path forward.

The following sections discuss how implications of the four contributions of our research

journey might also be meaningful in the teaching journeys of others as they contemplate identity

as pedagogy.

Professional Learning

As participants reflecting on our journey, one thing that was noted was the impact of

learning together as a polyvocal group that represented the various layers of Newfoundland and

Labrador English School District. Within the organization, much professional learning occurred

with colleagues from similar roles. For example, principals learned together at leadership

meetings, while teachers had opportunities to learn together during professional learning days. It

was unlikely that a teacher and an assistant director would be engaged in learning conversations.

However, such was the opportunity provided in this study. The conversations that ensued were

reflective and honest, and at the end of the study there was a desire on the part of all participants

to continue the conversations as a professional-learning community. Thinking of the

conversations as professional learning, they reached far beyond the technical rational focus of

professional development days. This gave participants a unique opportunity to consider their

personal teaching stories, their teacher identities, their practices, and their pedagogical

relationships alongside others whose roles in the organization were different from their own. As

a result, they were able to reflect on the collective difference they were making in the lives of

their students. Rex's words highlight how he felt in having an opportunity to be a member of a

group, learning together:

> I actually took the time to reflect and was able to share and not feel pressure. I
>
> didn't have to feel like [Rex] director of schools, I could be an educator and a
>
> learner. It just totally rejuvenated me . . . it's been a really positive experience.

And the conversations have been fabulous. To me, we were like-minded people.

We have different roles and different perspectives, but we blended very well in

the conversations. When I heard a different perspective from another participant, I

thought, "Oh, I've never thought about it that way." It really caused me to reflect.

The impact of learning with people from different layers in the organization, as Rex

pointed out, allowed each of the participants to hear other perspectives. A remnant of a hierarchy

is the silos in which people only work with those in similar roles—and isolation is an enemy of

change (Harris, 2021). As we move towards breaking down hierarchical norms and transitioning

to a school system where we are all working together to achieve a common moral purpose,

professional learning that is based in shared conversations and collaboration across the

organization might help move our system, and other systems as well, in that direction.

Professional learning in the NL system also tended to be prescriptive and focused on

policies or initiatives being implemented by either the Ministry of Education or school boards.

Engaging in the research study as professional learning provided participants space to reflect on

who we were as teachers. Furthermore, it served as professional learning that offered us an

opportunity to look inward and consider how we showed up in pedagogical relationships.

Knowing how students learn and being able to support them in their learning garners most of the

focus of teacher learning (Korthagen, 2019; Pitsoe & Maila, 2013). However, during this study,

knowing our impact and being able to assess our relational authenticity were also identified as

critical aspects of professional learning.

Professional learning that moves beyond a focus on teaching-as-doing towards teaching-

as-being can create "room to claim the space of praxis" (Macintyre-Latta, 2010, p. 137). Mockler

(2011) also described teacher praxis as emerging when teachers understand "their purpose, their

identity, and the implication of these for practice" (p. 525). In this study, as we considered our

teacher identities, re-storying and re-membering our experiences, we reflected on how those

stories had impacted our practices and how we might draw on them in new ways as we entered

pedagogical relationships. Professional learning, as an opportunity to reconsider our stories and

come to know ourselves more deeply as teachers, might also become a path towards praxis:

Guided by moral purpose, we might interweave our theoretical understanding of what it is to

teach with our practical experiences of teaching. Sachs (2003) proposed that when teachers have

a strong sense of their identity, they are more likely to enact moral purpose. Exploring our

teacher identity to reposition teaching as journeying towards praxis, thus entering pedagogical

relationships with moral purpose, might also offer opportunities for others to engage in a similar

journey as the one described in this dissertation.

Opportunities to Consider One's Story of Teacher Identity as Pedagogy

> The severest test of work today is not of our strategies but of our imaginations and
>
> identities. For a human being, finding good work and doing good work is one of
>
> the ultimate ways of making a break for freedom.
>
> —David Whyte, *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity*

In part, the intent of this dissertation was to tell the story of a group of teachers, with the

researcher as co-participant, who contemplated our teacher identities—the many stories that

made us who we were and informed how we taught. There are stories we are told and stories we

tell ourselves to which we can become chained (King, 2003). Stories of how our actions as a

system, historically, contributed to maintaining a system of control and oppression of people.

Stories of how the agency of students and teachers was supressed in service to maintaining the

status quo. Stories we told ourselves to explain our lack of action in breaking cycles of behaviour

that needed to be challenged. As we explored the NL education system as we had each

experienced it, we concurred, not happily, that there were indeed stories that continued to chain

the system and, as a result, were also infused into our teacher identities.

As we shared in our conversations, disrupting stories became an important aspect of the

conversations. Whyte (2001) wrote that work today is "a test of our imaginations and identities"

(p. 60). I interpret such tests to mean the challenges we face to our teacher identity in response to

the continual erosion of teaching as nuanced praxis, and the promotion of teaching as a technical

rational endeavour. In considering the stories of the NL system, we recognized they were

embedded into our own stories and had become sources by which we defined and viewed

ourselves. The disruption of those stories was the beginning of a path forward. As we held them

to the light and reflected on how they had impacted our identities, we could begin to untangle the

threads; as a result, we could see ourselves more clearly and listen authentically to the voices in

our own stories once more. Examining stories that made acceptable our unconscious acts of

suppression opened the way to change those stories and act differently while challenging system

narratives. By looking towards the future to which we aspired and imagining ourselves in that

future, we were also able explore what was hidden in the shadows and what had limited us from

fully acknowledging our stories in the light. Through our dialogic explorations, we were also

freed from stories that might have unknowingly chained us.

Sharing the research study might result in the threads of our stories of teacher identity

resonating for other teachers who then begin to examine the stories that comprise their teacher

identities. Perhaps there might be opportunities for their own stories to be considered as "stories

of courage, resilience, and moral choice [that] can inspire us all to reflect on our identity as

pedagogy too" (S. Elliott-Johns, personal communication, August 1, 2021). Reading the journey of the participants here might thus provide opportunities whereby the stories other teachers are telling themselves are questioned, challenged, and ultimately, unchained. As Whyte (2001) contended, it might also bring about freedom. In turn, such freedom might allow other teachers to fully embrace their teacher identity, to authentically enter pedagogical relationships, and to begin to uncover the self who teaches.

Ways to Consider the Stories of a System

> Stories can divide us, it is true, but they can connect us as well—across the boundaries of class, race, gender, and generation. They can push us apart or they can pull us together, elevating our spirits and inviting us to a higher level of humanity. Either way, stories affect us, for good or ill.

—William Randall, *Listening to Stories of Courage and Moral Choice: Creating Conversations About Inclusive Care in Our Schools and Communities*

It was vital for us to critically consider the stories we identified in the NL education system and to work to better understand how they continued to influence the educational landscape. While our study was limited to the NL educational system, *all* educational systems have stories upon which the teachers, students, and families draw—sacred, cover, and secret stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996).

The stories of the system, understood by teachers through their own lenses and in their own contexts, could also be uniting stories. At a time in history when we are re-membering (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Gunn, 2014) stories that have traditionally marginalized groups, courageously exploring the stories of the system is not only of value; it is essential. For example,

we can only know the ways we have contributed to the marginalization of others by deeply

reflecting on how we have participated in the telling of, and listening to, those stories. In looking

to the future, we are also able to help re-tell stories that open conversations of change and that

challenge hegemonic thinking; by doing so, we place all learners as the protagonists of their own

learning and lives. In this way, the stories in our systems that can define who we are together—

connected and united—can be seen as paths of anti-oppression, emancipation and liberation for

students and for teachers. That said, a requirement is that we carefully consider the stories to

which we listen and the stories we tell.

The locating of stories in the NL system that impacted the sacred spaces of pedagogical

relationship was not pursued as a way to place blame, but rather to help us make sense of the

ways our teacher identities had been impacted by those stories. Another implication of this

research might be that teachers in other education systems might also consider the stories of their

system and take up opportunities to unchain themselves from those stories that challenge the

alignment of their Möbius strips (Palmer, 2014).

Challenging the stories of a system might also give rise to rethinking how system

structures are understood and how, in turn, we might continue to challenge those stories through

our identity as pedagogy. We might ask ourselves which stories do we want to hold in our hearts

as we enter pedagogical relationships and what other stories might we need to question? As we

considered and shared stories of the NL system, the continued influences of hierarchy and

hegemony were still very evident. As thinking changes about systems, how they function and

how we describe them, important stories of the system must change challenge the status quo. In a

follow-up conversation among participants, which took place a year after the end of the

appreciative inquiry phases, Nel shared a realization she had come to about the stories we choose

to tell. She told of a situation that had unfolded: The burning of a pride flag at a NL school was a devastating event that communicated an attitude of intolerance to many people in the NL education system and across the province. Responding to the shared disappointment of many people who had worked hard to challenge a culture of intolerance, Nel said, "We continued to allow that story to be told. And we didn't tell another story—the story of all the work that had been done [around inclusivity and acceptance]." Critically examining stories that are told, and the stories we tell, can help to shift the narratives of a system. Being attuned to anti-oppressive narratives and how we can call out acts that oppress others are also ways we can work to counter existing narratives. Perhaps another implication of this study might be to inspire others to challenge the stories of their system, thereby providing an opening in which to think about how those stories maintain the status quo and inhibit necessary changes. Robinson (February 2010) closed his TED Talk titled *Bring on the Learning Revolution,* by drawing on the Yates poem "The Cloths of Heaven."

> Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths,
>
> Enwrought with golden and silver light,
>
> The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
>
> Of night and light and the half-light;
>
> I would spread the cloths under your feet:
>
> But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
>
> I have spread my dreams under your feet;
>
> Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Robinson challenged those of us in education to tread carefully. We must heed his advice in re-crafting the stories of educational systems because the stories we choose to tell are told on the

dreams students lay, in hope, under our feet: We tread carefully to protect them, also taking

action to make others aware that their steps must also be carefully trod.

A Hopeful Path Towards System Change

> On the news yesterday, there was a woman speaking about a program that they're
>
> working to curb gender violence and violence against women. The reporter asked
>
> her if she thought it [the violence] was ever going to change—it has been
>
> perpetuating itself in our society for so long. And she replied, "If I didn't have
>
> hope that it could change, then I would never be able to continue my work." And
>
> it struck me; if I lose hope that *we* can make a difference in our work, then I need
>
> to evaluate why I am here.

—Nel, Dream Phase Interview

As we moved into our last phases of AI, Design and Destiny, our understanding of

system change began to shift. We moved from thinking about big change coming from forces

being enacted *on* a system to change coming from *within* the system, with all parts of the system

moving forward together. Freire (1994) wrote, "Without hope there is no way we can even start

thinking about education" (p. 87). For more than a century, changes to the NL educational

system had been unsuccessful endeavours approached through policies, procedures, and

personnel; hope for change was essential. We envisioned a shift in culture as a central idea that

would drive change. The shift would start with placing students at the centre of the stories,

viewing them as the authors of their own stories, and encouraging teachers to teach with the

moral conviction to ensure students thrive.

For the NL education system, change was extremely challenging because of the stories so firmly ingrained in the stories of the province, its history, and its people. Change is happening and there is the glimmer of hope to which Nel referred. After all, a system comprises many complex parts. The system is not separate from the teachers, the students, or the families; it *is* the teachers, the students, and the families. As we change, so does the system; conversely, if we do not change, neither does the system. Jacobs (2005) advocated, "Hope can be a collaborative and imaginative process by which we overcome despair and reclaim agency in our pedagogy, pushing us forward to collectively reimagine the future and its possibilities" (p. 800). An implication of this study might be that change to the stories of the system will come from the stories of ourselves and will help push us forward to reimagined possibilities. Regardless of the system of which a person is a part, the system is not able to sustain itself in exactly the same way if it is challenged by new and hopeful stories. Re-membered stories, of systems and of ourselves, might therefore offer a hopeful way forward towards system change.

Becoming

> For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I
> see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach
> continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end.

> —Michelle Obama, *Becoming*

As I began this journey, it was akin to what Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) called a "nomadic inquiry" (p. 826), as my writing involved inquiry as part of the process. Engaging in this research study—learning to engage with the stories of the participants and those of my own that were awakened through the research conversations—was a journey of learning and of

becoming. It pushed me to consider how I would take up research and to relocate my teacher

voice in the nexus of teacher-researcher. It pushed me to find direction in how I would take up

research and relocate my teacher voice in the nexus of teacher-researcher. Throughout the

process of writing about the research, I discovered writing as inquiry. In other words, "Writing is

thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery"

(Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 826).

> *July 28, 2021*
>
> *I think back to when I began this research study and what I initially thought it*
> *meant to be a co-participant: I would enter the conversations and explore my*
> *teacher identity as part of the participant group. I would try to engage in the*
> *delicate dance of posing questions, guiding conversations to unfold as*
> *participants shared their stories and their truths. I would listen with eyes, ears,*
> *and heart wide open. What I did not recognize at the time was that the journey I*
> *would take would also find me searching for ways to recognize myself as a*
> *teacher-researcher. I've landed in a place where I recognize that the research*
> *study opened a space for a shared journey exploring teacher identity through the*
> *route the participant group travelled. It also allowed me to reflexively explore my*
> *personal teacher-researcher identity and come to recognize that voice in myself.*
>
> *This exploration of teacher identity that instigated my nomadic journey of*
> *research as a path of discovery was clearly one of becoming—more specifically,*
> *becoming comfortable in acknowledging who I am. As I continue to think about*
> *myself as a researcher, it is not about changing who I am to fit a new role and*
> *context. It's about bringing what I have to offer, what I value, and how I can*

contribute to rethinking education. There is obviously still growth and maturity to happen; there are skills and nuanced understandings of research that only come from actively engaging in research. For me to recognize myself as a teacher-researcher I have to also accept myself. I have had to find my voice to tell the stories I feel will contribute to change, honour the ways of being that allow me to authentically enter the space of research relationships, and openly accept the participants who enter with me. There is acknowledgement that we not only research who we are; we also research who we become.

Who I am as a researcher, nomadically inquiring, also means finding ways to share my learning and insights in ways that might challenge standard, or more traditional, ways of presenting work. This is something I feel makes a valuable contribution to the field of educational research, just as I felt strongly that the writing of this dissertation had to reflect the journey taken. Perhaps this dissertation, and others like it that are somewhat non-traditional, might inspire other emerging researchers to find their voices in writing and to share their work in ways that reflect their messy, tangled, research journeys of discovery, too. In challenging the way things have always been, we can help forge a new path in ways we hope things can be—for teachers, for systems, but most importantly, for students.

In the same way as I have found journeys in life tend to blend one into another—each one seen through a lens coloured by the one before—this research journey has the potential to inform and engage others upon which I embark. For me, it has been a journey that propelled and

enriched the evolution of my teacher-researcher identity, continuously moving "toward a better

self. The journey doesn't end" (Obama, 2018, p. 419).

Circling Back: Arriving Where We Started

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.

—Søren Kierkegaard, *Journalen*

Looking back at the research journey taken here with participants, the influential

experiences, people, and contexts on our teacher identities became increasingly apparent. There

is a saying in NL, often used when someone, usually a child, does or says something that

challenges a situation or presents a different way of seeing things: "I don't know who knit you."

While it is often said in jest, the saying captures several tenets uncovered during this study. For

example, there are many threads in our identities and they come together to create who we are;

there are many influences on how those threads come together; and, perhaps most importantly,

those threads can be unravelled and knit again. The nexus of identity does not only exist in one

place; it shifts and moves as we do, readjusting to new experiences, contexts, and people,

seeking and finding new ways of thinking and seeing the world.

The fact that we can, and do, change, is not only valuable, it is life-giving—to us as

individuals and to those around us. The stories that we look back on, the threads that are knit, the

voices that emerge—regardless of the metaphor that resonates for us—*can* change. We see

stories as they unfold behind us: The sacred, cover, and secret stories of teaching. In naming

them and exploring their influences on our teacher identities, we bring them from the shadows

and use what we have learned in our explorations to move forward. Brown (2015) writes: "When

we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new

ending". Inquiring narratively in this research study provided us, as participants, opportunities to

tell the stories by which we have been shaped as teachers and have embedded into our pedagogy. Exploring the stories through an appreciative inquiry lens was a framework through which we could authentically envision a shared new ending to those stories.

In a world where people are finding their voices, sharing their stories, and unravelling their threads, and writing new endings, the importance of looking back on the stories that were told has never been greater. For the students with whom we enter pedagogical relationships, there has perhaps never been a time in history when it has been so important to them that we question our own stories—stories that are sometimes misguided or ill-informed. To elaborate, we have told stories of students that have positioned them in places of subordination and oppression; we have withheld power and privilege and created cultural stories to explain our compliance with such narratives; we have silenced the stories that needed to be told in favor of stories we wanted to tell. As participants, these acts are part of a past we share. The way we undo harm is to unchain ourselves from those stories, challenge them through our practices, disrupting and decolonizing through our pedagogy as identity. We must enter those relationships in ways that honour students and their stories, add our voices to theirs in challenging the stories that have failed to recognize students for the unique individuals they are, to see them for all they are and all they wish to become.

In working with a moral purpose towards thriving, teachers are called to unravel stories from the past and to better understand our stories and identities, "both the good and the ill we have had done to us and have done to others" (Palmer, 2018, p. 14). In looking backwards and using what we have learned, we can move forward to a re-imagined reality.

This study has provided us—a group of teachers working together to explore and understand identity as pedagogy—an opportunity to look back from where we came. We were

able to examine, question, and claim our own stories and the stories we told ourselves about

others, infuse them into our teacher identities, and be guided by them in pedagogical

relationships. It has also allowed us to consider ways in which we might leverage our own

privilege to ignite and accelerate system change. Collectively and individually, we aspire to

bring about an envisioned reality that nurtures sacred spaces of relationship for the students we

teach. Living forwards, we are coming to know ourselves and our stories more deeply and to

embrace identity as pedagogy, as we continue to not only reflect on but also share our own

stories with others.

> *August 8, 2021*
>
> *Circling back for me today brings me to another fork in the road and*
> *preparations to embark on a new journey, that of teacher educator at St. Francis*
> *Xavier University. As I write, I am surrounded with boxes filled with the contents*
> *of my life. Artifacts from other journeys wait to be shipped to Antigonish, Nova*
> *Scotia. Opportunities to enter new pedagogical relationships with students and*
> *colleagues there await me when I arrive. I look forward to this new journey.*
> *Moving forward, new voices of my teacher identity will emerge and blend with*
> *those to which I have learned to listen. Perhaps this is where my research takes*
> *me, sharing stories of coming to know myself as teacher educator, and how that*
> *voice contributes to my teacher identity as pedagogy. The journey, a long and*
> *winding path, continues . . .*

Photo 9. Long and Winding Road

Postscript

At the onset of this research study, as indicated in the Define chapter, the Newfoundland

and Labrador English School District (NLESD), and education throughout the province of NL,

was on the cusp of burgeoning change—there was a feeling of hope for the future based on the

partnership the NLESD had entered with Michael Fullan and the Deep Pedagogies for New

Learning team. In April 2021, *The Big Reset* (Newfoundland and Labrador Premier's Economic

Report Team, 2021), a wide-scale review of the province, recommended that NLESD merge with

the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education (EDU). Thus began

another chapter of the evolving story of education in NL. At the time of writing, there was much

unknown, and indeed much angst, about how education would be structured, who the leadership

would be, and what direction the new educational entity would take. Throughout the NLESD

organization, there were questions about the unknown future. The only certainty was that change was on the horizon. "Change, even really positive change, involves a surprising amount of loss. Loss of the familiar" (Gottlieb, 2019, 06:58). Fear of the unknown was understandable, as the changing structure would bring with it many different beliefs about education.

This study explored some of the stories of education in NL to which many have clung. Through critical conversation, the participants began to create a new story with significantly different underlying narratives to guide the work. Through the research conversations, we saw our work as part of the NL education system, our roles in change, and our hope for the future centre on relationships and on ensuring that students thrived in our re-imagined system—a system we believed started with changing the stories we listened to and the stories we told. The change we desire begins with the recognition that even our small acts could help bring about positive changes and help bring to life the system we envisioned.

Over time, as happens with all systems, a new education system in NL will emerge. The participants in this study will be part of bringing about change, however that change may manifest itself. Perhaps, in the future, there will be other studies that examine the stories of this iteration of the system—studies that will also consider *this* story as a vital part of the educational change re-envisioned.

> *October 10, 2021*
>
> *From the perspective of my growth as an educator and as a person, this study and the conversations that ensued, have continued to elevate critical awareness of the privilege with which I experience the world. I also understand that privilege as coming with an accountability and responsibility to others for whom the conditions are not as favourable. When I read Chambers' (2004) call to take up research that matters to*

others, the others for whom I conducted this research were the children. As I consider the many ways the stories of the system influenced me, I also realize that there were other stories in that same system that allowed me to meet with success. While the conditions of my childhood were anything but affluent, my parents had social and cultural capital to navigate the education system where I eventually found success. I know that some other children were not as fortunate. I have had opportunities to experience teaching in other jurisdictions in Canada whose stories broadened my understandings, and where I came to personally know children by name whereas, before, I had only known them by a story. These children I hold in my heart as reminders that every child is more than a story and needs us to see them and to enter the space of pedagogical relationship with them. I have therefore come to better understand, through this research, that my privilege can be leveraged for the students with educators at all levels, with teacher candidates, with colleagues, and with families, to help challenge narratives that have chained a system and open spaces for children to create their own stories. Mine is the privilege to consider the stories I will tell.

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