

**Paths of becoming: A hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into
teacher candidate professional self-understanding**

Andrew Francis

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University of Ottawa

Abstract

An extensive body of educational literature examines the process and implications of how an individual becomes a teacher, but studies within this field often minimize or ignore the existential nature of this act of *becoming*. Something *happens* to the individual as they enter into the teaching profession and commence their teaching practice and in many educational jurisdictions, those happenings are left for the novice teacher to grapple with in isolation. This study presents interpretations of four teacher candidates' sense of *becoming* and provides a meta-analysis of important existential themes arising from examinations of the participants' professional self-understanding.

This study engages with the concept of existential *becoming* in teacher candidates through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to interpretation and understanding. Four teacher candidates, about to enter their final teaching practicum before graduating from an eight-month Bachelor of Education program as certified teachers, participated in this research project which included one-on-one interviews, journal analysis and focus groups. Interpretations of these teacher candidates' understandings of *becoming* a teacher are organized by Kelchtermans' *professional self-understanding* framework and presented through the use of poetic vignettes and images of the teacher candidates' paths of *becoming*. These aesthetic representations of teacher candidates' understandings of *becoming* offer an alternative and existentially-informed vehicle for teacher candidate reflection and professional self-understanding.

Data analysis and hermeneutic interpretations among and between the researcher and the participants revealed a number of existential themes present in the teacher candidates' understandings of *becoming* a teacher, including: fear, responsibility, authenticity, purpose, and

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the self. Each theme is examined via a connection to both existential and teacher education literature and implications for teacher education programs are discussed.

Keywords: teacher education, becoming a teacher, becoming, professional self-understanding, hermeneutic phenomenology, existentialism, reflection

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Dedication

For Mom and Dad

for everything

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Learning to teach—like teaching itself—is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become (Britzman, 2003, p. 31).

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 My paths

I was on a train. A train is a path, of sorts. It's steel and wood and power and it has direction. This train was bound for Ottawa, ON, thirteen years too early, it would appear now. But I was on this train and I had a cell phone in my hand. That phone was prepared to receive two calls, one each from two employers I had been interviewing with over the previous few weeks. I was twenty-one years old and had recently graduated from a Bachelor of Commerce program. On this train, on this path, I saw my future laid out before me: my phone would ring twice in the next few hours. I would accept one of the two positions, I would be instantly successful, and then life, like the train, would arrive. I would become the success I had thought I was supposed to become. The money, the jobs, the *life* would all be there and I would be done. Sure, I would live another 60-70 years, have a family and cross the usual thresholds of life, but I would have become the person I had imagined myself to be.

The train rattled on and, indeed, my phone rang twice. Once from an oil and gas consultancy firm in Alberta: "Thanks, but no thanks," I would tell them. Second, an office equipment sales company in Kingston, ON, the city I was currently living in. "Thanks, I will be in on Monday." I slid back into my chair having made my decision, feeling my feet take their next steps on my path...

Four months later, my feet became strangely frozen. I looked down at them one morning, poking their toes out from beneath my blankets. "Move!" I said. They would not. They would take no further steps on this path because in the previous four months, each step on this path had

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been more miserable than the next. Each time I had put shoes on those feet and walked from office door to office door shilling my products, asking receptionists if I could speak with someone about their photocopying needs, my pace slowed. Every time one dismissed me out of hand, my feet grew heavy. Each day I went home with no success—and due to the 100% commission nature of my job, with no money, either—my feet dragged just a little more until one day they refused to move entirely.

Fixed by depression and fear, I had plenty of time to think. I lay in bed that day and I considered the path I was on: I wondered why I had accepted a job selling photocopiers; why I had enrolled in a Bachelor of Commerce program; and why had I believed that financial success would leave me fulfilled? The path that I now found myself unable to walk seemed less like a purposeful adventure and now more like an existential crevasse.

So I lay there. And I thought. And I projected. I thought about the rest of the mornings of my life. I considered what I would be excited to do with my day, every day. I thought about what I loved, what I had done in the past, and what I wanted my life to be. It was in that state of emotional paralysis that I decided that what I loved was learning new things; what I had done was coach and teach; and what I wanted was for my life to be meaningful. I decided I would become a teacher. Little did I realize as my toes began to wiggle once more that what I was about to undertake was a far more complex process than I could have imagined.

Put on the tie, Andrew. You look too young to be a teacher.

Shave, Andrew. Professionals shave.

You can't be their friend, Andrew. They'll eat you alive if you're too nice to them.

I say my name as I order myself through my morning routine, but in doing so, I miss the point.

I'm not just a teacher, I'm Andrew, teaching.

This is what a teacher does, Andrew. This is how a teacher speaks.

Fine, but the sum is less than the parts, for me. This isn't working.

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I received my Bachelor of Education degree in the winter of 2006 and with its accompanying certificate, I had become a teacher. I had learned how to plan and implement a lesson, had taken a course on classroom management, investigated the different exceptional needs and abilities students bring with them to their schooling, and now I was a teacher. I was told I would be teaching six different classes and I was grateful for the opportunity. However, although I had watched teachers all my life, studied theory and observed my mentor teachers, I was still unsure how *I* would be a teacher. I could wear the clothes a teacher wears, speak like a teacher, even shave my face like one should, but I still did not feel like *I* was a teacher.

For the first few weeks I tried to be a teacher. My progress was stunted, my students disengaged, my hands clenched in frustration and disappointment with myself. Then one day, a package arrived in the mail from a friend. It included a nameplate for my desk (“Mr. Francis,” it read), a book on how to “survive” the first year of teaching, but most importantly, a package of Star Wars-themed mechanical pencils. My friend knew of my lifelong obsession with the series and they thought the pencils would be perfect for me. I left them on my desk, unused for days, thinking them too childish and unprofessional to use in the serious business of schooling. Until one day I picked one up out of necessity and began to show a student a math problem on their page.

“Is that a Star Wars pencil?” they asked.

“Umm... yes?” I replied.

“Cool. You like that stuff?”

“Yup. My whole life.”

“Cool.”

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My hands unclenched, I relaxed, I stopped being “a teacher” and began to be Andrew Francis as a teacher. I slowly injected more of myself into my lessons: my passions, my interests, my personality and what I realized was that the more of myself I gave the students, the more comfortable they became in engaging in the class. I acknowledged their humanity by displaying my own and the relationships began to build—I could see a new path before me. As the relationships grew, so did their trust in me. As they trusted me, I wanted to honor that trust with more creative and personalized lessons for them. As I learned more about who I was as a person and as a teacher through the relationships I formed with the students, the better I became at teaching and the more the students learned. I had created a positive feedback loop of self-understanding and student success. I was now in the process of becoming the teacher I wanted to be—one who cares deeply about his students as individuals and makes the educational process joyful and exciting for all. However, the more I engaged in this reflective process, the deeper and more complex the process would become.

When I first heard a student ask, “Why do we need to know this?” I asked myself: *Why, indeed?* When, as a new teacher, I hung my head in embarrassment after failing to properly teach a Grade 10 Math lesson, I asked myself: *Why am I failing these students? Why am I even a teacher?* When I first looked in the eyes of a student whose best friend had been killed in an accident mere hours before and they asked me: *Why did this happen?* I knew I could not leave those questions unexamined. For me, the answers to these types of questions are mercurial: temporal, historical, cultural, deeply personal and, above all, existential—to regress any response to a question of *why*, inevitably one comes up against ontological themes and concepts. At this point, I have not arrived at any conclusions, nor do I seek them, but I have begun to find language for my responses.

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My experiences as a high school teacher (2006-2012) and as a part-time professor in faculties of education (2012-present) asked more of me than I had expected when I first decided to become a teacher. Prior to this becoming, I knew of the challenges teachers faced in their classrooms. I knew what rewards would be afforded me should I be able to help my students achieve success in the classroom. What I did not know was that such an achievement would require me to ask questions of myself that I was unprepared to answer. To *become* a teacher—or at least a teacher that I wanted to be—I would need to journey down a path with an uncertain destination as I learned how to approach one simple question: *Why?*

In the process of my *becoming* a teacher, through a dialectical engagement of experience and study (Pinar, 2011), I have traveled with and encountered the pilgrims who had come before me: Frankl, Maslow and Rogers; Sartre, Heidegger and Marcel; Dewey, Freire and Greene; van Manen and Jardine. Each name, each set of ideas, each interpretation of the world and our existence bumped up against what I thought I *knew*, what I believed life was *about*, and what I thought education was *for*. Walking my path, I have, at times, felt lost and confused, searching the horizon for clues to where I was headed. However, as time has passed, I have become more comfortable in my journey. Each time I encounter another fellow traveler, their ideas orient me on my ontological quest—pointing here and there, shaping my understanding of my path and giving me language to describe the sights I see. My journey, for ten years now, has been an ontological one, motivated by my role as a classroom teacher and educator.

As I explored ideas and critically examined my understanding of existence and the purpose of education, I realized that there could be no “final” answers to existential questions, nor is there one *raison d’etre*, or purpose in education. However, in my experience and in conversations with colleagues, I learned that understanding the meaning of one’s own

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experiences in life and in teaching can be incredibly powerful and can provide focus, motivation and a stubborn positive persistence (Frankl, 1959, p. 9).

During my travels I encountered great minds of philosophy, existentialism and education theory; what I have recently come to realize is that in those meetings I was really encountering myself. The ideas presented to me could not be understood removed from my practice as a teacher and the critiques of modern schooling and existence were indeed critiques of *me*. I understood through my reading that although I have had some semblance of success as a high school teacher, I still had much to learn about teaching; I was still *becoming* a teacher (and always will be). Perhaps more importantly, as I was *becoming* a teacher, I was *becoming* myself. The teacher cannot be separated from the person, as teaching is a *personal* act. In the process of professional becoming every would-be teacher engages in, the personal walks step for step with the professional, engaging in their own existential *becoming* process. The path of the teacher is the path of the person, but more often than not, each entity forgets to look down to recognize whose shoes they share.

My examination of my own *becoming* has been one of distant reflection. Like the traveler whose mind drifts as they drive, awakening to realize they have been traveling for hours but have no recollection of their journey, I awoke two or three years into my career unsure of how I got to the point at which I was. I turn to look back on the path I walked and its experiences and their meanings are situated not in my understanding at the time, but in the present moment of my life. I know that I have shaped my own narratives to fit into who and how I see myself now, and therefore I cannot access those experiences with any sense of the context they existed in. I have been unknowingly *becoming* a teacher for ten years now. It has been a complex, messy business and it started, in my opinion, on the day my toes first began to wiggle again.

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What I am curious about is how this complex, messy business plays itself out in the lives of teachers and how we make sense of our own *becoming*. Particularly, I want to examine how teacher candidates (students in Bachelor of Education degrees) understand the existential implications of their *becoming* as they move from teacher candidate to teacher. This study is a hermeneutic phenomenological examination of teacher candidates' understandings of the paths they are walking as they become teachers. These paths are individually constructed but shaped by the expectations and behaviors of peers, mentors, teachers, government bodies and students. They are directed towards some purpose(s) and are the product of the individual's historicity. Most of all, they are important. Understanding who they are as a person and as teachers is vital for the success of both the teacher and their students, regardless of how one may define that success (Kelchtermans, 2009; Palmer, 2000).

1.2 Rationale and Scope of the Inquiry

No one reminds you to say goodbye to yourself and by the time you turn around, you are already gone. We don't ask you who you want to become, we tell you who you should be. This is a good teacher, we say, Now be it. Becoming is a taking and a leaving; it's a happening. Too often, in our haste to make it happen, we ignore its happening.

It is frequently suggested, both in educational literature (e.g. Harris & Sass, 2011) and now in media (e.g. Bruni, 2014) that the teacher in the classroom is the most important variable in determining whether or not a child learns at an expected level and pace. What these studies ignore is that teachers are not "variables" in discrete educational equations, but rather they are people, performing a job in a particular context at a specific moment of their lives; "teaching is done by somebody" (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 258). Empirical studies conducted around teachers and student success often ignore, glaze over, and/or reify the individual teacher and strip the

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teacher of their humanity, aggregating assessment scores while holding constant other variables which are precisely not constant.

The rhetoric that surrounds teaching and its measurement of efficacy in achieving curricular outcomes seems to yearn for a silver bullet solution, espousing “best practices” and “what works” in classrooms while ignoring the very notion that teachers and students are situated human beings. Teacher education programs, under pressure from governmental agencies who both fund and regulate the programs, contribute to the notion that teachers can be trained for effectiveness by placing their teacher candidates in a heavily-technical weighted stream of courses, failing to recognize the foundational element of education is the relationship between student and teacher and every teaching method or item of technical knowledge is subsumed by this ontological element (Oral, 2013). *Who* the teacher is, how they understand themselves, their students and their work is therefore the primordial constituent in what is an extremely complex act.

Acknowledging, qualitatively or quantitatively, the importance of the individual teacher in student success (assuming, for a moment, that student achievement of curricular outcomes is the agreed upon benchmark for “success”) and that the teacher is a *person*, teaching, it follows that part of the onus on teacher education programs should be in helping teacher candidates to examine who they are as a teacher and why and how they will *be* a teacher. Many teacher education programs state that this is part of their mandate, but few enact this dimension of teacher education pedagogy (Kane, 2002; Kane & Russell, 2005).

Perhaps one of the problems with enacting examinations of who the teacher is lies in both the teacher candidates’ and teacher education programs’ failure to acknowledge that these programs do not *produce*, but rather *educate* teachers in their process of *becoming*—a process

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that is existential in nature and grounded in the teacher candidate's own professional self-understanding. The purpose of a teacher education program, beyond educating for the *how* of teaching, must incorporate the *who* of the teacher. However, examining the teacher as individual goes beyond mere questions of: *Who are you as a person? What kind of teacher are you?* Teacher education programs need a framework that is accessible, employable and adaptable in order to assist students in examining their professional self-understanding.

There exists a considerable volume of research conducted in the field of education which seeks to examine how teachers and teacher candidates understand themselves in their professional roles. Typically, these studies fall within the category of “teacher identity” research and investigate how teachers come to develop their professional identity and the implications this identity may have on their practice. What is less evident in the literature is how teacher candidates experience, interpret and understand the phenomenon of becoming a teacher from an existential perspective—what self-understanding do these teacher candidates have and what meaning do they give to their work as a result of this self-understanding (Koster & van den Berg, 2014). Something *happens* to the individual when they become a teacher—they think differently, they speak differently, they care differently. This study provides an examination of how teacher candidates understand this *becoming*.

Existentialism, a school of thought which could supply language and notions with which to address *becoming*, rarely provides regimented advice or solutions to the problems it addresses. Although it is not the purpose of this study to provide a concrete “how-to” for examining teacher candidate's self-understanding, it remains that any exercise in self-reflection should be meaningful and in a new teacher's life, that which is useful is meaningful. The scope of this study, then, is limited to a hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretation of four teacher

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candidates' understandings of their own process of *becoming* a teacher through the lens of Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding* framework (2009), informed by existential themes.

Kelchtermans's work, described in detail in Chapter 3, has been employed in the examination of established teachers' professional self-understanding, but has not been used to interpret teacher candidates' self-understanding as they engage in the process of both instrumentally and existentially becoming a teacher. The following is just such an examination—a guided, hermeneutic phenomenological interpretation of who these four teacher candidates understand themselves to be and who they see themselves *becoming*.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

In enacting the research process, I address the following investigation aim and objectives:

Aim: To utilize concepts from hermeneutic phenomenology to examine and interpret teacher candidates' existential sense of *becoming* a teacher through Kelchtermans's concept of *professional self-understanding*.

Objectives:

1. Explore existential concepts inherent in Kelchtermans's concept of professional self-understanding.
2. Examine, using interviews, journal analysis, a focus group and dialectic engagement with four teacher candidates, how the phenomenon of teacher candidates' existential *becoming* can be interpreted and understood through Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding* framework and its existential themes.

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3. Entertain possibilities for how teacher education programs could utilize an existentially informed conceptualization of *becoming* a teacher alongside Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding*.

1.4 Overview of Study

In order to attend to the objectives of this study, in Chapter 2, I first present a review of the relevant literature, focusing on the concepts of “becoming” and “teacher self-understanding.” I situate each concept within the broader fields of existentialist thought and teacher education. I then discuss the philosophical presuppositions that I bring to this research project and the research problem I identify as the guiding question of this study.

Chapter 3 describes Kelchtermans's (2009) *professional self-understanding* framework, the conceptual framework with which I will examine the data gleaned from participant interviews, emails, journal entries and our focus group. Each component of the framework—*self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation and future perspective*—is discussed in detail and I draw connections among each component and elements of existential thought.

I then discuss hermeneutic phenomenology, the methodology I have chosen to utilize in my examination of my participants' sense of *becoming*. I describe the methodology as a field, highlighting its historical evolution and studies which were conducted utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology. I then present my understanding of how one might evaluate the rigor of a study conducted in this field, identifying five key heuristics with which one could judge the “soundness” (Moules, 2002) of a hermeneutic phenomenological study. I conclude Chapter 4 with a discussion of my understanding of *how* one should conduct a study within hermeneutic phenomenology, a methodology without prescriptive methods and, finally, the steps I took to conduct this research project.

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In Chapter 5 I tell the stories of each of the participants through three forms of presentation: I first present a poetic micro-narrative or vignette, demonstrating how I have interpreted the participant's sense of *becoming*; I then examine the participant's *professional self-understanding* with Kelchtermans's framework; and then conclude each participant's story with a visual representation of how I envision their path of *becoming* a teacher.

With stories told and interpretations presented, I provide a thematic analysis of my findings in Chapter 6. I identify six existential themes which I found prevalent among the participants' paths to becoming a teacher: *becoming*, authenticity, fear, responsibility, the self, and a sense of purpose. I highlight evidence for each theme, compare and contrast each theme among the participants, and provide philosophical and practical implications for those responsible for the preparation of future generations of teachers— teacher education programs.

I conclude the thesis with a final poetic micro-narrative, reflecting on my own experience in conducting and writing this research study. I then discuss lessons learned and what contributions I believe I have made to the field of teacher education and teacher self-understanding. I then leave the reader with a visual representation of how I envision my own path of *becoming*.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research study presents an interpretation and analysis of how four teacher candidates experience the phenomenon of *becoming* a teacher. To undertake this project, I first situate my research in two distinct, yet interconnected domains: becoming and self-understanding. To understand one's existential process of becoming, one must understand oneself, and to understand oneself, one must acknowledge one's existential *becoming*. It is a hermeneutic process of understanding, interpretation and growth.

To explicate the ontological and epistemological ground in which this study rests, I first examine the concept of becoming through a number of lenses: existentialism, education as a broad field, and, both an existential and instrumental notion of becoming a teacher. I then provide a discussion of different conceptualizations of self-understanding and the processes through which teachers come to know themselves as professionals. The review provides the context for Kelchtermans's (2009) *professional self-understanding* conceptual framework through which I examine and interpret the responses of the four teacher candidate participants.

2.1 *Becoming*

Becoming, understood as a verb relating to human growth, implies the process of movement and change in an individual—a person was once *that*, now they are *this*. It is typically used to describe the professionalization of an individual (e.g. becoming a doctor, a police officer, etc.) Becoming often carries with it an implication that the individual is intentionally and actively engaged in a process of change. To “become,” in a dictionary definition, is to “begin to be or to come to be something specified” (Become, n.d.). Specificity implies intention and purpose; “to be” implies a terminal point, or at the very least, a static state. Becoming a teacher, for example, can be understood quite easily with this definition in hand: an individual *chooses* to enter into a

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teacher education program and, once completed, becomes a teacher. There can be no argument around the facticity of their state: they *are* a teacher.

Examinations of the process teacher candidates engage in as they become (in an instrumental sense of the word) a teacher hold merit. It is important to understand, for example, the challenges these students face as they learn how to implement a math lesson or what reasons they give for persisting in a crowded and complicated job market. Recent literature in teacher education and professional learning, however, suggests that becoming a professional, or in the current concern of becoming a teacher, carries with it existential implications for the individual that are not typically included in the scope of these studies (Vu & Dall'Alba, 2011; Oral, 2013; Sanberg & Pinnington, 2009).

The notion of becoming attended to in this study is not one concerned with certification or adjudication of one's current state: are you a teacher or are you not? Rather, becoming, in this case, is not an act, but a way of being in the world. It is recognition that each moment in life presents opportunities for decisions and in those moments, one creates oneself and meaning in one's life. This becoming is existential in nature and any professional self-understanding teacher candidates develop must recognize that self-understanding is itself in a state of becoming. In this study, I use an italicized *become* or *becoming* to denote the existential, rather than the instrumental understanding of the word and process. This formatting has been employed by Zembylas (2003) as he echoes Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in his discussion of the *becoming* of teacher identity.

To better understand what it means to existentially *become* a teacher and to interpret that *becoming* through professional self-understanding, I first provide an overview of existentialism with a specific focus on how the concept of becoming is taken up by authors in this field. I then

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examine how existential *becoming* is discussed in the field of education, concluding with an exploration of the process of “becoming a teacher,” both from an instrumental and existential perspective.

2.1.1 Existentialism and Becoming

Existentialism is a field best understood not through a one-sentence definition, but rather through consideration and synthesis of its philosophy, literature, art and media that both explicitly describe and implicitly embody the ideas and themes of this school of philosophical thought (Kaufman, 1975). The label was first employed by Gabriel Marcel to describe the philosophical works of Sartre (e.g. 1943/1984) and de Beauvoir (e.g. 1949/2012) although these scholars were not the first to discuss what are now known as existential notions (Cooper, 1999). At its core, existentialism deals with the question of human existence, but does not concern itself so much with the question of “Where did we come from?” as much as “Now that I am here, who can I be?” The field rose to prominence in the post-war era of the 1940s and 50s in the wake of unprecedented destruction and human suffering caused by global conflicts (Flynn, 2006). It was a philosophical and cultural response to a perceived meaninglessness in life. Interest in the field has waned over the decades, with some citing the difficulties of engaging with dense and difficult writings in field (e.g. Magrini, 2012). However, existentialist writings persist within certain contexts (e.g. education, see, for example, Yue, 2011 and Magrini, 2012) as new generations seek new understandings of the implications of an ontologically examined existence.

The philosophical field of existentialism is vast and includes consideration of a number of themes of human existence, including: authenticity, suffering, anxiety, fear, absurdity, freedom, responsibility and transcendence (Flynn, 2006). These concepts are emotional and are concerned with the *experience* of existence. Scholars addressing themselves to existentialist

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concerns were seen as breaking away from the methodologies of the natural sciences and epistemological concerns of “explanation” and instead considered the ontological ground that made knowledge possible—“being” and “understanding” (Blattner, 2006). Confronting primordial emotions such as fear, anguish and death was essential for understanding existence, as it is death—the terminal point of existence—and its accompanying emotions that bounds and gives meaning and shape to existence (Heidegger, 2010). Attending to such notions can be construed as morbid or macabre, leading some to label existentialism a nihilist philosophy (Crowell, 2010). However, a deeper understanding of the field reveals that existentialism, through its attention to concerns such as death and absurdity (the inherent meaninglessness of life), challenges its audience, in a post-modern fashion, to confront their own finite existence and create meaning for their existence.

To enter into a conversation concerning existentialism is an arduous task and often requires a foundational description of which existential ideas will be privileged in the subsequent discussion. This need arises from the fact that existentialism is not a philosophy per se, but rather a collection of thinkers and ideas that place individual existence at the center of any philosophical question. The field becomes even more ambiguous when one tries to identify key existential writers. Most writers would now assign the title “father of existentialism” to Soren Kierkegaard, but the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Kierkegaard mirrors in some work despite the two having no knowledge of each other, also serves as progenitor for many existentialist concepts (Flynn, 2006; Kaufman, 1975). As existentialism developed as a field, divisiveness among the prominent contributing scholars as to what it meant to “be an existentialist” led some authors to request that they not be labeled as such (e.g. Marcel, a high-profile religious existentialist). In Kaufman’s (1975) existentialism introductory reader, he

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includes volumes from well-known existentialists including the above-named, but also Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Jaspers, as well as Doestoevsky and Kafka, authors whose works embody more than describe tenets of existentialism.

I was drawn to the field of existentialism initially through the work of Viktor Frankl (e.g. 1959/2006). Frankl, a Jewish psychotherapist, endured the horrors of the Holocaust as a prisoner of the Nazis in multiple concentration camps including Auschwitz-Birkenau and wrote his magnum opus *Man's Search for Meaning* after surviving this tremendously cruel period of human history. Frankl (1959/2006, p. 100) describes "existential" in three ways: (1) *existence* itself, i.e., the specifically human mode of being; (2) the *meaning* of existence; and (3) the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence, that is to say, the *will* to meaning." He believed that many psychological maladies, particularly depression, were a product of what he called "noogenic neurosis" and could often be cured if the patient was able to find meaning in her life. These neuroses were existential crises and their diagnosis and treatment formed an existential field of psychotherapy Frankl called "logotherapy" (Frankl, 1959/2006).

Reading Frankl's work had a profound impact on my classroom teaching as I felt myself called to invest meaning in my lessons that went beyond the goal of students meeting curricular outcomes. As I explored existential concepts and grew in my understanding of my own existence and professional practice, my teaching began to open up spaces for students to examine their own lives through the curriculum and, for many, their own learning experiences became more meaningful.

My understanding of existentialism is, and always will be, in its own state of *becoming* with shifts of interpretation coinciding with the stages and challenges of life in which I find myself. However, I recognize my freedom and responsibility in those interpretations and know

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that I am nothing outside of what I create myself. This notion echoes the unifying concept among those whose works are considered canon in existentialism: “*Existence precedes essence*” (Sartre, 1956, p. 349); there is no modernist concept of the *essence* of humanity. Instead, each individual, through reflection, decision and action (i.e. exercising their inherent *freedom*) defines who she is as a person and sets her own course for her life. Morris (1954) suggests: “This freedom is total; man can choose what he shall be. It is this process of choosing and of *becoming* which describes, as accurately as one can, what the Existentialists believe is fundamental to human existence” (p. 250, emphasis added).

It is in this murky field of existentialism that I locate the concept of *becoming*. Although the term can be used to describe the process of instrumental change in an individual, *becoming* takes on a depth of meaning when situated in existentially informed literature. For the purposes of the subsequent discussion, *becoming* does not identify a specific process directed towards particular possibilities, but instead can be understood as the inherent, continuous process of existence where individuals strive to transcend themselves towards something they believe is an improvement upon their current state.

What, however, does Morris mean when he suggests that “becoming” is “fundamental” to human existence? A number of prominent existentialists address the concept explicitly. Ortega (1941) stated that a person, “...is a project; something that is not yet, but aspires to be” (p. 195). Freire, a critical pedagogue with existential undertones, described “[individuals] as being in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted [sic] beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (2000, p. 84). The existentialist thinker does not view individuals in a static state of who they are, but rather how their lives are directed towards something greater than themselves. Sartre (1956) considered *being* itself as a “being of becoming” (p. 29), where individuals are

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directed towards transcendence of their current condition. Tillich (1952) suggested that the “essence of being” is not finding, but creating oneself and that “man creates what he is.” Assell (1969) states, “although existentialism has never been clearly defined...it is apparent from the literature that its emphasis is on ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’” (p. 200). What each of these statements suggest is *becoming* is a fundamental construct of human existence, a humble acknowledgement of the individual’s *unfinishedness*. The authors’ descriptions are almost ineffable, however, and defy application, which is perhaps why existentialism has not had a significant impact in the day to day educational processes of schools (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

Existential *being* is a state the individual is “already-in” as a function of their “thrownness” into the world (Heidegger, 2010). The meaning of *being*, however, is in its *becoming*. The power in this process, in the “fundamental project” of “becoming more fully human,” resides in the recognition of one’s necessary engagement in the world through *becoming* (Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). Greene (1977) describes this attitude towards *becoming* as “wide-awakeness” and this disposition is only made possible through the intentional acknowledgment and exercising of one’s inherent freedom and responsibility.

Existentialism de-prioritizes epistemological concerns in the face of ontological questions. Knowledge is situated within certain understandings of existence and becomes useful only when one understands the meaning and purpose of that knowledge. For me, notions of the meaning and experiences of existence are the first intellectual challenges teachers and students must face if their education and lives are to be anything more than instrumental, reproductive practices. Opening up teacher candidates to the ideas of freedom, responsibility and choice in

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their personal and professional lives has been a theme in educational literature for years and I now address it through *becoming* in the field of education.

2.1.2 *Becoming* in education

In the 1960s and 1970s, existential ideas became a language for critiquing modernity (Taylor, 1989) and, more specifically, notions of what the purpose of education is and should be in a modern society. The launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik in 1957 shook the social, political and educational landscape of the United States, ushering in a new generation of curriculum development and corresponding teacher education. Schools and teachers were now charged with preparation of students for participation in the growing arms race in science and technology in which the United States was engaged with the USSR. Sears and Marshall (2000) state that during this time, “teacher proofing” curriculum was instituted and

[c]urriculum-making became an empirical science which ushered in an entire new field of study (i.e. curriculum evaluation) while placing teachers in a vulnerable new state of accountability (for student learning) without adaptability (in terms of what and how to teach). (p. 204)

Within this intellectual context, a group of affiliated education scholars whose origins of thought could easily be traced back to existentialism—names such as Greene, Huebner, Grumet, Aoki and Pinar—became leading voices of dissent within education and the field of curriculum theory. These scholars rose to prominence as a counter-argument to this increasingly technical and regimented conceptualization of education and human development and became the standard bearers for a “*reconceptualist* curriculum movement” (Magrini, 2015, p. 274). They were not only concerned with what one could know, should know and how she would come to know it,

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but also what the implications of that knowledge and learning could be, particularly with how education served to weave together the social fabric of communities and society at large.

Privileging of ontology over epistemology through consideration of the intersubjectivities of students and teachers as they engaged in a process of education is a unifying theme in the writings of these scholars. The roots of existentialism are recognizable—and explicitly acknowledged (e.g. Grumet, 1975)—in the works of many of the scholars inhabiting the field of curriculum studies. Although these scholars have volumes of writing encompassing vast careers deserving considered discussion, each author speaks to the present concern of *becoming* in a manner that reinforces the existential themes described above, situated within the field of education.

Greene's (e.g. 1967; 1977) philosophical background is explicitly existential and traces of such thinking appear throughout her life and works. Greene's emphasis, particularly in the later stages of her life, was on the power of imagination and aesthetic experience in opening awareness in individuals to potentialities in their lives. She wrote with a plea to humanity to recognize, for themselves, their subjectivity and subsequent responsibility to it (Greene, 1977). Greene argued that education was an opportunity for recognizing the potential of meaning-creation and actualized freedom and believed that situations needed to be intentionally structured for students to "break free" and "recognize each other in our striving, our becoming, our inventing of the possible" (Greene, 1993, p. 220). *Becoming*, according to Greene's understanding, involved a process of recognizing the freedom and responsibility in one's own existence and acting to create and engage with practices consistent with that freedom and responsibility.

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Huebner, described by Pinar (1999, p. xxiv) as “...one of the most important minds the field of curriculum has ever known” embodied existential *becoming* in his writing on curriculum studies and, subsequently, theology and religious education. To Huebner, education was a vehicle to transcend one’s current understanding and create for oneself a new understanding of their world and existence, thus becoming that which one was previously not. He argues that education is “the lure of the transcendent—that which we seem is not what we are, for we could be other...the protest against present forms that they may be reformed and transformed” (Huebner, 1985, p. 360). Although for many years his work shifted to the theological and his theme of transcendence focused on humanity’s ability to engage with God through spirituality, Huebner made significant contributions to understandings of education and teacher education. Echoing his spiritual influences, he believed teaching is a “vocation” (1999, p. 379) and that “a vocation is not simply being called forth, it is also being called by..., to accept the vocation of a teacher is to answer the call of children and young people” (p. 380). In answering this call, we become teachers and we are “re-shaped” by the newness of the changing world. This belief is subsumed in Huebner’s basic tenet of existence: “Man is a transcendent being, i.e., he has the capacity to transcend what he is to become something that he is not” (1967, p. 135).

Among these giants of curriculum studies stands the Canadian curriculum theorist, Ted Aoki. Acknowledged by Pinar and others as one of the most important voices in the field, Aoki’s life and career is a celebration of *becoming*. His work transformed the field of curriculum studies as he challenged theorists to re-consider curriculum from “curriculum-as-plan” to the “lived curriculum” of schooling (Irwin, 2004, p. xxii). He argued against the instrumentalism that had pervaded schooling as educational practices began to take on capitalist tones of production and efficiency. He encouraged teachers to engage in critical reflective practices that allowed

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practitioners to create a “transformed reality” and subsequently come to a deeper understanding of “their own selves” (Aoki, 1983). Aoki (1979/2005, p. 348), like many others in his field, recognized the existential nature of his teacher-self where his *being* was that of *becoming*:

In my being and becoming the tensions that were there created a dynamic world within which I acted, which has, after all is said and done, turned out to be my life as I have experienced it. I reflect upon it as a unique life in many ways, at times distorted, but nevertheless a life which on occasions by my very acting within them, I used to give meaning to my being, doing my damndest in my own personal becoming.

Grumet (1975), another important contributor to curriculum theory, suggests “reconceptualist curriculum theorists... Huebner...[and, among others], Greene,... invoked Heidegger, Sartre and Habermas, bringing existentialism’s repudiation of the familiar... to the language of curriculum and teaching” (p. 60). Grumet’s writing engrosses the reader as an act of becoming in and of itself. Each sentence is a call to the past and salvo to the future. She contributes to the field of curriculum studies with autobiographical turns that negate the familiar and call out both to herself and the society she exists within. Her transcendent *becoming* is actualized through interpretation of her lived experiences. As she recollects the life that has brought her to her temporal situatedness, she writes to inspire a transcendent society, “...a world for children that is richer, larger, more colorful, and more accessible than the one we have known” (Grumet, 1975, p. xii).

Pinar (1975) is also concerned with how individuals understand the nature of their educational experiences, particularly through biography. His method of *currere* is a four-step process for examining one’s own self-understanding and includes four distinct, yet hermeneutically interdependent elements: regressive-progressive-analytical-synthetical. The

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regressive is a return to the past in one's mind—not a regress in a way where growth is sacrificed, but rather a remembrance of who and *how* one was during their educational life. It is not an interpretation nor a requiem, but a recounting. It is a calling-back, a study of what once was, free of judgment. The progressive stage, sequentially next, is attunement towards one's inner projections of what is “not yet” (Pinar, 1975, p. 10). Imagination takes hold during this stage where historicity and *becoming* meld into a vision of where one's life is directed. Again, this stage is not a time for decisions or adjudication, but rather an opportunity for free association among what was, is and could be.

The next stage of *currere* is the analytical, an intending towards one's “biographic present” (p. 7). *Where are you? Who are you? How are you?* Pinar (2004) alludes to the analytical as a “snapshot” of the moment one is currently in, a present that is collected to and by the individual through “critical examination” (p. 36). The final stage, synthetical, is the return to the present moment with the past, present and future in hand, prepared to answer the question of the meaning of the present. Now answered, tentatively and temporally, one is transformed and prepared to re-engage with the larger questions of curriculum and educational experiences. The process of *currere* is an existential *becoming* and demands that at the end of the synthetical element, one recognize the responsibility they have to continue this “movement.”

Pinar's work embodies existential projects and he uses his “existential experiences as data” when he attends to his self-understanding. He describes *currere* as a “movement” for the individual, where they once understood themselves and their experience as *that*, now they see themselves as *this*. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) suggest that this process has had a significant impact on the field of teacher self-study and one can see how engaging in *currere* creates opportunities for deeper self-understanding in the process of becoming a teacher.

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Magrini (2012) suggests the works of Pinar, Grumet, Greene and others fall within “reconceptualist” curriculum thought, which is loosely derived from existentialist thought. The works of these authors, particularly in later years, do not explicitly state a connection with the field of existentialism but rather seem to exist as the offspring of this field. They have left their parents of Sartre, Heidegger and others behind, venturing out in their own world of curriculum theory, phenomenology and hermeneutics, yet always thinking from the questions and ideas presented by their existential forbearers. In each of their works, there is a call to resist the alienation of the individual, whether they be teacher or learner, or rather, both. These authors have stood against and within the historical tides of positivism and empiricism, pushing back against educational reification of the individual into some “stamp[ed] out finished product” (Magrini, 2014, p. 2). The underlying theme that pervades each scholar in this field is that education is enacted by *someone*, with others, and there can be no separation of the individual from the educational process, nor should there be. Each individual engages in their own unique, historically-formed process of *being* and *becoming*. This interpretation is ontological-existential, as opposed to epistemological and there can be no input/output process in which a teacher is “stamped” out. The individual, as unique teacher, in their own act of *becoming*, must engage with their *becoming* and develop their own professional self-understanding in congruence with their *already-in* existential understanding. I next consider the myriad ways in which educational literature addresses the notion of becoming a teacher.

2.1.3 Becoming a teacher

Education research, as a broad field, examines the concept of becoming a teacher in a number of different ways. However, it is my belief that these studies can be conceptualized through two particular understandings of what is involved in becoming a teacher: learning the

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technical/mechanical aspects of the profession, hereafter referred to as “technicism” (Halliday, 1998), and the ontological/philosophical considerations which affect the beliefs and attitudes teachers develop during their professional lives. Becoming a teacher, in the technicist sense of the phrase, is about developing the skills and acquiring the knowledge that will best serve student learning. *Becoming* a teacher in an ontological sense, examines the personal and existential growth of the teacher and the philosophical postures the teacher assumes during their professional career. The difference between the two conceptualizations of “becoming” is reflected in the types of studies carried out in educational research that consider how one “becomes” a teacher.

Becoming a teacher, from a technicist perspective, is a formulaic process. If an individual wishes to teach in a public school in Canada, they follow a discrete set of procedures to obtain certification. In most cases, an individual wishing to become a secondary teacher, for example, achieves an undergraduate degree in a “teachable” field, applies to a Bachelor of Education program at their university of choice and if accepted, completes an 8-16 month (depending on the province) teacher education program which includes both coursework in educational theory and between two and four practicum experiences, where the teacher candidate teaches in a classroom under the supervision of an experienced associate teacher.

The content and pedagogy of the teacher education programs charged with preparing teachers vary among countries and provinces/states and there is a vast body of literature addressing what and how these programs should teach teacher candidates (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Russell, 2002; van Nuland, 2011; Zeichner, 1983; Zeichner, 2010). Although addressing the full range of research into teacher education programs is beyond the scope of this thesis, Darling-Hammond’s (2006a) synthesis of

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exemplary teacher education programs provides important context for this study. She describes “common components of powerful teacher education” programs, among which pertinent to this study is: “Explicit strategies to help students (1) confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and students...” (p. 41). These beliefs are personal and emotional and contribute to both what the teacher perceives as her job and, by implication, how best to go about it. Kane (2002) and Kane and Russell (2005), however, suggest that although this critical element of exemplary teacher education programs is typically included in the documentary frameworks of many programs, it is inconsistently enacted and, in some contexts, ignored. In effect, *who* is becoming a teacher and what they believe about students is under-addressed in teacher education (Keltchermans, 2009).

At the end of their university course and practicum experiences, regardless of how their teacher program prepares its teacher candidates, if successful in meeting specific standards of practice, teacher candidates are conferred a degree which allows them to be certified by a provincial body. They have then become, in an instrumental sense, a teacher. However, the learning that occurs both during a teacher education program and the professional experience of teaching in a classroom is far from formulaic. The skills, knowledge, strategies, attitudes, beliefs and understandings that comprise *being* a teacher are numerous, interconnected, nuanced and have context-specific applicability. The act of *becoming* a teacher is far more complex than simply obtaining certification and standing in front of students (Darling-Hammond, 2006b).

Technicist literature attempts to deconstruct the act of teaching into discrete elements and then reverse engineers a model of good teaching through identification of successful practices. These studies typically address such educational concerns as: assessment of student learning (e.g. Earl, 2012; Suskie, 2010), differentiated instruction (e.g. Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006), student

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engagement (e.g. Marzano, Pickering & Heflebower, 2010) and classroom management (e.g. Mackenzie & Stanzone, 2010). Technician literature focuses on investigating teachers' impact on student achievement using quantitative measures and examines, for example, how teachers' pedagogic skill or training affect student learning. Harris and Sass (2011), as one example, suggest that teacher "productivity," defined as a teacher's "contribution to student achievement, holding other inputs constant," (p. 802) increases with experience and is not impacted by professional development or teacher education. Literature of this nature, in my opinion, is myopic in that the whole of a complex activity like teaching, with its myriad moving parts and inter-subjectivities among stakeholders, cannot possibly be understood through compartmentalizing its "inputs" and subsequent "outputs".

Studies and books in this vein of "becoming a teacher" are typically empirical in nature—enact "x," get "y"—describing the experiences of teachers and students implementing strategies developed by others (e.g. Edward & Watts, 2010; Hume & Coll, 2009; Lawrence-Brown, 2004). These studies, however, largely presuppose a definition of success that is almost *a priori* in nature—success means students meeting learning outcomes or standards. The shared goals of these types of studies is identification of the most effective and efficient strategies that lead to student learning and then to refine the strategies based on subsequent findings. The obvious questions that arise from such "successful practices" studies are: How and why is success defined the way it is? And what does that definition of success mean in the lives of students? Technician literature either assumes answers to those questions or ignores them altogether. A technician view of becoming is an acquiring of tools without an examination of why teachers will want to use them. Mayer (1999) sums up this dichotomy succinctly: "Learning to teach can be learning the skills and knowledge to perform the functions of a teacher or it can be developing

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the sense of oneself as a teacher. In the former, one is ‘being’ the teacher, whereas in the latter, one is ‘becoming a teacher’” (p. 5)

Becoming a teacher, from an ontological perspective, calls the teacher to examine questions of meaning and being: *What does it mean to become a teacher? To be a teacher?* These questions bring the teacher face-to-face with not only ontological understandings, but moral and ethical dilemmas. To be a teacher is to place one’s feet in a value-laden position where the purpose of education, the privileging of certain knowledges above others and even the value of an individual life are determined. In choosing to *become* a teacher, the individual is selecting this profession as their “fundamental project and in doing so, creates himself” (Greene, 1969, p. 155).

Questions of *becoming* are, by their very nature, qualitative, philosophical inquiries. They examine the teacher candidate’s self-understanding through narrative or biographical approaches, attempting to reconstruct these stories *with* the teacher candidate in a meaningful way while interpreting the findings for broader generalizations about the nature of the phenomenon of *becoming* a teacher. Each study attempts to address *becoming* from a particular epistemological or ontological position. For example, McNally, Blake, Corbin and Gray (2008) and McNally and Gray (2012) approach *becoming a teacher* from the perspective of the teacher candidate developing their identity through the conflicting discourses between their own sense of purpose in teaching and the standards of practice they are held to by the schooling institutions. Adami (2014) considers *becoming* a teacher a learning of cosmopolitan ethics and Marshall (2009) suggests there is an underlying spiritual connection in many of those who engage in *becoming* a teacher. Important to acknowledge in this context, however, is that ontological considerations of *becoming* a teacher do not seek to define how one should engage in the process of *becoming*—

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nor should or could they. These studies provide a turn back towards the *becoming* that the teacher candidate is already engaged in and the research is more of a reconstruction of an individual's interpreted history than a quest to identify the "silver bullet" for teacher understanding and teacher education. Research in this field is hermeneutic and, in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, does not seek a solution, but rather contributions to understanding that will keep "the game" alive (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106).

Studies in the field of teachers' ontological *becoming* and subsequent self-understanding often frame this process through the lenses of teacher identity (e.g. McNally & Blake, 2012), reflective practice (e.g. Korthagen, 2013), self-study (e.g. Bullough, 1997) or authenticity (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004); each field is discussed in-depth below.

2.2 Teacher Self-understanding

Self-understanding is

...the accumulated wisdom that comes from sustained reflective thinking (Hunt, 1987) and includes such things as, for example, one's strength, weaknesses, needs, emotions and drives. Self-understanding also refers to a recognition of how past experiences and current situations influence how one views oneself as a professional (London, 2001). (Berry, 2009, p. 309)

Recognition of one's *becoming* is an act of self-understanding. Understanding one's self, as a person at this moment, is an important engagement for all humans, not simply teachers (Taylor, 1989). Self-understanding, however, is not merely a snapshot of self-perception; it is both a *process* one is always engaged with, as well as the temporally situated "*product*" of that process (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009). Self-understanding and its corollary fields of study such as identity, self-awareness and meta-cognition are broad and encompass myriad contexts and

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epistemological positions, therefore for this section, I limit the scope of address to the field of *teacher* self-understanding.

Kelchtermans (2009) suggests that teachers' professional self-understanding is comprised of five components: *self-image*, *self-esteem*, *motivation*, *task perception* and *future perspective*. This framework, described in depth in Chapter 3, and the process one undertakes to describe one's self-understanding, is situated in a broader body of literature, elements of which I explicate: teacher reflection, teacher self-study, and teacher identity. I conclude this section by turning to the notion of "authenticity" in teaching—a concept that is semantically loaded, but one that provides both a connection between self-understanding and existentialism, as well as an entry point for teachers to think about who they are as teachers and who they are *becoming*.

2.2.1 Teacher Reflection

Reflection, from the Latin *reflectre*, literally a "bending back," is the act of considering or reconsidering an event or thought (Reflection, 2013). Reflection is a commonly employed practice in teacher education and professional development (Marcos, Sanchez and Tillema, 2011; Schön, 1983) with the desired goal of improving teaching practice through knowledge construction (Conway, 2001) and critical thinking (Korthagen, 2004). Relevant literature supports its frequent inclusion in both teacher education and veteran teacher professional learning (e.g. Avalos & Bascope, 2014; Jay, 2003; Larrivéé, 2000).

Marcos et al. (2011) provide an overview and evaluation of studies promoting reflective practices in teacher education and they suggest that reflection is a "cyclical and recursive process that at least includes...*problem-solving*...*awareness-raising*...and [the] construct[ion of] *professional knowledge*" (p. 22). Turning back towards one's practice and cognition around that practice is vital in identifying both the positive attributes in one's teaching as well as the

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remaining areas for growth. However, strict focus on teacher practice, behavior and actions in reflection cannot paint the entire picture—the teacher must consider not only what they do, but also *who* they are when they teach. A number of studies address the *personhood* of the teacher through reflection with concepts such as: attitudes (e.g. Vaught & Castagano, 2008), dispositions (e.g. Diez, 2007; Rike & Sharp, 2008) and personality characteristics (e.g. Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). Korthagen (e.g. 2013), however, in my perspective, provides the most comprehensive model for reflection seeking improved teacher practice through attunement to *who* the teacher sees herself as: his *onion* model (Figure 1).

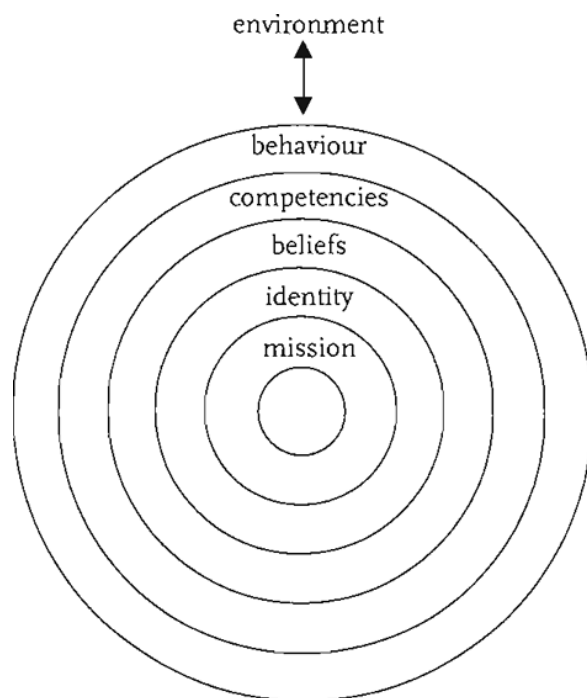


Figure 1

Korthagen (1993; 2004; 2013) suggests that reflection, or more specifically “core reflection,” is at the heart of teacher education and professional learning. He developed a conceptual map dubbed the “onion model” that demonstrates his research and practice-based understanding of the core reflection process—a process designed to lead teachers to better understanding of who they are both as individuals and as teachers. The “layers” of the “onion” are peeled back in stages to reveal a deeper (read: existential) self-understanding. This

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understanding is always interacting with the first level of *environment*—the context the teacher finds herself in. The second level is *behavior*, i.e., what the teacher *does* in their classroom. Third is *competencies*, or the personal and pedagogical skills and knowledge the teacher brings to her practice. Fourth, *beliefs*, concerns the epistemological and ontological notions of the teacher—*What constitutes a good education? How do students learn? Why teach at all?* The fifth level is *identity*, which, according to Korthagen (2004, p. 81), is how the teacher defines or sees herself. Finally, the layers culminate in an attending to the teacher’s *mission*, the centre of the core reflection “onion.” Korthagen (2013) describes *mission* as “what inspires us, and what gives meaning and significance to the work of our lives” (p. 32). The two innermost layers of Korthagen’s onion echo two framework elements of Kelchtermans’s self-understanding: *identity* with *self-image* and *mission* with *task perception*. Importantly, the visual representation of the onion in Korthagen’s model mirrors the stratified nature of both the reflection process and self-understanding in general. Reflecting on who one is and coming to understand oneself, as a teacher at the present moment, is a confrontation with oneself within the temporal context in which she exists; it is a process of hermeneutic interpretation of what one does, believes and is—and *why*. Korthagen’s model and supporting literature (e.g. Korthagen, 2013) provides a clear path to deeper teacher self-understanding.

The existential themes of purpose and mission in Korthagen’s model are not exclusive to his work. Feldman (2002, 2005) has written extensively in the fields of self-study, action research and critical reflection. He suggests that critical examination of one’s personhood is a foundational element in existential action research where the goal is exercising one’s freedom to choose a better life for both her and those she cares for. Greene (2012), in a particularly powerful piece, suggests that reflection for “competent practice” in teaching is a worthy motive for the

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practice, but she believes reflection needs to be extended into the existential realm in considering what that “competent practice” is “for” (p. 21).

Within any reflective practice model, the individual should not travel the path of self-understanding alone. Segal (1999) notes that reflection on experiences by the individual is not enough: “...our own assumptions and beliefs are all too often invisible and taken for granted in our experiences. The consequence of this invisibility is that we tend not to see how our perceptions of experiences are shaped by our assumptions.” (p. 73) Teacher educators clearly have a prominent role to play in the reflective process, but unfortunately there is often a gap between the theories of reflection and the practices enacted by teacher educators (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002).

Reflection is far from a perfect or guaranteed process. Reflection can reinterpret experiences in order to fit with current self-understandings and notions of “good” practice (Grumet, 1975). Stories teachers and teacher candidates tell can be explained in such a way as to make sense with the narrative they have constructed about their own practice and efficacy, serving to further cement beliefs as opposed to opening them up for interrogation. Also, when employed ineffectively, casually or to the point of exhaustion, reflection can become a self-defeating process, where the teacher candidate resists the process and the drive to reflect and develop deeper self-understandings (Smyth, 1989). Reflection is therefore not an instrumental tool; it does not “make” one better, but merely opens the space for the teacher to come to know herself to the point where she can *choose* to grow—to *become* someone else.

2.2.2 Teacher Identity

Self-understanding for a teacher can begin with a question as simple as: *Who am I?* A field of “teacher identity” has emerged from researchers’ efforts to assist teachers in responding

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to and understanding this question (Olsen, 2008). “Identity” is a term that has been appropriated by a number of domains and is therefore presented to the reader with antecedently constructed meaning. Identity has been employed in philosophy (e.g. Taylor, 1989); psychoanalysis (e.g. Freud, 1922); social psychology (e.g. Vygotsky, 1979); and cultural studies (Morley & Robins, 2013), to name just a few of its utilizations. Within education, definitions of identity and its employment in the name of teacher self-understanding is no less disparate (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Olsen (2008, p. 5) suggests that identity in education can be used as a “methodological lens” or as “research frame” through which to study teacher professional development, the “content” of that study (i.e. the product of identity analysis) and a “*pedagogical tool*” for teacher educators to “make visible various holistic, situated framings of teacher development in practice.”

Identity in educational theory, particularly in teacher development, has developed as a multi-faceted term utilized to examine teacher decision-making and professional understanding, as well as how teachers engage in the struggle to come to terms with their professional lives (Weber & Mitchell, 1996). The field of teacher identity is broad and deep. Sachs (2005) provides, as Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) suggest, a strong “starting point in the overall perception of identity”:

[Teacher identity] provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (p. 15)

This understanding echoes that which is the essence of *becoming*—an continuous, dialectical process of reflection, transcendence and change.

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What teacher identity provides to education and teacher professional self-understanding is a concept that acknowledges the individuality of the teacher, but also the temporal situatedness of that individual—contextual, political, emotional, etc.; identity is who the teacher *is, in* that moment of time. Identity, of course, relates closely to the metaphysical concept of the “self” (Taylor, 1989). “Identity” has been explored through the concept of *multiple selves*, where there is no fixed notion of *who* the teacher is, but rather a dynamic interaction with the various personae and self-understandings individuals develop for themselves, such as personal and professional “selves” (e.g. Freese, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008) or “actual” and “ought” selves (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Studies within education extend to all levels of experience, but of present concern are those that address the beginning or, more specifically, the teacher candidate segment of a teacher’s career. Research addressing teacher candidates’ sense of identity is conceptualized through three broad lenses: how identity is formulated or constructed by these teachers; how different contexts contribute to this formulation; and the implications for the teacher and their students given these identities.

The formation of teacher identity has been problematized over the last few decades and there remains no agreement on the process in which teacher candidates come to create and understand their particular notion of themselves (Strong-Wilson et al., 2014). Scholars have addressed the topic in myriad ways, most with a focus on the process of identity formation (e.g. Cattley, 2007; Chong & Low, 2009; Chong, Low & Gow, 2011). The consensus in these studies is that identity is constructed through interaction and reflection with one’s world where the teacher begins to “see” herself as a certain person within a certain context. Zembylas (2003), addressing the concept of identity through a post-structuralist lens, explicitly suggests that

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teacher identity is constantly in a state of *becoming* “in a context embedded in power relations, ideology and culture” (p. 213).

Britzman’s (2003) work takes up the formation of teacher identity as constant discursive practices the teacher candidate engages with as they become a teacher. She suggests that something “happens” to the teacher candidate as they learn to become a teacher and that “happening” is nested in interpretation, social construction, personal histories and contradiction. The identity of the teacher is born in a process that begins from their first moment of being a student, watching their teacher and creating their own understanding and meaning in the teacher’s actions and decisions, such as Lortie’s (1975) “apprenticeship of observation.” The student teacher’s identity is always *becoming* and is framed in a “double consciousness” of persons and place, relating those involved in the practice of teaching to the history, mythology and discourses of the institutions [in which they teach]...” (Britzman, 2003, p. 26).

Some scholars have addressed the topic of identity from a practical-implication perspective, i.e., what does the formation of one identity or another (or lack of formation at all) *do* to the teacher? Alsup (2006) examined the links between teacher effectiveness and identity and concludes that teacher candidates engage in *borderland* discourses which provide the context for change as these students negotiate a new professional identity that is both acceptable to the institution they teach in and “true” to the student’s own sense of self. She suggests that identity formation is essential to teacher effectiveness. Other scholars consider other implications for the teacher such as retention (e.g. Hong, 2010), self-esteem (e.g. Day, 2004) and job satisfaction (Moore & Hoffman, 1988). Some have chosen to examine identity within specific curricular fields, suggesting the subject matter the teacher candidate has chosen to teach shapes the

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formation of her professional identity (e.g. Amin, 1997; Brown & McNamara, 2013; Luehmann, 2007).

Teacher identity research has been examined by way of a number of different methodologies employed in the service of assisting teachers in their understanding of who they are as both people and professionals. Many studies engage in narrative inquiry in order to tell the stories of professional becoming (e.g. Beattie, 2009; Gomez, Allen, & Black, 2008; McNally, Blake, Corbin, & Gray, 2008; Sinner, 2010). Parkison (2009) and Phillips and Carr (2010) examined teacher *becoming* through field-based, action research projects and found that new teachers' *becoming* centered on their professional identity and intrinsic sense of purpose, echoing the work of Korthagen and Kelchtermans.

Although teacher identity has a prominent place in educational literature and has provided an excellent means with which to interrogate the “who” of teaching and teacher education, not all scholars choose to employ the term and even prominent teacher identity theorists suggest that the term is used so frequently and has become so nebulous that perhaps a better term could be utilized (Olsen, 2008).

Of present concern in this study, however, is Kelchtermans's opposition to the term “identity” due to its transient nature and “because of its association with a static essence, implicitly ignoring or denying its dynamic and biographical nature” (2009, p. 261). Although many identity scholars explicitly discuss teacher identity as a dynamic *process* (e.g. Zembylas, 2003), Kelchtermans instead chooses to use the term *professional self-understanding* to denote that which other scholars consider to be identity: *who* is the teacher and how do they understand their professional self. How the teacher approaches and arrives at that self-understanding is taken up in the field of teacher self-study.

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2.2.3 Teacher Self-study

As the concepts of reflective practice and teacher identity developed in faculties of teacher education around the world, a new movement emerged among teacher educators to methodologically frame these investigations in which teachers were engaging: teacher *self-study* (Loughran, 2004). As teacher educators asked teacher candidates to reflect upon their own beliefs, knowledge and behaviors, so too were those teacher educators realizing that their own practice was fecund for reflection. Teacher educators began to recognize their teaching as a site of inquiry and that critical examination of their practice could become a method for improvement upon that practice. An international group of scholars and teacher educators coalesced around this notion of self-study and formed a research community.

Bullough (2004), in an effort to prevent conflation of reflection and self-study, makes an important distinction between the two fields. Reflection is largely an internal process—the practitioner identifies a “problem” (in this case a problem is not necessarily a negative, but rather functions as the site of inquiry) and analyzes her own thinking with the purpose of responding to the “problem.” Even if a teacher educator guides this reflective process, the reflection is largely private. In self-study, Bullough suggests, reflection can be made public through reporting on a research study, mobilizing reflection and meta-cognition. Having made it public, the research is now available for public “scrutiny” and is advanced by developing the reflection to the point where it can stand up to scrutiny as well as the feedback provided by the study’s audience. In this way self-study distinguishes itself as field of inquiry, separate from the methodologies of reflective practice.

Analysis of research from the field of self-study suggests to me that self-study is a methodology (note, not a *method*) of teacher *becoming*. Authors investigate the development of

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their and others' professional knowledge (e.g. Bullock, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Hamilton, 2004; Zeichner, 2007) and self-understanding (e.g. Berry, 2009; Koster & van den Berg, 2014; Leitch, 2010) while simultaneously inviting educators to enact their own *becoming* either through relating to these studies or conducting their own.

Studies in this field are existential in nature. They trace the path the teacher—typically teacher *educator*—takes as she learns more about herself and her teaching practice. The intentional act of reflection, analysis and offering to the public is an exercising of the teacher's freedom and responsibility to their larger community. Indeed, many studies that exist in this field acknowledge this *becoming* by employing the word itself to indicate their professional and existential growth (e.g. Marin, 2014; Pereria, 2005; Phillips & Carr, 2010). These studies also recognize that the path each teacher takes in their *becoming* is unique to that person, with features that may be similar to or resonate with the paths of others, but which are ultimately experienced by the individual.

Self-studies are susceptible to the same type of criticism as existentialism—that it is a navel-gazing (Mitchell, O'Reilly-Scanlon & Weber, 2013) and self-absorbed field of thought, selfish in its very nature. This perception of both self-study and existentialism misses the foundational purpose of both fields—analysis of one's existence (as a person or teacher) opens ideas and spaces up to others, providing language and frames with which to guide one's thinking; self-study is done *on* a person and their practice, but *for* that person *and* others.

Research within the field of self-study significantly contributes to teacher self-understanding through its attention to both teacher identity and the affective dimension of teaching. Scholars exploring the sub-field of teacher identity within self-study implicitly frame teacher identities (often teacher-educator identities) around experiences that have led up to the

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moment of their inquiry. Self-study can help teacher educators construct their own identities through attention to who they were as teachers in the field and who they are now *becoming* as teacher educators (e.g. Bullock and Christou, 2009; Marin, 2014; Williams and Ritter, 2010). Nolan (2012) uses a self-study informed methodology to locate her own professional *becoming* within the learning of her own students—she examines not what she has taught, but what she can learn about her own teaching from the experiences of her students.

Other studies within the field of self-study explicitly seek to assist teachers in developing a sense of self through identity construction: de Freitas (2008) employed a self-study method to ascertain how mathematics teacher identities were constructed, Lindsey (2004) challenged teacher education students to consider their identity as a function of cultural history through self-study and Akerson, Pongsanon, Weiland and Nargund-Joshi (2014) worked as a collective team to assist Akerson in the construction of her professional identity as a classroom teacher of nature-science. The body of literature seeking a construction and understanding of teacher identity through self-study continues to grow rapidly, evidencing the value both teachers and teacher educators see in self-study methodology as it relates to self-understanding.

This attention to *who* the teacher is through self-study is complemented by a consideration of the affective dimension of teaching—the fact that emotions contribute to both the teacher’s understanding of herself and her job. Nias (1996, p. 294) states “the emotional reactions of individual teachers to their work are intimately connected to the view they have of themselves...” and Kelchtermans (2005), building from Nias, suggests that emotions put the personhood of the teacher *at stake* and emotional vulnerability in the act of teaching is an inherent characteristic of the job. Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004) explored the relationship between self-study and emotion and concluded that no analysis of the teacher’s practice is

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complete without consideration of the emotional component of teaching—how the teacher *feels* about their situatedness in the context of teaching constitutes a significant portion of their professional self-understanding. Wilcox (1998), through her self-study, affirms this notion and suggests “caring” plays a critical role in teaching experience and thus in the teacher’s life.

Building upon the concept of caring, Wilcox (2009) would later return to self-study and argue that the self—in all its moral, political and emotional contexts—can best be studied with an “ethic of authenticity”; a commitment to come to know oneself as one truly “is.” This notion of authenticity has been taken up by a number of scholars from a number of fields, but the term is inconsistently employed and requires elucidation within the field of teacher self-understanding.

2.2.4 Authenticity in Teaching

In modern times, the word “authentic” is typically used to describe experiences and objects that are intrinsically more “genuine” or “real” than others (Potter, 2011; Steiner & Reisner, 2006). It is a contrastive term, used to demarcate between and among “authentic” and “inauthentic” experiences and objects. However, as Sartre (1960) suggested of the term “existentialism,” authenticity is becoming so ubiquitous in everyday speech and it “is so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all” (p. 2).

“Authenticity” find its historical root in Romanticism, particularly in the work of Rousseau (Guignon, 2004). Rousseau is representative of a movement among European artists and philosophers who saw in their contemporary modernity a crisis of the human spirit; the Industrial Revolution and its mechanization had distracted humankind from their “authentic” selves. It was the Romantics’ central task to re-discover and re-examine that which was “real” in life and that which was mere societal fabrication. Its use in modern times, as a conspicuous

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positional label, however, has given it a buzzword-pejorative connotation and its value as an interrogative term for existence has been diminished (Potter, 2011); it has become semantically satiated.

Authors examining existentialist themes throughout history have frequently used the term “authenticity” to describe the notion of being human, being true to one’s self, or living a “good” life (e.g. Hegel, 1977; Sartre, 1956). The term, however, has become “muddled” (Steiner & Reisigner, 2005, p. 299) and its interpretation is highly cultural, historical and contextual.

Heidegger, an existentialist thinker, considered authenticity via the notion of “being-one’s-self” or “becoming truly human” (Brook, 2009, p. 49). Heidegger’s understanding of authenticity was largely predicated on an individual’s confrontation with the notions of death, their own temporality, and subsequently their personal responsibility to their own potential *being* and *becoming*.

The majority of the studies that consider authenticity in education are theoretical in nature: Magrini (2013) provides a conceptualization of authentic education; Mayes (2010) provides dimensions of existentially authentic education; Splitter (2009) links authenticity to constructivism; and Rabin (2013) discusses how authentic “care” relates to teaching. Bialystok (2013) makes the case that most of the educational research she has encountered employs the term authenticity without proper substantiation. There is a dearth of practical examples of authentic educative experiences, which suggests that this field of thought remains ripe for further exploration.

In an effort to demystify the term as it relates to education, Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne and Knottenbelt (2007) conducted an extensive literature review of the concept of authenticity, utilizing the framework of teaching as the vehicle of their inquiry. Their task first

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required the researchers to determine how authenticity, in general, was conceptualized in the literature before examining its use in teaching. In a subsequent publication (Kreber, McCuen & Klamfleitner, 2010, p. 385), three authors of the original literature review, synthesized their findings into thirteen features of authenticity in teaching, grouped into six general dimensions of authenticity—“being sincere, candid or honest; being ‘true to oneself’ (in a Heideggerian sense); being ‘true to oneself’ (in critical theory sense); constructing an identity around ‘horizons of significance’; care for the subject, students and interest in engaging students with the subject around ideas that matter; and a ‘process of becoming’ sustained through critical reflection on core beliefs and premises” (see Appendix 1 for a full table of dimensions and features). The six dimensions are representative of the themes of authenticity described in existentialist literature, but are perhaps even more significant for this study due to their notions of identity and becoming.

The examinations of authenticity in teaching by Kreber (2013), Kreber et al. (2007) and Kreber et al. (2010), including the dimensions of authenticity and the features that compromise those dimensions, are instructive for teachers in that they provide discussions of what authenticity in teaching *is*. However, there is a notable absence of consideration of the sixth dimension, which will be the primary focus of this study—authenticity as “a ‘process of becoming’ sustained though [sic] critical reflection on core beliefs and premises” (Kreber et al., 2010, p. 385). There also appears to be a dearth of research that seeks to investigate how teachers or teacher candidates understand the concept of authenticity as it relates to *becoming* a teacher.

Cranton and Carusetta (2004) provide four components of authenticity—“being genuine, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and living a critical life (p. 7). Carusetta and Cranton (2005), building upon

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their previous research, provide one example of exploring the concept of authenticity *with* practitioners, but this study is conducted with university professors, whose teaching experience is, by nature of the students in their classrooms, different from that of secondary school teachers.

Dall'alba perhaps comes the closest to addressing *becoming* a teacher through the concept of authenticity in her work (e.g. Dall'alba, 2009; Vu & Dall'alba, 2011) and does so through a phenomenological understanding of teaching (Dall'Alba, 2010). Again, however, she does not speak directly to secondary school teaching, focusing instead on professional education and higher education.

Brook (2009) had brought Heidegger's notion of authenticity to the forefront of my mind when he stated that Heidegger's authenticity involved three key components, each addressing a deeper and more meaningful element of existence, and by extension, teaching: *concern*, *care* and *commitment*. *Concern* is the daily needs of an individual—food, safety, sleep, etc.; an individual is *concerned* with their own survival. *Care* is concern beyond the self, where the safety and existence of others becomes a priority. Finally, *commitment* is “directedness” (Brook, 2009, p. 49) towards possibilities or projects, which Heidegger believed was a foundational aspect of being-human.

I had initially wanted to explore the participants' sense of *becoming an authentic teacher* and had anticipated that Brook's understanding of Heidegger's notion of authenticity would provide the frame with which I could interpret my participants' sense of *becoming*. I had hoped they would find meaning in being provided with such an understanding. However, I came to realize that the concepts of *authenticity in teaching* and *being an authentic teacher*, could not escape the prior understanding the participants had of the word “authentic.” As I reflected on this, I understood that *authenticity* cannot be a “goal” for teacher development, but is instead a

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concept to be used to interpret the distance between one's professional self-understanding and one's sense of self.

Each examination of authenticity in education seemed to hint towards professional self-understanding and its connection to the individual self. Each study, however, felt to me like a different face of the same crystal—all sides contributed to an understanding of authenticity in teaching, without providing a quintessential description of the experience of authentic teaching and learning. Indeed, perhaps that is why the notion of authenticity has been mired in ambiguity for centuries, employed sporadically and colloquially, defying a substantiated definition; because it cannot be epistemologically constructed, only ontologically understood. But that, to me, is what also makes the concept exciting to examine—authenticity is a crystal with infinite faces and I, through this research project, can perhaps add some clarity to one face as I consider the connections between authenticity, *becoming* and *professional self-understanding* with the four teacher candidate participants.

2.3 Summary

Becoming a teacher, *becoming* and self-understanding are interconnected fields of inquiry which all contribute to better understandings of teaching and teacher education. Engagement in self-understanding processes is the philosophical commitment to and acknowledgement of one's own *becoming*. However, one can live a life, become and be a teacher and never interrogate one's own existential understanding of both oneself and one's teaching. It is the act of intentional engagement with one's life that allows for the creation of meaning for the individual. In this chapter, I have situated the phenomenon I am considering—*becoming* a teacher—in the two fields of *becoming* and *teacher self-understanding*. I have examined methodologies and theoretical underpinnings that have been employed in similar studies, but have not yet

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encountered a study where the phenomenon of *becoming* a teacher has been addressed through an existential interpretation of *professional self-understanding*.

The personal, existential notions of *becoming* and *self-understanding* I have addressed in this chapter are interconnected but unwoven: Greene (1967) ties together the exposed threads left by each field of inquiry with a simple idea as she describes the potential of living an existential, examined life of *becoming* through teaching and education—choice:

...each single person must give himself reality by making critical choices in all the situations of his life, committing himself to what he chooses, and renewing himself by making further choices—in his freedom, without guidance or guarantee. This is the way he comes to be a full person, an identity. It is the way he authenticates himself as an individual. Education, therefore, must provide opportunities for him to make the decisions which give him continuity as an existing individual. The skills, the subject matters which are taught, must be presented as possibilities which each individual can appropriate for himself as he chooses himself, as he creates himself as a reflective being (p. 96).

This research study provides another thread of understanding of the lived experiences of those who choose to become and *become* a teacher.

2.3.1 Epistemological and Axiological Position Statements

This study is situated within methodological and philosophical traditions, but it is also situated in my own lived experiences as a teacher and the philosophical understandings I have developed throughout my life. The beliefs I have about teaching, education and existence act as a foundation upon which this study is built and influenced the design and implementation of this research project. Prior to commencing the writing of my research proposal, I first crafted a

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number of belief statements, outlining the philosophical presuppositions I would bring to the research. I would often return to these statements as I conducted the research and wrote up my findings, checking my interpretations against these beliefs to ensure both the beliefs and interpretations continued to resonate with me. These statements became the boundaries for my path as I engaged in my own process of *becoming*:

- Students attend school to learn how to engage in their “fundamental project” (Greene, 1967) of becoming more fully human (Heidegger, 1953/2000).
- What that learning entails is not given, nor is it limited to the specific, assigned curriculum.
- The teacher plays a significant role in student learning.
- *Who* the teacher is in *how* they teach influences *what* the content of the teaching is, and therefore, what students learn (Kelchtermans, 2009).
- *Who* the teacher is always negotiated within a specific context, dynamic and in a state of *becoming* (Britzman, 2003).
- Coming to know oneself as a teacher through recognition of one’s existential *becoming* can contribute to teacher self-understanding.
- Deeper self-understanding enables teachers to engage with their own “fundamental project” of *becoming* and therefore, better prepare themselves to assist their students in the students’ engagement with their projects.

These statements honor a tenet of hermeneutic phenomenology: the situation of the knower within the process of knowing. The research problem and my attendance to its question cannot and should not be separated from the epistemological and axiological beliefs described above.

2.3.2 Research Problem

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The research question I address in this study, given the review of literature presented above and my statements of understanding, is:

How do teacher candidates understand their own existential *becoming* as they become a teacher?

I believe Kelchtermans's (2009) concept of *professional self-understanding* provides one frame to consider this problem, particularly when situated in existential thought. The process of *becoming* is personal, existential, temporal and reflective. This framework attends to these characteristics by asking participants to consider how they see themselves as teachers (*self-image*); how they feel about themselves as teachers (*self-esteem*); to what purpose are they directed towards (*task perception* and *job motivation*); and where they see themselves in their careers in later years (*future perspective*). Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding* framework provides participants and researchers the opportunity to examine both where they are on their path of *becoming* and how they see their path unfolding in the future. I explicate this framework in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

Clearly from the literature review, there are a multitude of perspectives from which one might address the notion of teacher professional self-understanding. I am choosing to use Kelchtermans's (2004, 2009) concept of professional self-understanding to consider how the participants in this study understand their sense of *becoming* a teacher because I believe the framework he provides is both practical for organizing a teacher's self-understanding as well as relevant to the existential thought that subsumes a sense of *becoming*. Below I describe the specifics of Kelchtermans's concept of professional self-understanding and outline the existential themes inherent in each of the five components of the concept.

3.1 Professional Self-understanding

Kelchtermans's scholarly work can be considered as a research strand in the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching (ISATT) research community, an organization that played a significant role in shifting educational research in the 1980s "from teacher thinking to the study of teachers and teaching in all of its complexities" (Craig, Meijer & Broekmans, 2013, p. xv). ISATT's work is in stark contrast to the technicist conceptualization of teacher education and understanding (Halliday, 1998), as scholars affiliated with this organization explicitly acknowledge the humanity and situatedness in the act of teaching. Themes addressed by scholars in this association include: the lives of teachers (e.g. Day, 2000; Day & Leitch, 2001; Day, Stobart, Simmons & Kington, 2006), teacher identity (e.g. Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Flores & Day, 2006), reflective practice (e.g. Korthagen, 2004; Musaeva, 2013) and the moral implications of teaching (e.g. Bullough, 2011; Kelchtermans, 1996; Meijer, Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). These themes can be considered to inform the field of teacher self-study described above (see Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey & Russell, 2004).

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Kelchtermans and ISATT do not explicitly situate their work in an existential ground. However, the themes in the vast majority of the work Kelchtermans and the ISATT produce share an ontological ground with existentialism: valuing the individual while seeking an understanding of that individual's place in the broader context of their world. For example, Kelchtermans (2009) suggests teaching is “characterized and constituted by *vulnerability*,” by which he means that “teachers cannot but make dozens of decisions about when and how to act in order to support students’ development and learning, but they don’t have a firm ground to base their decisions on” (p. 266). This notion of the responsibility to make decisions for both oneself (the teacher) and for others (the students) without relying on absolute knowledge or certainty echoes the sentiment of Sartre (1943/1988) when he suggested that in choosing a life for one’s self, we are creating a person we believe to be a model for others; we choose and we manifest our values and therefore must take responsibility for our choices, not simply for ourselves, but for their impact on others. Indeed, in the same study, Kelchtermans suggests that his “fundamental concept of teaching [is that it is] an inter-personal and relational endeavor” (p. 258); Sartre in the same address referenced above, suggests, “...man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity” (p. 4). These are notions that challenge the perception of teaching as mere pedagogical tactics and the idea that curriculum can be “teacher proofed” (MacDonald, 2003). Teaching is enacted by a person who’s past, present and future are meaningful, crucial to the act of teaching and foundational in the teacher-student relationship.

As discussed in Chapter 2, existentialism as a field of thought and aesthetic experience can be arduous to both explicate and understand. However, in Kelchtermans’s work, one can find an entry point into conceptualizing existential themes within the professional self-understanding a teacher creates for herself. Existential themes such as freedom, responsibility, meaning, dread,

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agency, values, ethics, morality, transcendence, choice, time and even death can all be located within Kelchtermans's work.

Of present concern is *professional self-understanding*, one of two pieces in Kelchtermans's (2009) "Personal Interpretive Framework" (PIF) for teacher self-understanding. Using a narrative-biographical approach to conceptualize how teachers thought about themselves as professionals, Kelchtermans inductively developed this PIF which includes two interconnected domains: *professional self-understanding* and *subjective educational theory*. Subjective educational theory is a "personal system of knowledge and beliefs about education that teachers use when performing their job" (2009, p. 263). It is the semi-formalized collection of knowledge and beliefs the teacher has developed through experience and education; it is the content from which the teacher draws inspiration when faced with the question of "How should I deal with this particular situation... and why?" (2009, p. 264). Kelchtermans makes explicit that professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory are interweaving domains teachers develop and use when making sense of the professional situation they find themselves in. For this research project, however, I chose not to address the subjective educational theory component with the participants in an explicit manner in order to focus the scope of analysis and provide a clear interpretation of their *becoming* through the categorization provided in *professional self-understanding*. Also, I believe self-understanding to be the ground for decisions teachers make about what to do and "what works" in the classroom—if their subjective educational theory is a product of experience and learning, those experiences are enacted and interpreted by *someone*, and the *self* inherent in the interpretation must be first understood before addressing why the teacher believes something "works." It should be noted, however, that I

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recognize the two elements of the *personal interpretive framework* are not mutually exclusive and the experiences of the teachers help to shape their self-understanding.

Professional self-understanding, the other component of Kelchtermans's PIF, explicitly makes use of the term *self-understanding* (as opposed to the typically employed concept of "identity") to evoke a hermeneutic interpretation of one's self-knowledge as both "product" (self-understanding at a given historical moment) and "process" (the engagement in the act of understanding one's *becoming*). The five components of *professional self-understanding* described by Kelchtermans are: *self-image*, *self-esteem*, *motivation*, *task perception* and *future perspective*. Each component can be conceptualized both as an element of current professional self-understanding and as an expression of existential themes, which acknowledge the process of *becoming* the teacher is always engaged in. I explicate both the *professional self-understanding* components and their existential connections below.

3.1.1 Self-image

Self-image is the descriptive component of the professional self-understanding framework. It is how the teacher sees herself and describes that mental projection; it is her response to the question "Who am I?" (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994, p. 55). The vision the teacher has of herself, however, is not created in a vacuum. How she perceives others see her (colleagues' and students' opinions carry the most weight here) contributes greatly to her self-image. This perception is hermeneutic in nature as her *self-image* can be both the initiator and conclusion of others' perceptions: a teacher who has come to be known as an excellent resource for implementing technology in the classroom, for example, has her confidence boosted in this area, now offers her assistance to colleagues, reinforcing the perception and simultaneously impacting the teacher's *self-image*.

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How the teacher explicitly describes herself may provide the most significant contributions to understanding their self-image, but these descriptions may be white-washed for the audience and hide the teacher's actual mental projection. For example, a teacher may see herself as a content expert, but in the name of modesty may instead suggest that she is merely passionate about the subject. Although connected, the difference between "expert" and "passionate" paints a very different portrait of the teacher. In many cases, the way teachers tell stories about themselves and their experiences tangentially elucidates the *self-image*. How they position themselves in the stories of their school and classroom, to whom they attribute their successes and failures and the language they choose to tell their tales can provide important insights into the teacher's *self-image* (Kelchtermans, 1994).

The theme of *absence* is also strong in the *self-image* component. What the teacher does not say about herself can be as telling as how she describes herself; the picture of the teacher's self-image can be brought into relief by examining the absence of descriptors. Second, *self-image* can be illuminated by the teacher's description of their own *not-yetness* (Greene, 1998). Teachers recognizing their own process of *becoming* may describe their *self-image* as someone incomplete, someone who is still growing and learning. Their own perceived areas for growth and improvement contribute to their self-image in the contrast between who they believe they are and who they are *not-yet* (Koster & van den Berg, 2014).

The ways in which the teacher sees herself is representative of their attunement to and understanding of a number of existential themes, including meaning, freedom and responsibility. Frankl (1959) suggests that individuals are meaning-seeking entities and that decisions are the product of the meaning the person gives to both their life and the choices they make. Tillich (1952, p. 81-82) states "the power of man's life [is in his]...relation to meanings..." and is the

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“source of his vitality.” The *self-image* of a teacher is meaningful to them in that it is an understanding of how they are involved in their world. Each decision they make is filtered through that *self-image* and the meaning the teacher ascribes to the decision re-makes the self-image. *Self-image*, then, is a manifestation of the meanings the teacher has given to their decisions, life experiences and understandings; the ability to create meaning for oneself is an enactment of one’s freedom.

The freedom to describe and, in doing so, create one’s *self-image* is an existential theme of Kelchtermans’s work. Freedom, however, is not just the ability to describe, but also to acknowledge the process of *becoming*. The teacher’s notion of freedom is made manifest when they acknowledge (or fail to) the not-yetness of their professional selves. If they speak, for example, of characteristics and skills they wish to develop, they are acknowledging the freedom at the “boundaries of their life” (Greene, 1967, p. 68) and recognizing that they, as both teachers and persons, are dynamic and always in a state of *becoming*. Existentially, “freedom” is not a binary state opposite of “oppression,” but rather an expression of one’s own agency in their *becoming*. For the teacher, freedom will always be in tension as she is a member of an educational organization and is accountable for her actions and decisions. How she negotiates her freedom within her formal positions will be reflected in her *self-image*.

Although teachers are responsible to their organization, *responsibility* in existentialism transcends a sense of accountability and instead implies both a responsibility for individuality as well as a responsibility to the rest of humankind for that individuality (Sartre, 1943/1984). The teacher’s *self-image* is the product of her thinking about herself along with how she perceives others see her. Ultimately, however, this *self-image* is an expression of how the teacher sees herself in relation to those she is responsible to—on a macro scale, the entirety of humanity, but

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on a more applicable micro scale, her students. That being said, existentialists do not suggest to what greater purpose someone must be responsible (Wirth, 1962), only that they are responsible both to themselves and to others—the shape and course of that responsibility (*task perception*) will be determined by the teacher's values and those will be of the teacher's own choosing.

3.1.2 Task Perception

How the teacher describes their purpose in teaching is referred to as *task perception* in Kelchertmans' (2009) framework:

This encompasses the teacher's idea of what constitutes his/her professional programme [sic], his/her tasks and duties in order to do a good job. It reflects a teacher's personal answer to the question: what must I do to be a proper teacher? What are the essential tasks I have to perform in order to have the justified feeling that I am doing well?; what do I consider as legitimate duties to perform and what do I refuse to accept as part of 'my job'? (p. 262)

Task perception is what a teacher understands to be their "job" and as Nias (1996) suggests, the "job" of teaching and the personal investment the teacher makes in constituting for themselves the notion of that job, is deeply personal; who the teacher is cannot be separated from how they understand their profession.

More than any other component, *task perception* carries with it the most explicit links to the field of existentialism (van den Berg, 2002). Kelchertmans suggests that teachers' beliefs about what their job entails is never limited to their job description and includes the values and morals that define *how* they engage in their world. These ethical positions are revealed by the choices the teacher makes in their practice. Teachers often struggle with the contradictions they perceive between what they believe the objectives of education and their teaching should be and

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what they are asked to do as part of their employment (Kelchtermans, 1994; van den Berg, 2002). Although the tension between employees and their mandates is not unique to the teaching profession, the moral weight of the practice of teaching—the direct impact a teacher has on a student’s life—increases the existential stakes of each decision the teacher makes; the decisions *mean* more than in many professions.

Ascribing meaning and a larger purpose to tasks reflects the existentialist sentiment that the individual is responsible for finding meaning in life. When the teacher chooses to act in a certain way, to engage with her students in a particular fashion or to oppose external controls on her practice through micropolitical acts of resistance (Kelchtermans, 2002), she does so with a larger, value-laden purpose in mind.

There is an extensive body of literature that supports the notion that a sense of purpose in one’s work can be a motivating and sustaining factor in one’s life (e.g. Bronk, 2012; Frankl, 1959; Fullan, 2004). A sense of purpose is derived from a teacher’s self concept and values (Korthagen, 2004; Nias, 1989; Tickle, 2001) and is very personal, but it is also shaped by contextual factors such as school reform efforts, mentor teachers and student populations (Lasky, 2005). The socialization of new teachers into their school’s context can also shape the new teacher’s understanding of their job and in turn their *task perception* (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011). A sense of purpose is certainly a dynamic phenomenon with the individual, but what has become clear through research is that the sense of purpose becomes more stabilized, consistent and less susceptible to outside influences (like school reform efforts) as the teacher develops their own professional self-understanding (Lasky, 2005). The stability of that sense of purpose is of present concern as this study examines how teacher candidates (who completed their on-

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campus Bachelor of Education program days before the concluding round of interviews for this study) describe their sense of purpose as they moved through their second and final placement.

Implementation of policies that conflict with the teacher's sense of purpose threaten all other elements of the *professional self-understanding* model: *self-image* is partly informed by insider/outsider attitudes towards government policies; *self-esteem* is largely defined by whether the teacher believes they are doing a "good" job, which is in turn influenced by what they understand that job is or should be; alignment of personal purpose with that of an employer's can have a significant impact on *motivation* and dissonance among the stakeholders can lead to teacher attrition and burnout (Tomic & Tomic, 2008), which are two negative outcomes when considering the *future perspectives* of teachers. Loonstra, Brouwers and Tomic (2005), inspired by Frankl's (1959) notion of self-transcendence (i.e. finding meaning and purpose in life through the free and responsible devotion to a cause larger than the individual) applied the concept of existential fulfillment in an analysis of burnout in teachers and principals. They suggest that these two groups are less likely to experience the symptoms of burnout if they are existentially fulfilled—which includes a sense of purpose.

How a teacher understands and is able to work towards this sense of purpose contributes to how they evaluate their own performance in their job (Kelchtermans, 2009, in Pyszczynski and Kesebir, 2002):

Carver and Scheier (1981, 2002) posit that all self-regulating systems operate by comparing their current state with an ideal reference value, noting any discrepancies that exist, and then taking action to reduce these discrepancies... The standards against which one's current state is compared are organized hierarchically with goal-directed behavior (e.g., studying for an exam) at the intermediate levels, the specific actions through which

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these behaviors are enacted (e.g., reading over one's notes) at the lower or more concrete levels, and the goals that these behaviors seek to achieve (e.g., earning a good grade) at the higher or more abstract levels. (p. 125)

The distance teachers perceive between who they currently are and *what* they believe they should be doing in order to be a successful teacher leads to the evaluative component of Kelchtermans's framework—*self-esteem*.

3.1.3 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the product of the teacher's self-assessment of their performance. It is understood as how effectively they believe they are achieving the elements included in their *task perception*. There exists an extensive body of literature that conceptualizes and applies the concept of *self-esteem* in research (see Geving, 2007) and specifically teacher self-understanding (see Darby, 2008). What is clear from this research is: self-esteem is vital to a teacher's self-image (Kelchtermans, 2005); it is an emotional response to explicit and implicit feedback (Bullough, 2008); and it impacts professional learning (Wilson & Demetrio, 2007).

A teacher's *self-image*, as stated above, is the mental projection a teacher has of herself—it is how she “sees” herself. *Self-esteem* is part of that image in both an evaluative and constituting capacity: as an assessment (“Yes, I am a good teacher.”) as well as a component (“I am a confident teacher because I believe I am a good teacher”). That *self-image* is very personal and important to the teacher because it is how they understand their place in the world. If that image is threatened by outside inputs such as negative feedback, the teacher may use her *self-esteem* as a defense mechanism against that feedback in order to maintain her *self-image* and, by extension, her *self-esteem* (Nias, 1987) (“I believe I am a good teacher, therefore that negative feedback is incorrect.”).

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As a teacher candidate engages in the process of *becoming* a teacher, her *self-esteem* will always be at issue as her self-esteem in this new profession is in an incubatory stage—for many, this is the first time they have received feedback on their performance as a teacher. Self-esteem, particularly for teacher candidates, carries with it an emotional component. Indeed, self-esteem can be colloquially constructed as “*feeling* [emphasis added] good about oneself as a teacher” (Le Cornu, 2013). Positive self-esteem increases job satisfaction and reduces stress, particularly in new teachers as they navigate their new profession (Reilly, Dhingra & Boduszek, 2014; Richter, et al., 2013).

The challenge in understanding and employing the concept of *self-esteem* as it applies to teachers and teacher candidates is that its composition is externally-informed, internally constructed and contextually situated (Le Cornu, 2013). Feedback from individuals, particularly from students (Kelchtermans, 2009), is critical in the teacher’s *self-esteem*, but supervisors, parents and other school stakeholders’ opinions play a role (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Feedback is always “filtered and interpreted” by the teacher (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 262) and Nias (1985) suggests that some individuals and groups take the position of “significant others,” with their feedback holding more weight than others.

Self-esteem also plays an important role in teacher professional learning both in learning *how to teach* as well as how to navigate the professional *life of* a teacher (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Motivating oneself to hone the craft of teaching requires confidence and self-belief (Wilson & Demetriou, 2007)—the belief that one has the *ability* to learn more about the profession as well as the belief that she can become “better.” The dark side of self-esteem, however, is exposed through the lens of professional learning as the teacher’s opinion of their own abilities should not suppress the recognition that no teacher is ever perfect and one can

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always continue to learn—too concrete of a self-assessment, particularly a positive self-assessment, can minimize professional and personal development.

From the existential perspective, particularly that of Frankl, each individual's responsibility is to “find” (i.e. determine; create) meaning in their lives. Teachers, when understanding their “tasks” (*task perception*), identify tasks that they, at some level, find meaningful: teaching for good citizenship may be important for one teacher while teaching specific curriculum objectives may be meaningful for another. Their efficacy in achieving those meaningful outcomes informs the teachers' *self-esteem*. However, the reverse may be true as well: the teacher may find they are successful in accomplishing specific tasks with their students, leading to self-esteem and positive feelings, which re-orient the meaning they give to that task—it becomes important to them *because* they are successful. This process of meaning creation, *self-image*, task identification and evaluation (i.e. *self-esteem*) is hermeneutic in nature and no origin or source of ultimate meaning is necessary in existentialism. What is important is that the teacher exercises their freedom to create meaning through responsible choice.

The existential themes expressed by Kelchtermans's component of *self-esteem* reflect the emotional implications of this component. As with other components of the *professional self-understanding* framework, there is always the notion of existential “freedom” and “responsibility”—the acknowledgement that each individual is responsible for engaging with the “fundamental project” of “becoming” (Greene, 1967, p. 19). However, in the face of freedom the individual is presented with the potential for failure—a failure to choose for oneself and to exercise that freedom.

Sartre, an atheist, described freedom as “dreadful” and that individuals were “condemned” to be free, unable to appeal to no greater authority than themselves. Each person

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was responsible for their own existence within the temporal and cultural context in which they found themselves. The lack of caretaker or safety net in one's life is cause of anxiety for individuals. Kierkegaard (1843/2003) and Sartre (1943/1984) both distinguished between the forms of anxiety "fear" and "anguish." Fear is the anxiety arising from an external threat—in Sartre's example, a soldier experiences fear when they are faced with an enemy's bombardment. "Anguish," however, is the anxiety arising from the acknowledgment of one's existential freedom and the dread one experiences in the face of it—a doubting of whether or not they will live up to that freedom; the soldier, moments before the bombardment, experiences anguish at the thought of being a coward during the fight. The anguish a teacher feels is not in the success or failure of their lesson, but in their sense of whether or not they did all they could do for their students—whether or not they exercised their agency in the fullest way.

For the teacher, *self-esteem* is not only described in the difference between their *self-image* and their *task perception*, but can be understood as the teacher's evaluation of their own engagement with their freedom for the sake of their students.

3.1.4 Motivation

The study of motivation has held a prominent place in the field of social science and is defined by the question: Why do we do what we do? Kelchtermans (2009) describes the conative component of his *professional self-understanding* framework, *job motivation*, as the "motives or drives that make people choose to become a teacher, to stay in teaching or to give it up for another career" (p. 262). Implicit in this definition are both discrete *reasons* (e.g. job security; love of working with students) as well as a *magnitude* of emotion—the strength of the motivation (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Clearly many teachers share similar *reasons* for becoming a teacher, but the way they experience that reason is specific to the individual.

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Kelchtermans (2009) suggests *job motivation* is connected to the *task perception* component of the framework as the teacher will be more likely to be motivated to teach if they feel as though their working context is supportive of and aligned with their vision of their “job.” Explored in a later work (Rots, Kelchtermans & Aelterman, 2012) is the connection between *job motivation* and *self-esteem*. Teacher motivation is enhanced when they feel a sense of “professional competence” (p. 4) and when teachers, particularly new teachers, feel a sense of self-worth through their professional actions. This self-worth is generated both extrinsically through positive feedback of mentor teachers and intrinsically when the new teacher observed their students engaged and successful in their learning. Significant research in the larger psychological field of motivation (see Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2010, 2014) supports the notion that individuals are increasingly motivated when they believe they can be successful at a task.

There is no shortage of studies that have investigated the reasons why individuals choose to become teachers (e.g. Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Watt & Richardson, 2008; see Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014 for an overview). Anthony & Kane (2008), for example, identified twenty-five distinct “extremely significant” motivators in individuals’ choosing to become teachers. These motivators, however, are not static throughout the teachers’ careers (Sinclair, 2008). Appropriately for the current study, Kelchtermans (2009), for example, suggests high school teachers often enter teaching due to a love of their subject matter but as they progress through their career, they begin to recognize that their presence and involvement in their students’ lives is meaningful to both students and the teacher, shifting motivation away from the subject matter to the student as *subject*.

The shifts in motivation as an existential process of *becoming* can be understood through the writings of Buber (1937/2010). Buber (who rejected the label “existentialist” in his

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disagreement with the perceived-individualistic stance of existentialism¹), like Frankl, was a philosopher whose focus was determining an ontological basis from which to make sense of existence. He suggested that existence can be understood in the *type* of relationship one has with an Other: an *I-It* (experiencing the Other as an object limited by one's understanding) or as an *I-Thou* (experiencing an Other through a meaningful, unbounded relationship) (Buber, 1937/2010). Shifts in a teacher's motivation from subject to student during their career, then, reflects an existential progression from an *I-It* (students as objects "experiencing" teaching) to an *I-Thou* (students as subjects with whom the teacher forms relationships) understanding of their job. This understanding is an existential recognition of the humanity of an Other (in the case of the teacher, the students) by finding meaning and motivation in the new understanding of the relationship.

Where an existentialist may take issue with Kelchtermans's description of job *motivation* is that although the context certainly influences how a teacher is able to work towards their *task perception*, it remains the responsibility of the teacher to actualize their freedom within that context. Certainly some schools will be more supportive of and therefore more motivating for the teacher, but the attitude of the teacher towards that context will always remain her decision. Frankl (1959, p. 33) describes this choice as the "last of the human freedom—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." Indeed, choosing perseverance in the face of adversity is vital to changing the context within which teachers work. Wirth (1976, p. 127), invoking Frankl, suggests:

¹Buber's philosophy was predicated upon the notion that all existence should be understood as relational. Sartre, the poster child of existentialism, did not disagree with this sentiment, suggesting that to be an existentialist was to recognize the fundamental intersubjectivity of humankind where self-understanding and self-actualization were only possible in the *context* of one's being—a context that is defined by its intersubjectivity.

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...most teachers work under conditions which make a mockery of humane efforts at teaching. But unless we clarify for ourselves the directions we ought to pursue, and commit ourselves to achieving what is possible, we will be at the mercy of regimentation or succeeding waves of spurious fads.

The teacher should not simply make do with the context they find themselves in, but must instead choose to imagine, articulate and work towards shaping the future of that context for themselves, their students and subsequent generations. The literature, both educational and existential, suggests that exercising one's agency in creating that future should be and will be a motivating factor in the teacher's career, *task perception* and *future perspective*.

3.1.5 Future Perspective

The final and culminating component of Kelchtermans's professional self-understanding framework is the temporal piece, or *future perspective*. Kelchtermans elucidates this concept with the question the teacher asks of herself: "How do I see myself as a teacher in the years to come and how do I feel about it?" (2009, p. 263)².

This element of the framework expresses both the product and process of self-understanding and *becoming*—the teacher imagines herself in the future and conjures an image of who she wants to become (product), but in doing so, that imagining has already engaged her in her own *becoming* (process). *Future perspective* is a product of her historicity—at the moment of imagination, all of the teacher's experiences and her interpretation of herself through those

² For my part, I find it curious that Kelchtermans would choose the phrase "how do I see myself as a teacher..." given his specific focus on the "who" of the teacher throughout the framework. To me, it may be more appropriate for the teacher to ask herself: "*Who* will I be as a teacher in the years to come and why?" This phrases the question in such a way that the future-self of the teacher is not an object separate from the teacher's current understanding and acknowledges the responsibility inherent in the process of becoming that future-self.

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experiences inform who she imagines herself to be in the future. It is also “dynamic..., an interactive process of sense-making and construction.” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 263)

Who the teacher envisions herself becoming is a reflection of who she currently sees herself as (*self-image*). The *future projection* is situated in her current self-understanding and is a “response to past experiences that is simultaneously a commitment to future experiences” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 217). Imagining who one might become may also illuminate one’s *task perception* as the teacher’s *becoming* may be directed to purposeful goals and outcomes the teacher hopes to achieve.

Inherent in the question of *who* the teacher would like to become are the axiological underpinnings in the question of *why*. The ways in which one responds to the question of: “*Why become someone who...?*” reveals what principles the teacher values and the role she wishes to play in enacting them. For example, a teacher who envisions herself in the future as a classroom teacher who engenders passion for mathematics in her students takes a different axiological position than the teacher who envisions herself as a school administrator who wants to create a safe and positive school environment. There is no judgment of these positions, but it is important to recognize what the difference among teachers’ perceived futures expresses.

Different scholars have contributed to elucidating the process through which teachers, particularly new teachers, describe and/or understand their future perspective with conceptualizations including: career paths (e.g. Rinke, 2008), professional “trajectories” (e.g. Leijen & Kullasepp, 2013); and professional development/learning (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990; Timperley, 2010; Webster-Wright, 2009). Studies within this body of literature typically consider the context and operationalization of teacher

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learning, but generally downplay the role of the individual's self-understanding in their growth and *becoming*.

Britzman (2003), however, explicitly acknowledges learning to teach as a process of *becoming* and suggests that teacher candidates often struggle with their engagement in *becoming* because of the “normative visions” (p. 123) new teachers have of what it means to be a teacher. Teacher candidates envision an “idea of a teacher” (p. 118) through their apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) and the discourse they engage with in schools of teacher education (Koster & van den Berg, 2014). Britzman suggests difficulties arise when teacher candidates aspire to become someone (or *something*) they are not. She suggests that the “process of becoming...requires dialogue with the past and the present, with other persons, and with the contexts and histories that coalesce in the process of coming to know” (p. 119). *Future perspective*, imagining who one is *becoming*, is not simply a product of fantasy, but an active, intentional engagement with one's own history, experiences and self-understanding.

Fantasy and imagination, however, are central themes to existentialists—imagining who one might become is foundational in understanding one's existence. Ortega (1941) states:

It is too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a concept of life, to “ideate” the character he is going to be. Whether he be original or a plagiarist, man is the novelist of himself (p. 155).

It is the responsibility of the individual to author herself, which includes a notion of *who* she is becoming.

The future is always of concern to existentialists: Sartre (1956, 1975) suggests that the purpose of imagining the future is to examine present reality through an identification of what is “not yet” and that humans are responsible for envisioning and striving towards a transcendent

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future. Stapledon (1931/2008), a science-fiction writer who brings an existential examination of humankind to his novels, suggests: “To romance of the far future, then, is to attempt to see the human race in its cosmic setting, and to mould our hearts to entertain new values” (p. 9). Sartre (1956, p. 561) concurs: “It is on the day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our suffering and that we *decide* that these are unbearable” [original emphasis].

A *future perspective* does not necessarily intend a positive image of one’s career in Kelchtermans’s framework: teachers may envision themselves as burnt-out or disenchanted in their future careers, a product of their exasperation with their current working context or pessimism for the teaching profession in general. In existentialist thought, positive future outcomes in one’s life are far from certain. Ultimately, any *future perspective* for the existentialist must include a confrontation with one’s impermanence and death; a number of existentialist thinkers provide considerable treatises on the subject (e.g. Heidegger, 1953/2010; Kierkegaard, 1843/2003; Sartre, 1943). Although Kelchtermans’s framework makes no mention of it, I believe a *future perspective* must include a vision of, if not death, than the totality of the teacher’s career. It is within this notion of finitude that the teacher must consider the *meaning* of their work as a teacher—what do they want to accomplish during their career and why? Looking forward to look back upon an imagined career provides the teacher with an existential perspective on her career and her hopes and dreams for her life and work, informing her present-day self-professional self-understanding.

Chapter 4: Methodology

“Oh, if only it were possible to find understanding,” Joseph exclaimed. “If only there were a dogma to believe in. Everything is contradictory, everything tangential; there are no certainties anywhere. Everything can be interpreted one way and then again interpreted in the opposite sense. The whole of world history can be explained as development and progress and can also be seen as nothing but decadence and meaninglessness. Isn’t there any truth? Is there no real and valid doctrine?”

The Master had never heard him speak so fervently. He walked on in silence for a little, then said: “There is truth, my boy. But the doctrine you desire, absolute, perfect dogma that alone provides wisdom, does not exist. Nor should you long for a perfect doctrine, my friend. Rather, you should long for the perfection of yourself... Truth is lived, not taught. Be prepared for conflicts, Joseph Knecht—I can see they have already begun.” (p. 83)

~ The Glass Bead Game, Hermann Hesse (1943/2002)

4.1 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Professional *becoming* could be studied in a number of ways, but I believe that the situatedness of teachers’ professional lives plays a crucial role in their development and therefore a research methodology which privileges that situatedness should be used. How teachers, particularly new teachers, understand education, teaching and their role as teacher cannot be interpreted at arm’s length; there is a necessary simultaneous movement back and forth between the teacher’s self-understanding and their understanding of their professional context. An appropriate methodology to consider the phenomenon of *becoming* a teacher in this dialectical fashion is hermeneutic phenomenology. It prioritizes dynamic interpretation as opposed to concrete knowledge and it allows for an aesthetic engagement and representation of interpretation, reflecting the primacy of experience in existential understanding (Gadamer, 2004; van Manen, 1990).

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4.1.1 Overview

Phenomenology is the study of the meaning of lived experiences in individuals or groups of individuals (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). It is a qualitative research tradition that seeks to understand the “essence” of lived experiences, recognizing that experience of a phenomenon has a deeper meaning constructed by the experiencer that goes beyond the event itself. Originally conceived as a philosophic tradition in the nineteenth century by Brentano, it would be further developed by Husserl (1931/2012) and his successors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to become a prominent qualitative research tradition (Creswell, 2013; Kincheloe, 2005; Moran, 2002).

Husserl’s (1931/2012) phenomenology was a spiritual descendent of an empirical understanding of the world. He sought to create a science of understanding, where the essence of understanding phenomena arises from a conscious attending to the experience. Researchers could obtain a “true” understanding of the world and existence through the “sense” of the experience, as articulated by the experiencer. However, Husserl’s phenomenology would come under criticism from his own student, Martin Heidegger, who balked at Husserl’s contention that to truly understand the “essence” of the experiences of others, the researcher must “bracket” out their pre-understanding (i.e. biases; prejudices; preconceptions) of the experience so they could approach the subject objectively (Annells, 1996). Heidegger (1953/2010) drew from the field of *hermeneutics*, the philosophy of *interpretation*, to articulate a different way of knowing. He believed that our unique engagement in the world is the very essence of existence and therefore understanding cannot be removed from the interpreter’s contextual existence. A significant number of authors have written extensively on hermeneutic understanding (e.g. Caputo (1987); Habermas (1990); Ricoeur (1981)) and it is beyond the scope of this study to describe in-depth

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each of their contributions to the field. Each, however, owes or echoes their understanding of hermeneutics from the ideas articulated by Heidegger.

Gadamer (2004), perhaps the most frequently referenced author in the field of hermeneutic phenomenology would elaborate on the ontological imperative as it related to “truth” and “understanding,” describing the necessary intersubjectivity in interpretation to be a “fusion of horizons” where *an* understanding of the phenomenon is achieved through combining the contextual perspectives of both the subject and object.

Where phenomenology as a broad field includes a number of techniques and methods for the research process (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), hermeneutic phenomenology has no prescription for understanding. van Manen (2014) describes it thus:

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of abstemious reflection on the structures of the lived experience of human existence. The term *method* refers to the way or attitude of approaching a phenomenon. Abstemious means reflecting on experience aims to abstain from theoretical, polemical, suppositional and emotional intoxications.

Hermeneutic means that reflecting on experience must aim for discursive language and sensitive interpretation devices that make phenomenological analysis, explication, and description possible and intelligible (p. 26)

It is a methodology defined more by its underlying philosophy than any list of techniques or methods (van Manen, 1990). Delineation between *methodology* and *methods* is crucial in this research tradition as the concept of “method(s)” implies a finitude of the possible ways in which researchers can interpret a phenomenon. This is philosophically counter to Gadamer’s (2004) contention that a true hermeneutic process knows no formal bounds, is fecund and invites further interpretation.

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This methodology has been employed in previous studies to examine new teachers' understandings of their successes and failures in the classroom (e.g. Dreon & MacDonald, 2011) and how new teachers' lived experiences allow them to learn the tacit dimensions of mastery teaching (e.g. Roth, Masciotra & Boyd, 1999). In recent decades, however, hermeneutic phenomenology has been employed as a standard methodology used to investigate experiences in the nursing and health care professions. Studies in this field are particularly interested in the experience of existential phenomena such as grief, pain, loss, depression, etc. and hermeneutic phenomenology provides an interpretive methodology with which to approach these ineffable experiences (Laverty, 2008; Standing, 2009).

Below, in order to situate the research process I undertook, I first examine how a methodology which has no set method could be considered rigorous (or not) by identifying and outlining five heuristics which authors suggest can be used to assess the quality of a study in this field: philosophical coherence, address of historical context, engagement in a hermeneutic circle, *aletheia* and fecundity, and resonance. Then, given these quality constraints, I discuss four key elements of a hermeneutic phenomenological *process*, highlighting *how* hermeneutic phenomenological authors have engaged in their research.

4.1.2 Rigor in Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Among the methodological concerns most prevalent in the hermeneutic phenomenological field is the notion that this methodology can be treated with an "anything goes" mentality in the research process (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson and Spence, 2007, p. 1397). The openness of the interpretive process does invite a variety of interpretive methods, but hermeneutic phenomenology is not a relativist methodology. The quality of the study is often considered through the notion of *rigor*.

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“Rigor...can refer either or both to methodological thoroughness and precision or criteria used to judge the trustworthiness of the results” (Armour, Riveaux & Bell, 2009, p. 102).

Trustworthiness, in the classical, post-positivist, empirical paradigm has been conceptualized by the terms “validity” (both internal and external) and “reliability” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), where adherence to methodological prescriptions and statistical analysis conventions provided an authentication of method, and therefore rigor. However, as has been articulated by a number of authors (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005; Koch, 1994;), these empirical standards do not transfer smoothly into the field of social science and research. For the broad qualitative research field and specifically a constructivist research paradigm, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest that instead, “[t]erms such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* replace the usual positivist criteria” (p.53). Rigor, as a subjective assessment of a research study within qualitative research, carries with it an implied sense of *soundness*—a sense in the reader that this study has earned a reading through its consideration of its methodological and philosophical antecedents and forestructures (Moules, 2002).

A review of the hermeneutic phenomenology literature, both historical and contemporary, reveals a number of heuristics that allow a reader to consider the level of rigor in this type of research study. Analysis of the study with these heuristics does not constitute a pass/fail assessment, but rather their usage guides the reader to consider the depth of investigation and appropriateness of the interpretation(s); they are not a diagnostic device, but rather guiding principles of a holistic examination.

4.1.2.1 *Philosophical coherence*

Throughout hermeneutic phenomenology literature there is a pervasive urgency for researchers, particularly novice researchers, to develop an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings

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of the research paradigm they hope to work within (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005). Although consideration is most often given to epistemological concerns within the broad field of qualitative research, within hermeneutic phenomenology, it is the ontology of the study and the researcher that establishes the philosophical context for the research question (Annells, 1996). Although some authors describe epistemology as the relationship between the knower and the known (e.g. Creswell, 2013), in my opinion this relationship is mediated by the researcher's understanding of their being-in-the-world (their ontological presuppositions). If, for example, the researcher believes, like Heidegger and Gadamer, that they are unable to separate themselves from their continuous being-in-the-world (ontological assumption), the *type* of knowledge and understanding they will be able to acquire (epistemological assumption) will be very different than if they, for example, ascribe to Husserl's beliefs that presuppositions and prejudices can be bracketed out of the interpretative process to allow for an objective understanding of the phenomenon.

A philosophical understanding of the research paradigm one operates within is crucial because it allows the researcher to ask questions and interpret phenomenon in ways that are coherent with the ontological context of that paradigm. Rigorous hermeneutic phenomenological studies are ones that situate the research question within a cogent description of both a philosophical understanding of the research paradigm and the presuppositions and prejudices that the researcher brings to the interpretive process (van Manen, 1990). Research studies constructed in this way allow the reader to trace a philosophical line through the research and interpretive process, and understand, from a philosophical perspective, the decisions the author has made in their interpretation and explication (Habermas, 1990).

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4.1.2.2 Address of historical context and temporality

A rigorous hermeneutic phenomenological study is paradoxically humble in its language because it recognizes that the interpretation it brings to the phenomenon experienced by the participants is situated in a distinct context defined by its historicity and temporality (Gadamer, 2004; Heidegger, 1953/2010;). Understanding achieved in this type of study is not constrained by this factor, but rather establishes its credibility through a recognition and articulation of its situatedness (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009).

The interpretation of a phenomenon (or text) cannot be explicated without situating the phenomenon within its temporal, cultural and traditional understandings. If a “truth” is to be uncovered, it can only be understood from a particular vantage point (i.e. Gadamer’s (2004) “horizon”), as “knowing” is a function of the previous experiences, ideas and interpretations of the “knower” (Seung, 1982). The meaning of a phenomenon, the interpretive process and the understanding articulated by both researcher and audience are all located within the particular place of the individuals, but are also a product of the myriad experiences and interpretations that created the context where interpretation *can* take place. Seidel & Jardine (2012) suggest that historical consciousness and recognition of the intergenerationality of meaning in experience is paramount in the interpretive process.

Rigor in hermeneutic phenomenology is, therefore, necessarily substantiated in a different way from that of other phenomenological research processes as “essences” cannot—and should not—be teased out in isolation from the traditions and cultures that have allowed the researcher to engage with the experience or text (Moules, 2002). Gadamer (2004) suggested that in fact when working out an interpretation of a text or phenomenon, the purpose of that interpretation is not to uncover the author or participant’s original meaning, but instead to

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develop a dialectical understanding that privileges the historicity of the interpreter, locating understanding in the Heideggerian conceptualization of “being-in”—a recognition of the interpreter’s situatedness in the interpretive process. Gadamer (2004, p. 277) states that “[understanding] is not a gift of God” but rather “...exists for me only in concrete, historical terms, i.e. it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.”

4.1.2.3 *The hermeneutic circle*

The eponymous circle in hermeneutics, conceived by Heidegger (1953/2010) and elaborated upon by subsequent hermeneutic phenomenologists (e.g. Gadamer, 2004; Porter & Robinson, 2011; Ricoeur, 1973), can be described as a dialectical method of understanding where the whole of the interpretation relies on an understanding of the parts, and an understanding of the parts relies on an understanding of the whole. It is a movement back and forth (simultaneously) between the micro of the phenomenon and the macro of its context, as in the reading and understanding of a book through its chapters, and the chapters through the larger context of the book (Blattner, 2006). Clear evidence of this movement from one context to the other and awareness of its necessity is crucial for establishing a sense of rigor in hermeneutic phenomenology research.

Coherence of interpretation through the hermeneutic circle, as congruence of ideas between micro and macro levels is considered, helps to establish whether or not the interpretations are sound—are *rigorous*. Heidegger (1953/2010, p. 148) believed that the hermeneutic circle was not something to be wary of, but rather it held “[a] positive possibility of the most primordial knowledge...” Ricoeur (1973) described the usage of the hermeneutic circle in interpretation as a means to *assess* interpretations, to “guess and validate” within the circle and

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to recognize that not “all interpretations are equal” (p. 330). Rigorous hermeneutic phenomenological studies explicate the interpretive process through articulating the interplay and “generative recursion” (Moules, 2002, p.15) between micro and macro understandings of the phenomenon.

4.1.2.4 *Aletheia and fecundity*

No matter how well the interpreter is able to enter and engage in the hermeneutic circle interpretive process, there remains an innate sense of need for some sort of “truth” in a hermeneutic phenomenological study—a sense that this study presents a reliable account and interpretation of a phenomenon. However, the question becomes: *What kind of truth can hermeneutic phenomenology present?* In hermeneutics, truth, according to Jardine (2006) is “*unhiddenness*,” what the ancient Greeks would refer to as *aletheia*: “to show what was previously concealed; making present that which was absent” (p. 282). Truth, then, is a “revealing,” but not in an objective sense where what is revealed existed “as is” before an interpretation was brought to bear. *Aletheia* is the “truth” that arises when a light is cast on a previously darkened phenomenon, where the act of *unconcealment* inexorably alters the constructed composition of that which was concealed.

Each interpretation, each *unconcealment*, opens the phenomenon up to further interpretation by recognizing that the newest interpretation is just one of many possible understandings of the phenomenon. The “fecundity” (Jardine, 1992, p.55) of interpretation is an essential heuristic in describing the rigor of a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Gadamer (2004) describes generativity as an essence of hermeneutic inquiry—an ability to proliferate further interpretations. Humbly acknowledging the contextual specificity (as described above) of a particular interpretation keeps “the game” (Gadamer, 2004, p.106) alive and opens the door for

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others to access and interpret the phenomenon, further enhancing the possible understandings of the “unconcealed.”

Aletheia as “truth” clearly relies heavily on an epistemological foundation of constructivism. Interpretation, as author of truth, cannot exist in a positivist or post-positivist paradigm and requires the reader to lightly set their feet between relativism and objectivism. Gadamer (2004) suggested that within hermeneutic understanding, one understanding is not *absolutely* “better” than another, but that within the historical context in which the reader exists, one might find more “appropriate” interpretations, but the appropriateness of the interpretation is always “contingent, preferential, referential, and changing” (p.11). The obvious question at this point becomes: If some interpretations are more appropriate than others, who then decides which ones are appropriate? The answer, like hermeneutics itself, is open to interpretation. In the next section, I present *one* answer to the question, building upon the heuristics described above, the concept of “resonance,” and how a community of inquiry mediates the “appropriateness” of interpretations.

4.1.2.5 Resonance

van Manen suggests that hermeneutic phenomenological studies should aim to “create a sense of resonance in the reader. Resonance means that the reader recognizes the plausibility of an experience even if he or she has never personally experienced this particular moment or this kind of event” (2014, p. 240). The concept of “resonance” in research studies, when taken in a standard definition of the term, belies the depth and type of understanding one is trying to describe when they say that something “resonates with” them. To “resonate” can mean to “evoke” something within the reader—images, emotions, memories, etc. The term itself is used typically with the preposition “with” or “in,” suggesting an ontological connection; a nod to a

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particular sense of “being” that the resonating study produces. Jardine (2006), for example, presents a vivid description of what resonating can *feel* like. In a research study where he interprets the emotions a new teacher felt when entering her classroom for the first time, Jardine suggests:

Those new teacher’s comments seem ‘surrounded’ by living *worlds* of relations, worlds full of images, faces, concepts, rituals, bloodlines, invocations, spooks and spirits. They are ‘familiar’. And those surroundings seem to already surround me since it seems that I am already living in a familiarity with that world. (p. 274)

Resonance is *aletheia*, it is an unconcealing of emotions within the reader, bringing a sense of familiarity to the reader, rediscovering a knownness while casting a new light on the known.

Assessing the rigor of a research study in isolation from its resonance with its audience is antithetical to the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology. To close the loop with a final stamp of approval on the discussion of whether or not a study is rigorous is to deny the very essence of hermeneutic practice. The need to identify a study as rigorous (or not) is an emotional echo from the era of dominant (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 for discussion) empirical research paradigms. There can be no objective checklist to assess hermeneutic phenomenological studies because the audience of the research brings their own checklist with them each time they read the text. Their understanding, like the interpretation itself, is situated in temporal, historical, cultural and traditional contexts that cannot be bracketed out from the reading and interpretive experience (Heidegger, 1953/2010). Therefore, just as a researcher must enter the hermeneutic circle in order to interpret the phenomenon, the readers themselves enter the hermeneutic circle and consider the study’s rigor, or *soundness* through a dialectical identification of *resonance* with the work (Moules, 2002). When research interpretations *resonate* with the reader, the level of rigor

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in the work becomes meaningful and simultaneously (and paradoxically) substantiates the study's resonance with the reader. The resonance the reader feels, then, is an *earned* resonance—resonance that is the result of mindful, considered and deep interpretation of the phenomenon. Earned resonance is achieved not through strict adherence to methods, but through an embodiment of the philosophical underpinnings of the research methodology, which the above heuristics describe.

Individual reader resonance, however, even when arising from a study that addresses the above heuristics, is inherently arbitrary and cannot alone qualify a study for acceptance into a canonical list of works on the subject. Just as the chapter of a book and its understanding cannot be separated from the book itself, the earned resonance through rigor in an individual cannot be separated from the larger interpretive community within which the interpretation exists (Morgan, 2007). This recognition by the interpretive community plays out in article publication and chapter selection for “readers” and anthologies, reminding those within the field of hermeneutic phenomenology that, as Gadamer (2004) suggested, interpretations are not absolutely better than others, but some may be more appropriate for the context within which they exist.

It is important to reiterate, however, that an assessment of rigor or a resonance is, like all interpretation, situated contextually and resonance is temporal in nature—there is no guarantee that an interpretation that is canonical will continue to be so in the future. An interpretive community, like an individual, must be humble in their declarations, both positive and negative, as no understanding is final and what resonates today may seem mundane tomorrow, in light of new understanding.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is not a methodology easily grasped, due to its lack of prescribed methods. Creswell (2013) suggests that it is not a methodology he would encourage

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novice researchers to consider. He explicitly states what the works of Heidegger, Gadamer and Jardine imply: hermeneutic phenomenology finds its mooring in ontological, not epistemological considerations, which requires the researcher to first ask themselves difficult, existential questions and arm themselves with philosophic understandings of existence. Regardless of experience, however, any researcher interested in conducting and writing a rigorous study in the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology should write with the above heuristic considerations in mind, in the hopes that the interpretation will resonate with the reader or a community of inquiry. In doing so, the study becomes *aletheia* for all, opens up new understanding and invites new interpretations, keeping the hermeneutic circle open and “the game” alive (Gadamer, 2004, p. 106).

4.1.3 Process of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

To explain *how* to engage in the process of a hermeneutic phenomenological study is to take on a task similar to explaining to a young person how one might fall in love. Yes, there are certainly some general guidelines to the act, elements which typically constitute the experience—there is another human, just as there is a research question; there are new and exciting feelings, just as there are thoughts and questions—but somehow the processes do not lend themselves to explication, just description. There can be no “how-to” because the “how” is different in every instance. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodology of “thinking” (Smythe, 2008) and it is impossible to teach someone else “how” to *think*, rather it is only possible to describe how you *thought*. In both cases—hermeneutic phenomenology and love—however, the one key phrase that helps another come to understand is one of patience and resonance: “You’ll know it when you feel it”—when it resonates.

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There is a considerable amount of literature describing hermeneutic phenomenology and a greater quantity of studies that employ the methodology. The processes these studies describe are similar in nature but far from universal. In my broad understanding of the field, there are four key elements which seem to constitute the *method* of hermeneutic phenomenology. I use *method* with the knowledge that there is no prescriptive process in this field, but it would be naive to not suggest that hermeneutic phenomenological studies share some key similarities in their processes. The four elements are: acknowledgment of subjectivities and prejudices (in the Gadamerian sense); rich description of lived experience; an imaginative interpretive process; and a “vocative” (van Manen, 2014, p. 240) presentation of understandings, inviting further interpretation.

4.1.3.1 Acknowledgement of subjectivities

In Husserlian phenomenology, the essence of a phenomenon could only be understood when the researcher was able to “bracket” out their prior understandings so that they could turn to “the thing in itself.” Husserl (1931/2012), seeking a formal science of understanding, argued that it was the preconceived understandings which distanced the researcher from attending to the phenomenon in an almost objective manner. He developed a methodology in which an understanding of a phenomenon could be produced free from subjective interpretations. Heidegger, as mentioned above, suggested that interpretation was only possible because the researcher was “already-with” the phenomenon and Husserl’s attempts to bracket out prior understanding was ontologically impossible; it is the researcher’s very *being* that allows them to understand the phenomenon, and that being is constituted by the entirety of the researcher’s lived experience, including their experience with that phenomenon.

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Gadamer (2004), building upon Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology, suggested that it is the "fore-structures" (p. 268) of understanding that allows the researcher to attend to the phenomenon. Included in these fore-structures are "prejudices," a term Gadamer attempts to re-appropriate from its solely negative connotation in everyday use to its historical use, where pre-understandings, prejudices, were neither negative or positive, but rather value neutral. Gadamer suggests that hermeneutical work, particularly hermeneutic phenomenology, must first acknowledge the interpreter's prejudices so that they may be examined in an effort to bring them to a level of consciousness where their influence on the interpretation is not a pernicious one. In this way can the researcher become open to new understandings, not free from pre-understandings, but aware of their influences. van Manen (2014), harking back to Husserl's original language but with a Gadamerian sense of the notion of pre-understandings, calls this process the "epoche" and describes it as a key element of any phenomenological study.

Any study undertaken through this methodology must first begin with an acknowledgment of one's subjectivity and also excitement for *discovery*, as opposed to *proving*. The purpose of a hermeneutic phenomenological study is not one of verification, but interpretation. The researcher does not develop a hypothesis about what an experience with the phenomenon may be like and then seeks out evidence to support their belief. A hermeneutic phenomenological study requires a humble epistemological position, where the truth of an experience remains open to interpretation.

4.1.3.2 *Imaginative interpretive process*

All qualitative research involves interpretation. Typically, interpretation is undertaken through codification of words and notions and then codes are extrapolated through thematic analysis. The uniqueness of hermeneutic phenomenological research is that it rejects a mechanical process of

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coding and counting and instead addresses the *meaning* of the phenomenon in question. van Manen (1990) states:

Making something of a text or a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of “seeing” meaning. (p. 79)

“Seeing” meaning is the act of *aletheia*, an unconcealing of that which was never there prior to the act of interpretation. This act of interpretation, of “seeing,” is only possible through imagination.

Imagination, in my mind, is the foundational tool of hermeneutic phenomenology. Without an ability or eagerness to imagine what was, is and could be, the interpretive process is impossible. Lavery (2003, p. 30) suggests that imagination is a “key process” in interpretation and it is through the imagination that empathic pathways are built so that understanding of an unexperienced phenomena can be achieved (Koch, 1999). Smith (1991), a prominent hermeneutic phenomenologist, outlined characteristics of a “hermeneutic imagination” and stated that among all characteristics of this form of inquiry is “inherent creativity” in the interpretive process. Smith suggests that hermeneutics is about “creating meaning, not simply reporting it” (p. 201). This act of creation is made possible by imagination in the interpretive process.

Gadamer suggests understanding exists in a “fusion of horizons” (2004), where the interpreter and the “text” (e.g. the phenomenon, the participants’ responses, etc.) “see” not only what is before them at the moment, but also what is possible from their ontological and epistemological positions. The “fusion” occurs in the act of interpretation; where historical and present understandings come together to create a horizon of the future, where new possibilities of

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understanding and interpretation exist. This process is itself an act of *becoming* and exists within the shared imaginations of the interpreter and the text. New meaning is imagined as historical and present understandings converge in the imagination. Hermeneutic phenomenological studies require this process of fusion so as to “create,” not “report” meaning (Smith, 1991).

4.1.3.3 Rich description of lived experience

Phenomenology, as a broad research tradition, and at its core, is about making sense of stories—the stories participants tell the researcher in interview responses and the stories they tell themselves as they weave an ongoing narrative, making sense of their interactions with the world. These stories, and their interpretations, create a bridge with which the researcher can address a particular phenomenon and begin to craft an understanding of what it could mean to experience that phenomenon; what that phenomenon *means* to the experiencer (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomena that are often most interesting to researchers are the ones that are also the most elusive. They are the existential experiences that simultaneously feel meaningful, but are also difficult to describe: grief, joy, loss, satisfaction; emotions and experiences whose meanings transcend their descriptions. Phenomenologists’ work is to approximate the meanings of these experiences with descriptions, knowing that no description can equate to the experience itself. To attempt an approximation requires what is often referred to as *thick* or *rich* description (Armour, Rivaux & Bell, 2009; Benner, 1994). These descriptions are created and presented in a hermeneutic circle, tacking back and forth between the participants’ stories and the researcher’s interpretations of those stories. Lengthy, direct quotes from the participants provide a first-hand account of the phenomenon while at the same time adding both substance and methodological rigor, creating a trail for the reader to follow as the author presents his understanding. Most

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importantly, these rich quotes begin to give voice to ineffable experiences. van Manen (1990), in describing his understanding of the process of hermeneutic phenomenological writing, focuses on the use of anecdotes as a method to access and grasp the *meaning* of an experience. He suggests anecdotes are a “methodological device in human science [used] to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (p. 116). It is the stories of the participants, the quotes and responses which weave together the narrative of a life lived. The words they choose and the *ways* in which the participants respond to questions provides swaths of color to the interpretation, bringing new meanings into relief while a sense of the phenomenon begins to emerge. My analysis of their responses is important, but it is the participant’s voice in the study which paints the existential image for the audience, calling out emotions and memories from which they draw their own understanding.

4.1.3.4 Vocative presentation of understandings

The most difficult aspect of hermeneutic phenomenological research, however, is not the interpretive process itself, but rather the act of describing the understandings born in the interpretation (van Manen, 2014). In this methodology, the author’s aim is to “express the noncognitive, ineffable and pathic aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomenon” (van Manen, 2014, p. 240). The challenge lies then in the nature of that which is being described. The author’s responsibility to the audience is not just to provide an account of their interpretation, but rather to use their language and other aesthetic representations to create an existential and emotional space for the audience to encounter their own understanding of the phenomenon.

Interpretation is an aesthetic act of creation in the imagination, but that act cannot be *reported* in technical language, it can only be experienced through “vocative” language (p. 241). This language is “poetic” in that it is the experience of reading the words that is the “result” of a

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study, not the description of the experience itself. David Jardine provides numerous examples of this style of writing, addressing himself to a variety of topics through poetic discourse, including topics such as environmental education (Jardine, 1996), suffering (Jardine, McCaffery, and Gilham, 2014) and mathematics (Jardine, 1990a). He also addresses the field of hermeneutics specifically in a number of works (e.g. Jardine, 1990b; Jardine, 1992; Misgeld & Jardine, 1989). In each of his writings, Jardine invites his audience into existential understandings through poetic prose. He interprets interpretations and plays with words, their etymologies and the constructed meanings they have for individuals, with particular concern for the temporal understandings of the words. He evokes emotions and memories, creating spaces for new interpretations while providing his own rigorously developed notions of an experience. For myself, Jardine's works demonstrate the breadth and depth of poetic language possible for scholarly writing, a style of writing I have felt called towards throughout my life.

However, not all evocative representations of interpretations are language-based. Heidegger (1953/2010, p. 226) highlights other aesthetic modes of interpretation and creation when he alludes to the "poetic saying of images" in the interpretive process. A work of art works in a dialogic manner between the artist and the audience, where the artist supplies first an interpretation of some phenomenon and the audience then interprets the work, with each new individual constructing their own meaning. A work of art is also generative in that meaning is not only *subjective*, but also *intersubjective* as meaning and understanding shift as individuals describe their interpretations, further influencing others' understandings. Arts-based research studies provide aesthetic entry points into otherwise ineffable, existential interpretations of existence (Leavy, 2009). Art, employed in the service of a hermeneutic phenomenological study, is an invitation to new interpretation:

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events find their meaning in aesthetic encounters where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed in every unique situation. In this sense, a work of art truly exists only in the dialogic encounter. If locked in a darkened vault, a painting is simply an aggregate of materials. Aesthetics, like education, is the process of becoming and recreating in each new context. (Slattery, Krasny & O'Malley, 2007, p. 550)

What is perhaps most interesting is that although a number of scholars highlight the value of visual-aesthetic representation in hermeneutic phenomenology, locating studies which employ this method of interpretation and presentation was quite difficult. van Manen (2014), not coincidentally, provides one of few examples where art complements literary description. He offers a visual representation of a prominent theme of his book as its cover art, planting an image in the reader's mind prior to engaging in his discussion. In my own interpretations, described in depth below, I found the notion of using images alongside the text inescapable, as it is the emotional response to these images where I found a resonating sense of the phenomenon of *becoming*.

4.1.3.5 *What came with me, what I left behind*

The interpretations of my research question—How do teacher candidates understand their own existential *becoming* as they move through their final practicum experience and into becoming a teacher?—took on many forms throughout the research process and I acknowledge here that those interpretations will continue to change. I “chose” my method, outlined below, because I could choose no other. I felt called to employ a poetic micro-narrative writing style, but also know I was pulled to supply *something* tangible, or substantial in the way of “presentation,” because regardless of my own epistemological position, I believed a formal presentation of findings was what made for a thesis.

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When considering *how* I would write my interpretations, I wanted to write like David Jardine. I wanted to “sit with” the data and “play” with words. I wanted to be patient with my interpretations and measured in my word choice, but that has never been who I am. However, it is still Jardine to whom I turn for a sense of comfort. In one of his works, *The Descartes Lecture* (2012), Jardine quotes Kunzang Pelden when making his case for a sense of “buoyancy” and “joy” (p. 1) in an interpretive process, and I share the same quote now because my interpretive process is that of the over-heating elephant: I threw myself into interpretation and knew only one way to emerge—I describe that way below.

We ought to be like elephants in the noontime sun in summer, when they are tormented by heat and thirst and catch sight of a cool lake. They throw themselves into the water with the greatest pleasure and without a moment's hesitation. In just the same way, for the sake of ourselves and others, we should give ourselves joyfully to the practice. (Pelden, 2007, p. 255)

4.2 My Method

4.2.1 Overview

I began to develop my research project around Heidegger's (1953/2010) notion of authenticity, in particular, its three constituent components of concern, care and comportment. I was curious how teacher candidates understood and interpreted these terms in their own lives and professional practice and whether or not I could make sense of their existential *becoming* through the concept of *authenticity*.

As I began to engage in the interview process with my four teacher candidate participants, I attempted to first discuss their understanding of the term “authentic” as it related to their own teaching practice and the field of education in general. I had hoped to work with the participants to build an ontological understanding of the term that would incorporate concern, care and comportment. What ensued was that each participant, in one way or another understood the notion of authenticity in teaching as the teacher “being herself” or “being real.” Although I

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did not want the participants to place a final stamp of approval (or disapproval) on their teaching as “real” or “fake,” the notion of authenticity did provide a substantial entry point for the participants to consider their own behaviors and emotions in their teaching. When they thought about their teaching performances in terms of it being a “real” representation of their personalities, they began to develop a certain level of professional self-understanding and engaged in the process of *becoming*. However, I felt that the concept of “authenticity” was too loaded with previously-constructed understandings of the term and the word itself was a distraction from my original intention of considering the process of *becoming*. I therefore abandoned my direct focus on authenticity and instead chose to use Kelchtermans’s *professional self-understanding* framework as the organizing concept with which I would attend to the participants’ *becoming*.

Throughout the research process, however, I remained loyal to the spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology and allowed the interpretive process to guide my steps and decisions. I outline that process below.

4.2.2 Recruitment and Participants

In the interest of convenience, consistency and appropriateness of participants it was decided between my supervisor and me that I would recruit participants for this study from our university’s Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program and, more specifically, the Urban Education Cohort (UEC) of students. Students in this program had previously demonstrated an eagerness to go above and beyond the expectations of the typical B.Ed. program by engaging in the more time-intensive UEC program and we believed this eagerness and enthusiasm for educational experiences would translate into an acceptable number of participants.

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All students enrolled in this university's teaching preparatory program complete an eight-month degree consisting of 60 credits of classes and two practicum placements, one five-week and the second six-week. Students graduate upon the successful completion of both course work and practicum placements and are then eligible to apply for admission to the Ontario College of Teachers, the body responsible for granting teacher certification. The UEC, however, is a specially designed program of courses and professional development activities aimed at preparing teacher candidates for working in schools designated as Urban Priority schools. Identified by the provincial Ministry of Education of Ontario, these schools face challenges such as "poverty, criminal and gang activity, and a lack of community resources" and receive extra funding to "develop programs in partnership with their community" to combat these challenges and support their students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1). In order to participate in the UEC, students had to submit an application after they had been accepted into the general program and include both their motivation for working with urban populations and also a description of the experiences they had had which they believed would make them successful in such work. If accepted, both of the student's practicums would take place in the same school and they would be required to be at the school one day a week, beginning in the first month of their degree and continuing until the conclusion of the program. Students would be observing, volunteering and developing relationships with students and staff until they began their official practicum experiences. All students would follow a similar course schedule and therefore share many of the same classes³; courses were specifically designed for the urban schooling context and integrated so time would be made available for travel to practicum schools. Students would

³At the time of this research project, the UEC was only available to Intermediate/ Secondary teacher candidates but has since expanded into all grade levels.

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engage in Community Service Learning projects as a requirement for the UEC program. These projects typically involved 50 hours of volunteer work in the school community during the students' 8-month placement. The coursework and professional development for this program relied heavily on reflective practices and it was therefore assumed that students enrolled in the UEC would be prepared to engage in deeply reflective conversations for this project.

Upon receiving ethical approval for this study from the university's ethics board, I sent an email to all UEC students inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix 2 for recruitment note). I explained that the research process would consist of five one-on-one interviews, a focus group and professional journal analysis. The purpose of selecting these data collection strategies was to allow time for me to build relationships with each participant in a one-on-one setting, addressing (initially) different components of authenticity, but eventually considered the teacher candidates' *professional self-understanding* in each interview. The focus group allowed me to gain a better sense of the importance of some of the emergent themes in my data analysis and gauge the importance of those themes to the participants as they spoke about their experiences, while also providing an opportunity to socially construct meaning and understanding through a collaborative approach. The journal analysis strategy was designed as a supplementary source of data from which I could gain an understanding of the path the participants had already walked during their B.Ed. These journals were written prior to their participation in this study and therefore provided an uninfluenced account of their thinking and professional self-understanding early in their teacher education program.

I explained in my recruitment email that I would be seeking four participants and if more than that number were interested, I would select the participants based on a first-come, first-served protocol. I believed four participants would be manageable given the research timeline I

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hoped to work with and, imagining the focus group at the conclusion of the data collection process, I believed that more than four participants would create a group too large for the personal and emotional conversations I wanted to have.

Whereas my supervisor was director of the UEC, I assured the students that their identities and responses would not be shared with my supervisor until their final grades had been submitted. I received responses from five willing participants and selected the first four participants who responded. The four participants were all in their second semester of an Intermediate/Secondary Bachelor of Education program, enrolled in the UEC and were all completing their practicums in the same secondary school. When the research process was set to begin, they had all met their second placement associate teacher (AT) but had not yet begun their second official practicum.

Names of participants were kept confidential by me, but during their private conversations, the participants were able to determine who else was involved in the study. Only one participant (Nicole) did not know the name of any other teacher candidate in the study up until the time of the focus group.

4.2.3 Data collection

The initial phase of data collection consisted of four one-on-one interviews with each participant, conducted between February 18, 2014 and March 17, 2014. Initially this research project was proposed with the concept of existential *authenticity* at its core. The first interview was designed as a relationship-building conversation with the participant, the middle three interviews would examine a component of Heidegger's notion of authenticity—concern, care and comportment—and the concluding interview was meant to be a wrap-up and opportunity for me to ask clarification questions. However, as I engaged in each interview, I became more disenchanted

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with the notion of authenticity as the lens of analysis and instead found myself considering the broader notions of Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding*. I continued with the initial interview guide, but follow-up questions during the interviews began to focus on elucidating the participants' understandings of their *self-image, self-esteem, task perception, motivation* and *future perspective*.

Interviews were semi-structured with different clarification and follow-up questions for each participant, but each participant received the same initial questions. At the beginning of each session, time was allotted to consider any further thoughts the participants had on the previous interview session. Interviews took place in university study rooms and were scheduled at the participant's convenience, but typically occurred once per week for four weeks.

I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews. Interviews ranged in length, but typically lasted approximately 40 minutes; transcriptions were approximately thirteen pages single-spaced. Transcripts were securely emailed to each participant prior to the next interview if requested so that they might both have an opportunity to comment on their responses and also continue their reflection prior to the next interview if they so chose; participants would occasionally make notes on these transcripts and return them via email. Upon completion of the initial interview phase, each participant submitted to me a collection of their professional reflections/journals for analysis.

As the participants neared the end of their second practicum, we scheduled a time for a focus group and met for the first and only time as a collective, on-site at the participants' placement school. The focus group considered a number of the questions from previous interviews, but primarily attended to what changes the participants' had noticed in their own practice or self-understanding during their second practicum. The focus group took place on

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April 22, 2014, was one-hour in length, was audio recorded and transcribed. The focus group transcript was 26 pages and was made available to each participant. I then scheduled concluding interviews with each participant where I returned their professional reflections/journals and discussed both their self-understanding as well as the reflective process they had engaged in. These interviews were conducted between May 2 and May 9, 2014 in either university study rooms or coffee shops in Ottawa, ON.

Although it was not part of the initial research design, I received unsolicited emails from three of the four participants both during and after the official data collection period. These emails all requested digital copies of the micro-narrative I had written for that individual as part of the interpretive process, as well as feedback on the research process and comments on the participant's current professional path. Consent was given to include the data from their comments.

4.2.4 Data analysis

Data analysis informally commenced during the first interview. As the participants responded to my questions, I interpreted those responses and asked follow-up questions, leading the conversation in directions that I had not anticipated, shaping the nature of both my and the participants' understandings. I transcribed the interviews prior to each participant's follow-up email and as I listened and typed, I inserted anecdotal comments into the transcription text, commenting on follow-up questions I wanted to ask in the next session and identifying similarities and differences among the participants' responses. I also worked with a notebook at my side with sections quartered off for each participant as well as separate sections for both what I called "Big Picture Analysis" and my own journal entries of how I was experiencing the process. I updated each section daily and frequently referenced these running records throughout

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the writing of this document. I also posted chart paper around my home where I identified key images that came to mind as I read each transcript; these images informed the visuals created for each participant (see below).

After completing the initial round of four interviews, the participants began their second practicum placement and I used this time to read their professional journals and draw out competing and supporting evidence of the interview data. I identified ideas that seemed to have evolved during the participant's B.Ed. experience and developed a list of follow-up questions for each participant, which I asked during the fifth and final interview.

The formal data analysis process was comprised of two different, yet simultaneously-enacted modes of interpretation—the first an aesthetic expression of my existential understandings of the participants' *becoming*, the second an explicit categorization of responses through the lens of Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding*. In the spirit of a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, the first stage was not one of codifying responses or counting word usage, but rather one of "sitting with" the participants, their responses and my interpretations, reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening to the audio recordings and hermeneutically tacking back and forth between individual statements and existential interpretations of the participant's existence. I came to my own understanding of *who* these teacher candidates *were* as teachers and attempted to provide a sense of that understanding through two different media. First, I gathered my understandings of each participant, my sense of the notion of existential *becoming* and then juxtaposed my interpretations against one another, creating an image in my mind of how I envisioned these teacher candidates and the paths they appeared to be walking in their *becoming*. I sketched out images of my understanding of each participant's *becoming* in draft form with key notions described in the margins. I pulled

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keywords from the posters in my home to inform these images, ensuring that I honored the initial interpretations I had made while developing a more complete sense of the participants' *becoming*. These images manifested my sense of *aletheia*, the “unconcealedness” of interpretation and understanding, whereby the images evoked emotions suggestive of the existential *becoming* that could not be explicated through technical writing.

While re-reading the interview transcripts, I began to categorize the participants' responses by the five components of Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding* framework. I read each transcript multiple times, searching for phrases or comments that informed one of five components—*self-image*, *self-esteem*, *task perception*, *motivation* and *future perspective*; I wrote quotes and references in each category as well as my own commentary on the quotes. I then synthesized those notes and drew together a number of themes for each candidate in each component. I wrote up those themes, organized by participant and then component. As I wrote, I made more notes in my “Big Picture Analysis” notebook, comparing and contrasting the participants. I then re-read my new writing alongside the “Big Picture Analysis” and drew out existential themes, which emerged from my analysis.

Still considering the aesthetic expressions while conducting my Kelchtermans's analysis, I posted my sketches around my home and considered what the story was behind each image. I asked myself, “How would I describe what I am seeing here?” Again, hermeneutically, I tacked back and forth between the images, the *professional self-understanding* and the stories of these participants I was telling myself. When I believed the story had crystallized enough to be told, I wrote a poetic micro-narrative, describing the images in my mind, echoing van Manen's “vocative” mandate. I then presented these narratives to each participant during our fifth and final interview, having them read it at the beginning of the conversation and then provide their

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reactions. For the most part, the participants were complimentary of the micro-narratives and believed the stories captured, in a poetic manner, their sense of themselves in their *becoming*. I did not alter the narratives based on their responses, but instead updated the sketches from any comments or input a participant made. I then asked a local amateur artist to update and stylize the sketches in order to provide a more visually-pleasing version of the images. The participants received final versions of the images and narratives in May, 2014. I continued to write this text, updating my analysis as I returned to the interview transcripts, the follow-up emails I received from the participants, the images and the micro-narratives.

Recounting the data analysis process reminds me of Vonnegut's description of his main character, Billy Pilgrim, in the novel *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969): I feel as though I became "unstuck in time" (p. 29) during this process. The writings of the micro-narratives felt like both catatonic and hyper-aware states, available to me not by choice, but what felt like necessity. The images I sketched were aesthetic expressions that I could not describe, only draw. Each interpretation and presentation of understanding felt simultaneous and asynchronous at the same time. I felt consumed by the hermeneutic circle and only the aesthetic representations of the participants' *becoming* satisfied me. The interpretive process evoked a need in me and that need could only be satiated by aesthetic representation.

I reflect now on the process I engaged in and question whether or not I could replicate it, or whether I would want to. The Andrew who engaged in that interpretation is not the Andrew that types this sentence, and I am profoundly saddened and pleased by that knowledge. I am grateful for the lessons I have learned, but also recognize that my naiveté in the process provided me with an energy that cannot be intentionally mustered, only exuberantly channeled; I cannot unexperience that which I have experienced, and those experiences have changed me. Indeed, I

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would encourage any reader of this study to read it more than once—particularly Chapter 5, where the stories of the participants are presented. The micro-narrative will impact the way in which the reader interprets the *professional self-understanding* discussion and image, and, once read and viewed, these two components will impact how one reads the micro-narrative; the circle turns and turns.

In a hermeneutic phenomenological study, there is no final *end* to data analysis, but rather a sensation in the author that a story is ready to be told. My analysis has not ceased, even after concluding my presentation of findings. Indeed, my interpretations have asked me to look inward to the source of those interpretations, bringing new understandings and implications into relief. Now, however, I believe the presentation of findings and my interpretations are ready to be shared.

Chapter 5: Paths Walked and Stories Told

The interpretive process inherent in a hermeneutic phenomenological study must be fecund for further interpretation. The challenge in presenting any interpretation within this methodology is that “findings” can seem to provide finality to the interpretation where, indeed, any other individual reading, for example, identical transcripts, may interpret the words on the page in a vastly different manner; where I see conceit, others may see confidence. Where I see self-doubt, others may see humility. This is one individual, with one self-constructed history, applying the lessons I have learned to the experiences of others so that I may cast a pebble into the sea of *professional self-understanding*; others may determine what the ripples mean or choose to cast their own stones. The findings presented below are ready for their own interpretation and the story of my own path of *becoming* may be laid before the reader without my conscious intent. As I attempt to tell the stories of these teacher candidates, I shed light on the stories I tell myself about my own experiences, and, in particular, my values.

I am concerned with the phenomenon of *becoming* a teacher and I believe that phenomenon could and should be examined from an existential perspective. For the sake of clarity of presentation and understanding, I felt it necessary to bind that examination within a self-understanding framework. The findings I present below are organized by the elements of Kelchtermans’s (2009) *professional self-understanding* framework—*self-image, self-esteem, task perception, motivation* and *future perspective*—but I encourage the reader not to focus directly on these findings and their structure as the *essence of becoming a teacher* cannot be neatly organized without losing that which makes the experience of *becoming* an existential process. There is something ethereal which cannot be explained inside one-inch margins. As described above in my discussion of methodology, the findings presented below are three-fold: I open each

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participant's section with a poetic micro-narrative; an attempt at capturing the elusiveness of my existential understanding through poetic language. I then discuss my interpretation of the participant's process of *becoming a teacher* through Kelchtermans's framework, first providing an overview of the individual's path up to this point. I then conclude with a visual of the individual participant and the path of *becoming* that I imagined them walking. It is in the visual and the micro-narrative where I believe the essence of my understanding of the participants' *becoming* a teacher is captured. And it is through these mediums where Gadamer's "game" (2004, p. 106) of interpretation stays alive; the reader is invited into the existential world of the participant through the visual and the visceral. Kelchtermans's framework helps to tell the story and make sense of who the participant *is*, but a deep understanding of the participant's path of *becoming* needs more than description and quotations. To understand their *becoming* requires imagination, attunement and an existential understanding shared among participant, author and reader.

5.1 Robert

24 Hours

The beep reminds him to look down; his watch flashes double zeroes and he takes a deep breath before tapping the button on the watch's edge—another twenty-four hours gone, another twenty-four in front of him. Beside the watch, a bracelet; a gift, a reminder. The bracelet moves from wrist to wrist with each mistake, each misstep.

He's lost track of the hours that have melted away during his life. Some better than others, some productive, some wasted, some necessary evils. All of them have brought him here, to this point on this path. He's not sure of where it all ends, he just knows that this is the path he needs to be on.

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The beeping stopped, he turns. In the distance, he sees where different twenty-four hours have been spent. It was these hours that brought him here and he is thankful. Those hours are gone now, ghosts. Some of those ghosts could haunt him, but he does not mourn their loss—he wakes them. He invites them to join him in his next twenty-four. Here they come now, materializing from the fog that has gathered in his past:

Here, the hill he walked up each morning and down each night. Its ridges littered with its own specters: power and ego, greatness and folly. Though he remembers his climb each day, the shoes that carried him no longer fit, indeed, felt mis-sized early on. The passion that guided his ascent re-harnessed; for others, now.

There, the darkness that found him in his youth. Scattered, defeated days spent with a haunted mirror. It was the hands of his teachers and parents he would grasp to pull himself out, the darkness travelling with him now, not blinding, but helping. “Here is my darkness,” he would say to his students. “Introduce yours to mine, for mine has been defeated and so will be yours.”

There, an elastic band snapping on a young woman’s arm. She is on her own path and though he calls to her to join him, he knows, quietly, that she chooses her own steps. He extends his hand to that ghost, not for her to grasp at this moment, but as a reminder that it will always be offered should she choose to take it. Beside her, shades of her peers he neglected, he knows.

Now, ghosts who walk in the sunshine: lessons that extended through sleep; students who spoke passion; actors, improvisers them all, finding their own place at their school through his help. Wins, every last one of them.

He gathers the ghosts and looks forward now. Twenty-four hours in front of him—a lifetime of twenty-four hour days. He imagines the horizon has shape, has waypoints he will

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reach. He will be called by different names at each of those points: teacher, principal, father, perhaps; a good man, he hopes. Between here and there, countless lives he'll bump up against, countless ghosts he will create and call to him. Some, a product of missteps on his path, will be marked by the bracelet, shifting from left to right, then back: each mistake, each shift, a ghost. Some, a product of purpose, of caring, will be marked with a contented sigh just before the watch beeps: each win, each sigh, a ghost.

The watch, its twenty-four hours, and the bracelet, its impermanence, are the guideposts of his path. The bracelet feels settled at this moment, but he reminds it not to get comfortable beside the watch. It will have to say its temporary goodbye again, sooner than later, he knows. Beside the bracelet, the watch; a pace-setter, a reminder. Twenty-four hours is not a defined amount of time—it is an opportunity. He taps the button on the watch's edge—24:00...23:59....23:58. He looks ahead, not needing to look back, knowing what steps took him to this place and in which direction he is headed. 23:57. No more time to waste.

Robert was the lone male to volunteer for this study. He was in his late twenties during the time of this study, had already completed a Masters of Arts in History and was enrolled in the B.Ed. Secondary Social Studies/English program. Prior to deciding to become a teacher, Robert had worked as an employee of a political party and had spent a number of years working on Parliament Hill. While in his B.Ed., Robert served in an elected position on the Bachelor of Education program's student council and took on a number of leadership roles in the school community. A self-described "joiner," it was clear early on that Robert was not shy of work or commitment.

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At first glance, one would assume that Robert had always been a “joiner,” but digging under the surface I learned that during his years as a high school student, Robert experienced what he described as “mental illness.” His Grade 11 year was marred by apathy, failing grades and overall dissatisfaction with his life. He describes that period as “dark” and credits two teachers, one Social Studies, one English, for bringing him out of that darkness with a combination of encouragement and tough love. Re-engaged in academics after a long summer of self-doubt and soul searching, Robert found himself back on track for university and completed an undergraduate degree in Political Science and History.

Robert is married with no children and his commitment to his wife played a major role in how Robert envisioned his teaching career. She, in a job with no current mobility, would have to stay in her position while Robert looked both locally and outside of his current area for employment. You could hear the sadness in Robert’s voice when he acknowledged that the early stages of his teaching career might find him living away from his wife.

During the interview and research process, Robert approached the topics of conversation with an interesting combination of casual engagement and passionate concern. He repeatedly spoke of the fact that he became a teacher because he wanted to do something meaningful with his “24 hours.” He wanted to have a positive impact on young people’s lives while at the same time hoping his work would have a positive impact on himself. He wanted to be a “good” person and hoped being a teacher would help him become one. There was always an intensity during those conversations, but at other times, when asked for his opinion on individuals, programs or schools, he would lean back in his chair and the passion would melt away. He would endlessly shrug while providing responses, drawing out his thoughts with extended “welllllll” and “I don’t know,” as if he was a veteran of too many conversations where passion was frowned upon and

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he was just “throwing this out there.” But at other times, his care for his students and the profession of teaching in general was unmistakable. One wonders what impact a life in politics at an early age might have, or even if the B.Ed. program encouraged cautious engagement with one’s passions.

Robert’s experience in the Bachelor of Education program was impacted largely by the cohort of students he was with in the Urban Education Cohort, the Urban Priority High School and its students with whom he worked and, like many B.Ed. students, the different approaches to teaching his two Associate Teachers brought to the classroom. Robert used these people and contexts to find language to describe his professional self-understanding and one can see their influence in the ways in which Robert defines the role of a teacher, the school and the education program designed to facilitate his participation in these contexts. His path in becoming a teacher was shaped by his understandings and the ways in which he chose to interpret his experiences. His “darkness” in high school has followed him, nipping at his heels and reminding him that he is not done *becoming* a “good” person. His peers and mentors provide definition to what he wants and does not want to become, and his students give meaning and purpose to his actions, particularly those students who experience darkness themselves. He walks a path, 24 hours a day, resetting his watch at the close and continues to walk forward.

5.1.1 Self-image

Robert was tentative in describing himself as both a person and teacher, obsequious in discussing the positive aspects of character while coloring his faults with a Greeneian “not-yetness.” Some of the banal descriptors came more easily: “I’d like to think I’m the ‘fun’ teacher,” “funny,” “optimistic.” Other times, he could only describe himself through negative, sometimes paradoxical language: “not introverted” or “too fair”; “probably patient, for the most part. Maybe

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a little too patient? Maybe a little too forgiving? [laughs].” The language Robert uses is fecund for interpretation. What does “too fair” mean? Why not use the word “extroverted” instead of the clumsier “not introverted”? What does it mean to be the “fun” teacher? I consider these questions only after I explore how Robert may have generated these notions.

Descriptions of his self-image arise particularly when Robert responds to questions about his peers and Associate Teachers. The ways in which Robert describes these individuals (albeit largely through grouped, me/us vs. them rhetoric) sheds light on how he sees himself. In describing a number of his peers in the Bachelor of Education program, he casts aspersions on them suggesting many of them are lazy, duplicitous, or becoming teachers for the “wrong” reasons. He describes himself as someone who can’t simply write the prescribed six-page paper when he has ten-pages of thoughts and finds it frustrating when his colleagues question his motives. He cares deeply about the grades he receives and is annoyed when other students receive good grades despite putting in less work. His self-image then, is one of contrast between what he believes makes for a “good” student and teacher and what many others in his program seem to do.

Robert sees himself as a strong teacher with significant amounts of experience both prior to the program and through his involvement in extra-curricula during his Bachelor of Education, but is consumed by worry that a lesser-experienced candidate who may perform well in an interview will be awarded a job over him:

All these same people are going into the job market, and, you know, that person could be fantastic in an interview and you’re going in with all... knowing that you’ve put in completely different levels of energy not only in teacher’s college, but all volunteering

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and learning how a school works and extra-curriculars and the community service aspect.

It's kinda... I guess I'm a little frustrated....

Robert's Associate Teachers also provided a mirror with which he could view himself and his teaching. The two experiences he had were, in his mind, stark contrasts. His initial Associate Teacher would "...talk to the front because that's where the keener students would sit and the ones in the back—"I don't care, they'll figure it out. They'll sink or swim" and I couldn't do that." Robert realized in the "second week of the final practicum" that that "is not how it has to be" when he observed his second Associate Teacher employing a variety of strategies to motivate and engage her students and focused on classroom management and relationships with the students above curricular outcomes. Robert's self-identification with a relationship-focused teacher suggests that that is his view of what "good" teaching is and sees himself as that "type" of teacher. Robert wants to see himself as a "good guy; a good teacher" and uses colleagues and Associate Teachers as exemplars of "good" and "bad" people and teachers. He needs these people to define himself because just as important as what he sees himself *as*, is what he believes he is *not*.

What is perhaps most pertinent to the present study is the change in the way Robert described himself throughout the research process, particularly after he concluded his final practicum. There was a noticeable change in his confidence, both demonstrated and discussed—he shrugged less in discussion and trusted his words more. When asked what differences he saw in himself now that he had completed the program, he replied, "Confidence, probably more than anything else." I asked him to explain what the source of the new confidence was and Robert suggested, "Experience, I think." And then, harkening back to the importance of one's AT, he elaborated:

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Experience and having tried a couple different things and discovering what doesn't work so well for you and what works a little bit better. I felt like second practicum, too, a big thing for me was being with a teacher who I felt, 'That's who I think I am and who I want to be'.

Robert noticed a significant difference in his own attitude towards teaching as he said he saw in his second AT and himself, "Spunk. Spunk. Creativity. Coming in everyday going, 'Okay! This is going to be great!... [rather than], 'Oh! Here we go again. Another day [groan]...'" With this new attitude in his process of *becoming a teacher*, Robert said he is "happier with myself," "more patient" with students and peers and finds himself speaking and interacting differently with people, being less negative and more understanding of the particular set of circumstances within which those people are living from.

Robert's existential *becoming* is acknowledged through the statement: "I have changed and I am going to continue to change." He knows he is not finished *becoming* a teacher simply because the official Bachelor of Education process has concluded. Perhaps most important in his consideration of his self-image is how he now internalizes his conviction to being a "good teacher" or a "good guy":

...before I really, really, really wanted people to think I'm a good guy. And I do. Who doesn't? I want people to think I'm a good guy... but now, it's a little bit more internal. It's like, I want to *know* that I'm a good guy, and it doesn't really matter if people see that.

Robert has taken responsibility for his life and his *becoming* through "paying attention" and constantly pushing himself to be better, "Because if you're a fantastic teacher on the first day and

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you're giving yourself the ability to grow, then you are going to be beyond fantastic. The best teacher you could have possibly been, maybe." "*Maybe.*" Clearly his self-image is unfinished.

5.1.2 Self-esteem

Inseparably intertwined with *self-image* is *self-esteem*, the evaluative component of Kelchtermans's (2009) framework; self-esteem is the mortar of the self-image construction. It evaluates the self-image and provides course-correction or affirmation for the individual. The analysis of Robert's professional self-esteem is intertwined with and dependent upon on his self-image.

As suggested above, there was a marked increase in Robert's self-confidence throughout the research process. Other than his stated improved confidence, the increase in self-esteem can be elucidated in the language Robert used. Multiple times throughout the interview process I asked Robert if he believed he was a teacher. In the first interview, he suggested, "I feel like I'm beginning to talk like a teacher." There are three elements within that short sentence that suggest the state of his self-esteem at the beginning of the research program. First, he used, "I feel" as opposed to "I am"—there is a tentativeness to "I feel," as though one might be able to object to or disagree with a statement of fact like, "I am," but using feelings as a defensive buffer allows him to later recant, change his mind, or leave his notions up to interpretations. Second, Robert stated he's "*beginning* to talk like a teacher..." Using *beginning* is a rhetorical "dipping a toe in the water" of *becoming*. It is a hesitant step into the *being* of teaching and a using temporal descriptor such as "beginning" implies he is aware he is *not* a teacher yet but is at the initial stage where he can suggest he is *beginning*. Third, instead of stating that he is beginning to feel like a teacher, he instead selected a *characteristic* of a teacher—their "style" of speaking, whatever that may mean to Robert.

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Contrast this statement of “I feel like I’m beginning to talk like a teacher” in the initial interview to the statement of “I think I’m slowly becoming a good teacher” in the final conversation. The differences are clear. Robert has moved into an emotional and cognitive space where he now not only thinks of himself as a teacher but also thinks he is in the *process of becoming* a good teacher, albeit slowly. He has gained confidence in himself to the point where he includes himself in the profession and is not afraid to admit that he may be good at this job.

5.1.3 Task Perception

The maturation process of Robert's *task perception* is clearly evident from the interviews, indeed, Robert can easily describe it himself. When asked what he wanted to accomplish as a teacher, Robert replied that he wanted to “make a difference in the lives” of his students. What Robert believed the students needed for that difference to be made was subject matter content; students could take history, literature and politics lessons and apply them in their own lives. One can almost see Robert envisioning his future students who could be successful in life if only their knowledge-vessel could be filled with enough content. He did not yet consider his students as the individuals they are—young men and women whose learning and life potential exists in the context of their lives.

Highlighting the interconnection between *self-esteem* and *task perception*, Robert entered the Bachelor of Education program confident in the fact that his job would be to teach students content. However, the shock of seeing just how many challenges the students and school faced shook Robert's confidence in what he would be able to accomplish and instead, he began to speak of his job as “managing chaos” in the classroom and “managing his and the students' expectations” of what the students would be able to accomplish in a given day or semester. Robert wanted to “screw up as little as possible” and was focused on not necessarily content or

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teaching, but behaviors and classroom management, which is fairly typical of new teachers (Meister & Melnick, 2003). During his first practicum, Robert felt that if his class did not have any major incidents and the students were able to complete *some* work, it was a successful day. This attitude seemed to emerge from Robert's experience with his Associate Teacher. The veteran teacher, when Robert describes him, appears to care about his students but has lost the will to do much more than manage the class and fulfill curriculum obligations through worksheets; "getting through the day" was the *modus operandi* of the class.

Robert's attitudes and expectations quickly adjusted to the reality of the school. The difficulties he faced and the challenges in the school community, particularly early in his B.Ed. experience, changed what Robert believed his job to be, as well as the language he used to describe these tasks. In the concluding interview session, Robert was resigned to the belief that schooling is a difficult process, but he wanted to "make it a little less shitty" for his students. His job was not necessarily to be the content/pedagogical expert, but rather to be a role model for the students and encourage them in whatever way they needed—a significant shift in his thinking in mere months.

Perhaps most interesting was Robert's response, when asked what makes for a good teacher, he stated that a teacher needs to be a "sucker for punishment," absorbing the stress, pain and difficulties students present with; one wonders how sustainable that "task" is in a long teaching career.

Robert did, however, speak with poetic optimism at the conclusion of the interview process, himself highlighting the steps he has taken on path of *becoming*:

It comes back to kind of like, creativity and trying to have a relatively dynamic classroom where it's not so much like first practicum, [then] it was learn... I mean, you're learning

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on your feet, right? Whatever it takes to get through the day without a fire starting, basically, where I was kind of past that during second practicum. Where it was like, let's light some different fires, you know?

5.1.4 Motivation

Robert makes it clear throughout the interviews that he finds motivation in his work primarily through the need to make a difference, to make a positive impact on the lives of others. When asked directly, "What motivates you?" he replied:

You want to make a difference, right? You want to go... if there's one... if people ask, "What do you want to do?" If there's one thing that been consistent in all the different careers, it was like, [I] want to do something that makes a difference. That helps people. To me this just seems to be one of the absolute best alternatives to help a lot, a lot, a lot of people in a lot, a lot, a lot of ways. And I guess that's what kind of gets me in the door, you know, "Okay, today I might help one kid, I might help 10 kids and I might help no one and have to work even harder the next day." I guess that's the driver.

"Making a difference" to Robert, is not just in the day to day lives of his students, but also how his contributions to students' lives also contribute to the larger community. He finds motivation in both classroom experiences with the students and also extra-curricula, devoting his time to making a positive impact in the school community, "contributing to something bigger."

Throughout the research process Robert maintained two core principles: the desire to make a difference and the preference of working in a job where no two days are the same. Robert was forced to deal with a number of difficult situations during his practicum, including in-school drug raids and the suicide of a member of his extra-curricular club. Instead of being defeated by these incidents, Robert found purpose and motivation in them:

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Every single day is different. Every single day is different. And the crazy stuff, you know, is still exciting and the crazier it is, I guess, the more opportunity there is to turn crazy into something great. You go in there and they're sitting there quietly, that's super boring. You go in and they're all over the place, okay, we can channel that energy somehow and it's hard, but even if you channel that for 5 minutes of the 75, that's pretty good! 5 minutes is not bad. We get five minutes every day and it starts to add up to some real time.

By the end of his practicum, Robert discussed a lack of interest in teaching in a school like he had attended as a student, one where major incidents were not taking place every day and the challenges seemed to be more mundane. This echoed the sentiment of the other participants who all seemed to *need* the chaos their school presented. One wonders what Robert's level of motivation might have been like had he not been exposed to a context with so many and so consistent needs.

Context and experience beyond Robert's practicum high school play a large part in the source of motivation Robert feels. In his own high school experience, Robert, as mentioned above, was the beneficiary of two teachers' interest and support. Robert claims that it is no surprise that he entered the curriculum fields he did—history and language arts—because of this influence. When he speaks of wanting to make “school less shitty,” you can feel the historicity in his words, where he wants to help current students not experience the pain and darkness he did when he in high school. Knowing that teachers can have the impact they did on him motivates Robert in his work.

Robert's motivation was not without interruptions and he did cite situations that had diminished his passion for education. Colleagues in the Bachelor of Education program who did

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not share his enthusiasm for both the academic work and the practice of teaching “got [him] down.” Robert was frustrated when students did not put in the same number of hours with extra-curricula or did not demonstrate the same care for coursework. He also reported experiencing negative attitudes towards the B.Ed. process from teachers in his practicum school, further frustrating him and providing validation to his peers who treated the program as an annoyance.

Robert’s experiences with his Associate Teachers also played a significant role in his level of motivation. His first experience, although generally positive, diminished Robert’s enthusiasm because he felt like his AT was going through the motions of teaching. Thankfully, his second AT seemed relentless in her pursuit of student success, showing Robert that apathy did not have to rule the day and it was still professionally acceptable to care deeply and work tirelessly for the students.

Motivation is heavily influenced by the interplay between *self-esteem* and *task perception*. A clear, confident sense of purpose provides motivation and resiliency in the face of challenges. Robert’s motivation for teaching was molded and galvanized in the fires of his Bachelor of Education practicum experience. He re-directed his intention towards being more “student-focused” and shifted away from worrying about the content to worrying first about the learner. Now, sure in his decision to become a teacher, he is more motivated despite entering a job market where gaining employment will be difficult, particularly in the first few years of his career. He is motivated, however, by a confident sense of purpose:

I think now it’s just knowing that that’s what I want to do. What I should be doing.

Where a year ago it was kind of what I think I want to be. But the experience was so positive for me that it was like, “Okay, that’s it. That’s what I’m going to do.” ... I’ve found something. It’s not just about money, or a little bit about it being [not]

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monotonous, but to go and do something that's exciting everyday and then to go back to the same thing every day, it really underscores that so much is happening and how exciting and how much opportunity comes from that, so I don't know. It's there now. The flame is lit!

5.1.5 Future Perspective

In projecting his future, Robert's notions are bound by opportunity, evidence and aspiration. Through the course of the research project, one could see Robert's sense of himself as a teacher crystallizing through his experiences. Where previously his focuses were on "surviving" and making the most of his opportunities in the Bachelor of Education Urban Cohort, his views, at the end of the process, now shift to the future with a recognition of the reality he exists within. When asked how he describes himself as a teacher during the final interview, he quickly replied, "Unemployed," laughed and then proceeded to answer the question more introspectively. The speed of his response, however, betrays the current mindset he has—he is a teacher, but he is also not a teacher until he has the opportunity to teach once again. His process of *becoming* has, for now, stagnated and it will take a tremendous amount of strength and courage to persevere against great odds as he attempts to secure a job. Sustaining the motivation he had during his last practicum, in particular, will be difficult without the students. Robert has attempted to maintain his relationships, however, volunteering at his school and providing feedback on assignments for students who are applying to university and college.

Who Robert believes he is *becoming* as a teacher is shaped not only by how and when he is able to teach, but also by the evidence of successful teaching he has accumulated during his Bachelor of Education program. He believes that to be successful over the long-term in teaching one must be "crazy," "eccentric" and, as above, be a "sucker for punishment." In his final

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practicum AT, he saw characteristics he admired and wanted to embody. Robert did not suggest one needed to be intelligent, organized or a curriculum/content expert. He selected characteristics he believes would be necessary for success in an urban schooling environment, particularly a focus on emotional and social needs rather than academics. Robert also pictures himself walking a path towards school or system leadership. He sees himself wanting to become a school administrator, school board staff or working at the Ministry of Education in a leadership position. He stated that he likes to be “involved,” likes to be “responsible for things” and that he feels if he is going to identify problems in the system, he is responsible for contributing to their improvement. This responsibility is an important indicator of an existentially-informed self-awareness—Robert realizes that he is responsible for and accountable to the understandings he has and that it is he who is ultimately responsible for his own fate. In so choosing for himself that fate, he sends a strong signal of responsibility to his students and colleagues.

Clear evidence of this responsibility comes in the story Robert shared about a student who gave him a plastic bracelet with the instructions to shift the bracelet from wrist to wrist each time he did or said something that was hurtful, unhelpful or unnecessary. Robert identified with this task and found it helpful in identifying the moments where he was responsible for contributing to the problem as opposed to the solution:

And this bracelet thing [gestures to a rubber bracelet on his wrist] that they gave me is cool...every time you do something you're not proud of, you're supposed to switch wrists. And even... and just in that first week, realizing the little things: I made a comment about this person and I shouldn't have, that was a jerk thing to do, switch the wrists. And then realizing how often you're switching the wrists, just by paying attention to these things was really interesting.

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Despite having a relatively clear picture of his own future, like other participants, Robert's greatest fear is not that he will continue to make mistakes, but that he will cease to care about them—that he will lose his passion for teaching and at the same time, lose part of who he is; that he will experience burnout. In his own experience, he has felt the emotional saturation that comes with high-stress, high-expectation jobs and also believes that a number of the teachers in his school have suffered that fate:

The one thing that worries me is that in the past, other things that I've done, where you feel really good about it and then you get to a place and there's that one day where it's like, it doesn't feel the way it did, where you kind of take a step back, and I think that's what happens to a lot of these teachers who burnout and they get other things going on in their life that they didn't have at the beginning of their career...

Robert did suggest, however, that the reflection process he engaged in through this research project helped him become aware of the potential for burnout and he believes reflection could save him from that fate: "I think self... just being aware of your own... of who you are and... I think these [reflective conversations] are great, we should be doing this all the time." Being asked to consider who he is *becoming*, both as a person and as a teacher, has supported Robert in that *becoming* by asking him to articulate both aspirations and fears. Now articulated, his path towards the former and away from the latter becomes clearer.



5.2 Heather

I See the Light in You

She watches the leaves flutter around her and she can't help but laugh. "Namaste, Wind. I see you." The leaves dance softly on weak gusts, their movements a shy echo of what she has faced before. "I remember you, Wind. I remember how you pushed me, made me fight for every step of this path." Leaves bounce up and down in the air—Wind nods in agreement. She watches the leaves fall gently to the earth, and she remembers.

The dark times, first, so far back on the path that the darkness no longer feels threatening. From home to home Wind threw her, not the homes she wanted, but rather the ones she needed. A hand, able to slice through Wind, found her and pulled her into the light. A hand of a teacher, gratefully grasped, both savior and oracle.

Now Spring, a time of renewal and growth, but also a time of stilted progress. Wind will not hide forever and catches her off balance as she talks with her friends. She rebounds between words, inappropriate, here; hopeful, there. She moves forward on her path, mirrored on all sides by who she is and whom she would like to be. Wind shapes her gaze, forcing her to assess the images thrown back to her. Embarrassed, here; contented, there.

She remembers putting pen to paper as she walked her path. "This is me," she would write. Time after time she would write, "This is me," and time after time, Wind would merely chuckle and scatter her pages. She left them to fly away, saying, "That was me. They're better off gone."

The stage appears in her mind. A silhouette she finds familiar graces it, motions and emotions exit left and right. A voice, once proud, now silenced, reverberates against Wind. Wind reminds her that once, her path led to this stage, but the theatre is empty. The stage fades and

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visions of her father emerge. He invites her to walk with him through a foreign land. Wind pushes her away, will not let her walk by his side.

She remembers the classroom of November. The uneasiness, the doubt, the frustration. She remembers the phone calls, the tears, questioning. This is where she met Wind face-to-face. This is where Wind's gusts blew hardest. Each squall ripped her shoulders backwards. Each uncertainty pushed her more towards the edges of her path. Each hesitation, a step back.

But then—a choice; a lift of her head and a choice. A decision: Wind will not triumph. She stepped forward with that choice. "I will do this," she says quietly over Wind's howling.

"Do what?"

"Care. Help others. Teach."

And Wind abated.

The leaves simply flutter.

"Namaste, Wind."

Now, now the hand that can grasp is hers. Now the words that can be spoken will shimmer. Now the pages can be written. Now the stage can play host once again. Now she can walk with her father. Now she will teach.

"I see you, Wind."

"Namaste, Heather."

Heather, without question, was the most enthusiastic and engaged participant in this research process. In her early twenties at the time of her Bachelor of Education, Heather had already experienced more difficulties and adversity than most encounter in their lifetime. Heather's tenacity and optimism in her teaching and its potential impact on the lives of her students pervades each of the interviews and her enthusiasm was clearly demonstrated in the emotion she

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brought to our discussions and the frequent follow-up emails she would send between interview sessions.

Heather is unapologetic and humble in describing her early life: she spent a significant portion of her childhood in foster care. Her father, who today plays a complicated role in Heather's life, at times frustrating Heather, at other times described as her "hero," is frequently discussed during the interview process; Heather's mother is never mentioned. Heather describes her relationship with her foster parents as "awesome" and described at different times how her social worker told her how Heather's experience in foster care "didn't happen" and how she was "one in a million." Heather's childhood was a difficult one and she, like Robert, uses the word "darkness" to describe her state of mind in her youth. Also like Robert, Heather attributes her eventual emergence into the light to a teacher, "Ms. Hannah...she almost pulled me out of a darkness and she sort of provided me with a sense that there are opportunities for everyone..."

Heather chose to become a teacher after her experience with Ms. Hannah, focusing her courses of studies on becoming a high school English teacher. Rarely during our discussions, however, did Heather speak about particular curriculum content that she was passionate about. Her focus was on "helping" and even "saving" troubled students. There is a clear connection made throughout the interviews with Heather that it was her own experience as a troubled youth that led her to joining the Urban Education Cohort:

I really do want to be a teacher like [Ms. Hannah], who focuses on the ones who...we talked about this in our program. It's the students who are A students, they are going to be A students regardless, it's targeting those students who don't care. That's what she did for me and so I was like, "Okay, Urban Priority Schools... this is where I fit. This is what I want to do."

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Heather's goal in teaching is not simply to deliver the curriculum, but have a positive impact on the personal lives of her students, particularly the ones she believes have had social and personal struggles.

Heather demonstrated a deep commitment to the reflective process she was engaged in with this research project. She would often show up to our meetings with notes on thoughts she had from our previous conversations and would frequently email me to ask about some of the topics we had discussed, writing in depth on her meta-cognition. Heather often had difficulty explaining verbally the ideas she was grappling with and would interject in her own responses with the phrase, "I don't know"; Heather needed to write.

More than any other participant, Heather described a sincere interest and appreciation of the Bachelor of Education program in which she was enrolled. She admired professors, celebrated the educational theory she was learning and unhesitatingly dismissed those of her peers who approached the program with disdain or conceit. There was an endearing innocence about Heather as she quoted authors and educational theorists. Her experiences with her Associate Teachers had profound impacts on Heather. Her first practicum left her in tears most days, confidence shaken and questioning whether she should continue in the program. Supported by a professor, Heather persevered and had a tremendously successful second practicum. Her second AT, in contrast to the first, encouraged Heather to find her own voice in the classroom and created a safe space for experimentation and risk-taking; Heather left the B.Ed. confident in herself and excited to undertake a career in teaching.

5.2.1 Self-Image

Heather was very forthcoming in her self-analysis, layering her initial interview responses with commentary after the interviews had been transcribed. She professed to have never experienced

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the level of self reflection the B.Ed. program and this research project offered her and that she cherished each opportunity. When asked to describe how she saw herself, Heather suggested that she was “really nice,” “passionate,” “flexible,” “responsible” and “caring.” She sees herself as the teacher whose experience and personality are a perfect fit for disadvantaged students:

I think that my experiences in foster care set me apart from the other [teacher] candidates because I can relate to those urban priority kids in a way that I think others can't—unless of course they have themselves also experienced a rough childhood and adolescence.

Time and again throughout the interview process, Heather made it clear that what students needed was someone to care about them and she believed she was that person.

Like other participants, Heather defined herself through contrast. She believed her experience, attitude, work ethic and skills made her the type of teacher students would need, while many of her colleagues did not possess such attributes. She found her fellow students to be “distracting and irritating” when they did not take the program as seriously as Heather did or if they did not share the same beliefs, it was disheartening. Heather’s self-image, like other participants, is heavily dependent on how she perceives other teachers and teacher candidates. Her confidence, depending on her opinions of others could waiver or be strengthened. When asked if she was worried about these teacher candidates who do not “care” in the same way she does, she suggested she was not worried about competing with them for a job because she felt that she would get the position over them “hands down,” but she worries for the students of the teachers who do not care: “God forbid, those poor students. I just want to rescue them, you know?”

When asked what she wanted to become “better” at, Heather was quick to identify areas of concern as the curriculum from her first practicum and “differentiated instruction,” but also

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included self-condemnation of who she was, at times, as a person. She suggested that she can be “sucked in” to negative conversations and even found herself piling on with teachers in the staff room as they described their frustrations with different students. She knew that to be the teacher she wanted to be, she would have to change her mindset:

Now I feel like I have a bigger responsibility than before—like a responsibility to be a role model in all aspects of my life. I don’t want to be hypocritical. I think that hypocrisy is a terrible quality to have. How can you be the teacher who is sensitive and open toward cultural differences, creating a safe inclusive classroom, and also be the woman in her twenties who gets drunk and laughs at [inappropriate] jokes? I think that when you become a teacher, you have to be prepared to ‘grow up.’

She described herself as “wanting to be perfect” despite recognizing that perfection was impossible. Her path, unlike the other participants’, included attitudinal and personal adjustments, as well as pedagogical improvements. The theme of maturity and “growing up” was prevalent in Heather’s self-analysis. She sensed that the process of becoming a teacher had forced her to mature rapidly. She felt more “open-minded,” had limited the vulgarity in her speech, reconsidered the style of dress she chose for her personal life and felt a distance grow between her and her old friends, ones who did not share the values and attitudes she believed made for a good teacher.

The importance of who she felt she was as a person and who she wanted to be as a teacher was a prevalent theme in the research process with Heather. At the conclusion of her B.Ed., Heather wrote an email which included the statement [original formatting]:

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I am a better person when I teach. Because I have to be a role-model, because I have to stop thinking about just myself, because I want to help others, and because I can see that they need my help. Because I also want to inspire.

Heather believes she is “closing the gap” between who she is as a teacher and who she is as a person as she grows in experience, but she worries about slipping into old ways of being. From the same email, Heather suggested that while working at a coffee shop immediately after the conclusion of her B.Ed., she began to feel the absence of the impact teaching had on her on a personal level:

Sometimes I despise the person I am at work. I'm so vulgar and obnoxious, and make completely inappropriate jokes with my coworkers/friends. I become judgmental, self-centred, and find myself often regretting the things that I say. I just keep thinking about how disgusted I would be if I walked in and saw one of my former teachers behaving in that way.

Clearly the act of becoming a teacher had a profound effect on how Heather saw herself, and by extension, her *becoming*.

5.2.2 Self-Esteem

Understanding Heather's self-esteem in teaching and in herself is a strange process. She is confident, but full of doubt; she insulates that doubt with a sense of purpose, but questions whether or not that sense of purpose will be enough to sustain her through the challenges she will face in the classroom. Her students gave her confidence through positive feedback, but she needed her Associate Teachers' approval to validate her confidence. She worries about competing with her peers for jobs, yet feels that she would win a job “hands down” in a

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competition; Heather's self-esteem and belief in herself exists within the boundaries of the oscillating statements she makes.

When I first began speaking with Heather it was on the heels of an extremely trying time, her confidence all but destroyed by her first practicum experience. In the Urban Education Cohort, teacher candidates work in the classroom of their Associate Teacher one day a week from the beginning of the school year, developing relationships with students and staff and preparing for practicum. Heather's time in the classroom involved her

...sitting in [the teacher's] classroom on a chair, just watching her talk and talk and talk.

And once in a while she would throw a question at me, expecting me to know the answer and I would just cringe... I would say, 'Sorry I don't know. Sorry I don't know. That's what started it all for me...

Heather felt embarrassed each time she was unable to answer a question in front of the students.

When it was time to take over the class

I was afraid because, I guess, it was my own insecurities, but I was afraid because I knew that she knew so much and I knew so little and I felt like I was being judged on a whole other level and I couldn't deliver. And I... it was going terribly and I felt humiliated and I just, I was like, "I don't think I can do this."

Along with a sense of humiliation, Heather also felt confused about the expectations of her Associate Teacher. When she first arrived and showed her AT the unit she had prepared, she was told that it was "too creative" and that it was "never going to work" in the classroom. Heather then removed many of the creative aspects of her lesson plan and was chastised for having lesson plans that "were not creative enough." Later in the practicum she was told that she needed to "just go for it" and not rely on the AT for feedback on every lesson, then was again confused

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when the AT spoke sternly about Heather not showing the AT lesson plans prior to the lesson. In what is a very emotional and difficult time for any individual beginning their teaching career, Heather also had to combat inconsistent and unclear expectations, further shaking her confidence.

A prevalent theme in the interpretation of Heather's self-esteem is that of *fear*; Heather is afraid of failure and self-doubt threatens to undermine the contributions she wants to make to the world. The fear she feels is not just in teaching, but in her personal life. She describes wanting to be a "rock star" and performer at an early age but fear of failure derailed those dreams. Later in life she attempted, multiple times, to write a novel that would chronicle the life she had led and the challenges she had faced, but fear again pulled her up short: "I've gotten up to like Chapter three and then scratched the whole thing and said, 'I'm so afraid to write this, I don't even know what would come of it.'"

I followed up this discussion of the fear of success with the question of whether or not Heather was afraid to teach. She replied:

Ya! Ya. [laughs] I've had some terrifying experiences. I see the way that people talk about, you know teachers, even, in schools and it's... I don't want to be ineffective because I have so much passion to do it and to do it well, and I want to help all these students and I am afraid. What if I just can't? What if the passion is there and I just can't? I just keep trying, I guess.

The paradox of Heather's self-esteem, however, is that her fear and self-doubt is a powerful tool. She suggested that the fear "drives" her forward as she pushes on and it helps "make [you] a better person."

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Heather's second practicum saw a reduction in the fear of teaching as she was able to work with an Associate Teacher who nurtured Heather and provided a space where failure and self-doubt was okay:

I was doing all these things and [my AT] was fine with it and just experimenting whereas last term I was just so afraid because I was afraid of what my AT would say, or it didn't feel like it was a safe environment to explore, where this one it was 'go for it!'

Heather felt like she could be herself because she did not need to become someone she was not to gain the approval of her AT.

In both practicums, Heather received positive feedback from her students, but her experiences with her first AT limited the impact that feedback had on her confidence. She suggested that in her first practicum, despite the positive comments she would receive, she was "afraid" of the students. In her second practicum, with the support from her AT, Heather developed relationships with the students beyond those which she had in the first practicum and therefore the feedback had deeper meaning for her. She attributes the change to her AT creating a space where she could "be herself" without "trying to be herself."

Heather's self-esteem saw a marked improvement from practicum one to two, but the shadow of her peers, particularly those who she deemed to be lazy or "uncaring" continued to loom over her. Although she suggested that she would win a job competition against these students, she still spent a significant amount of time afraid that these teachers would get jobs and diminish the educational experiences of other students. Even though Heather is certainly more confident in her own teaching now, fear of and the impact from other teachers continues to play a significant role in her self-esteem.

5.2.3 Task Perception

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The most persistent theme in Heather's discussions around what she believes her role as a teacher is, is a focus on the student-as-individual above student-as-learner. In our first interview, I asked Heather what, in her mind, was the job of a teacher. She replied, "I think it's just helping the students reach their potential or pushing what they think their potential is." At the conclusion of the research process, I asked her a second time and she replied, in a similar theme, "I think it's building the individual first, the skills second."

During our discussions Heather would touch on what it meant to *build* an individual and what the outcome of *building* a student might be. Only occasionally did she provide specific personal characteristics that could be developed in the student through teacher influence. She described, late in the interview process, that "students need to be taught how to get through adversity and how to build that resilience." Heather also believed that students needed to be taught *how* to create and sustain their own relationships with others. Beyond those two characteristics, she spoke in generalizations. As a teacher she believes she is responsible for "making a difference" and "improving students' lives." Like other participants, these vague platitudes reveal a lack of definitive understanding of the teacher candidates' *task perception* and leave them resorting to emotional responses to the question of what they want to accomplish as a teacher:

So I think what I actually [mean] is "building morals" first and the skills second, because, I don't know, that's just my personal view but I think that as teachers we are trying to... we're trying to make people become better people. Trying to open their mind and those should be the first things that we try to help them with and creating relationships with them and then... meanwhile, also trying to build upon their skills. But I think that... I don't know... we don't want to raise a city of shitty people [laughs].

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The laughter after “shitty people” suggests that Heather is fully aware that she has left her point vague, but knows also that she can think of no better way to describe that which she means.

Heather sees it as her responsibility, humbly so, to be a boon to the education system. Her job, in her mind, is to manifest the educational theory and literature she absorbed during her Bachelor of Education and also that which the Ministry of Education espouses. She is quick to deride her peers for being “norm-based” when teachers should be “criterion-referenced.” She believes her job is to contribute to improving the public education system at large and particularly in righting the wrong she experienced:

... if I had been in the education system that teachers college is trying to push right now with all these engaging and interactive things, I think I would have learned a whole lot more... When I look back it's very norm based, everything is norm based and I can't think of anything we did that really stayed with me... It kinda makes me sad, but at the same time, well this why we're all here, to change that.

The other students in her program are a consistent source of frustration for her because many, in her mind, do not feel the same as she:

Without saying names, people in our program... not that they should think like me, but there are people who will say comments about, I have heard comments like, “Our job isn't to be social workers.” I've heard that statement so many times from someone in our cohort and it makes me so upset every time I hear it because our job is so much more than teaching the curriculum.

Heather describes her students as her “babies” and as wanting to “rescue” them from teachers who do not share the same values and attitudes as her own; who do not “care” like she does. To

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Heather, her job is to care, relentlessly, about her students and those that do not demonstrate the same level of emotional commitment do not gain Heather's respect.

5.2.4 Motivation

If motivation is what drives someone to be persistent in a task or endeavor, Heather's *motivation* was tested unlike any other participant's during her Bachelor of Education. As described above, Heather's experience with her first AT brought her to tears nearly every day and left her confidence shaken. In order to persist through what was an extremely difficult time, Heather leaned heavily on a number of motivating factors and then, once she was through the initial storm, new sources and strengths of motivation arose.

It was clear from our interviews that Heather is motivated by validation. Whether student feedback, AT comments and support, or the marks she received on her assignments during the academic portion of her B.Ed., Heather wanted to know she was doing well and also how she could be better. She describes herself as being motivated to "constantly improve" and she related a story of a conversation she had with a professor over a paper on which she had received an "A" grade. Heather wanted to know what she could have done to improve on the assignment and the professor could not understand why Heather was asking that question after receiving a high grade. Heather laughed while telling the story, saying that she *needs* to keep learning and improving and she never feels complete or finished in her learning. Even after completing a successful practicum in her second placement and feeling that she "had a taste of bliss," Heather feels she can continue to improve upon her pedagogical skills and is excited to undertake the challenge of finding a job in a very difficult job market.

Heather was initially motivated to become a teacher because of the experiences she had in her own life with teachers and non-family adults. She wants to "make a difference" for

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students because she knows the lives of these students can be improved with the right supports, supports she found at an early age:

I mean, for me, it's all the hardships... I mean everybody had hardships, but in foster care I was constantly told, I was constantly told... I'm still told by my social workers, "You're one in a million, this doesn't happen." I think hearing that, it was almost like kids, in those urban priority schools, I was one of them... you know? It makes you realize that there can be a change, there just... I don't know how exactly it's done [laughs] but there can be a change and I want to be a part of that change... I think we're all responsible for helping people get out of that.

Heather felt responsible to "pay forward" the support she had been given when she needed it most.

As her first practicum became more and more difficult emotionally, Heather continued to tell herself, "I really want to do this," "I really want to make a difference" and "I really want to change a kid's life." These sentiments continued to motivate Heather despite not receiving the validation she typically enjoyed. Through the tears, Heather kept a clear eye on what her ultimate purpose in teaching was and continues to be. In an email response after our first interview together, Heather described why she persisted: "Because the kids deserve it." She does not feel that she "owes it to society," but rather she believes that everyone should "want to make a difference" and to be a good person is to act selflessly for others.

These values—being a "good" person; selflessness; responsibility to others—are the source of her motivation and give substance to an existential sense of purpose in her teaching. Heather has chosen for herself who she wants to be, what she believes that means for others and what the implications of those choices can be. Her sense of purpose motivates her, pushes her

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and helps her understand who she is, who she is *becoming* and what she can accomplish with that *becoming*:

Because if I didn't know, if I didn't have any sort of understanding of what I thought my purpose was, even as a person on this earth... then... then I don't think I would care about things as much as I do... And I think that's what... the fact that I'm aspiring all these things, I think that really pushes [me] and makes [me] a better teacher and person. I think that that's the root of it, what your aspirations are and being driven [by them].

5.2.5 Future Perspective

Heather has a very clear perspective on where she wants to go in her career and who she wants to become. The process of becoming a teacher has helped to crystallize the images she has of her future. All paths for Heather, however, lead to *becoming* a better person—both for herself and for her students. Those paths may snake and diverge as she moves forward, through different roles in the school and education system, but her purpose, in her mind at least, will remain the same.

Heather's classroom experiences came in Social Studies and English Language Development (a class for newly-arrived immigrants who had no formal schooling experience) but she imagines herself not in those classrooms, but rather with students on a stage as a drama teacher, returning to a former love:

Because I stopped dreaming of being, you know, the actress or the singer, I sort of lost those hobbies along the way and I haven't felt the same since and that's when, recently, I've been deciding that I would really like to do my [additional qualification] in drama and sort of bring that back so I can combine both of those things that I really want to do and that I love.

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Regardless of subject matter, however, Heather imagines herself as a teacher who “creates a classroom that students enjoy going to and leave saying, ‘I miss that class’ or ‘I liked that class’ or that ‘I learned something from that class’. Not just about skills but about being a good person.”

As a teacher, Heather hopes to become a “role model” for her students, a living example that life can get better with the right supports and attitudes. When asked what “kind” of teacher she wants to become, Heather identified teachers from movies such as *Dead Poets Society* and *Freedom Writers*. These teacher archetypes are classic hero or martyr teachers, selfless individuals who are able to impact their students’ lives through charisma, passion and caring. The picture Heather painted of herself as a teacher throughout the interviews supports her choice of aspiration, as she used words such as “save” and “rescue” to describe the influence she hopes to have in her career. One cannot help but wonder, however, how sustainable that mentality is and what impact a failure to “save” every student may have on Heather over a long career in education. Heather does not see herself, however, remaining in the classroom for the length of her career. She would like to “work [her] way up” to “work on the board or be a principal” so that she could have “power over how things are done in schools.”

Heather’s *future perspective* has been shaped by the process of reflection both in her B.Ed. classes and through this research project. Just prior to her second practicum, Heather suggested that she was becoming a “crazy person” because of the reflection. The new horizons and questions that lead her towards them were overwhelming at times. She would return after each interview with new thoughts on old issues and uncover more and more of who she saw herself to be and who she wanted to become. She believes the reflection process she has engaged

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in has been powerful, however, giving her “something to aspire to be.” Without the questioning, the imagination does not have a canvas on which to draw.

The picture Heather paints of herself now is of someone on a long path to self-improvement through contributions to others’ lives. The more she *becomes* a teacher, the more she focuses on her students and their needs, the better the person she sees herself *becoming*:

I just... I feel... when I’m in the classroom I feel... I feel like I am helping other people and I’m not focusing on all of my issues. I’m trying to help them solve theirs and it feels really good to do that. And it sort of takes the focus away from the negativity that might be in my life outside of the classroom. And I don’t know... it just feels really good.

At peace now with her past and filled with a sense of purpose, Heather is able to look to the future with head held high, knowing, certain that she is in the right profession for her. She continues to push herself in her personal life so that she can better serve those she comes in contact with in her professional life; as the “gap between who [she] is as a person and who [she] wants to be as a teacher” narrows, she *becomes* the teacher and person she wants to be.



5.3 Nicole

Lessons

Her path to this place was built by her hands, but designed by their lessons: her students, her “youth,” her charges. It was them that brought her here, though it was her own feet that carried her. It is towards them she will direct herself; it is their lessons that will show her the way forward.

She knows now that her path leads through the classroom, pausing only long enough to gather more lessons to her, shape her steps a little more finely, and then it is onwards. On to something else: not a classroom...not an office... to young people, to a purpose. Though there will be disappointment, this is not a failure. This is a well-chosen path, ambiguous to be sure, but one that she must walk. She looks left and right to her colleagues’ paths, she sees them lingering in the classroom for years and years. She nods and wishes them well, they are not right or wrong, they are important too: “Go be the best you can be.”

She does not need to turn to remind herself of how she arrived here. The lessons that brought her come quickly to mind and steady her feet as she moves forward. Learning from, with, and against her mother. Measuring herself alongside her colleagues, their words providing language for who she does and does not want to be. The mirror in which she sees the dark wool of the family, tells her, “You can do this. You can do this. You can do this.” And, time after time, she does it. Providing lessons of her own, showing the boys on the field that they should not underestimate her—her father is particularly proud of this. Letting no one box her in, she typifies that which she teaches. You can do this.

Now walking forward, each step shuffles off parts of Ms. Pearce. The first to go is the name; Nicole remains and the wall between she and her charges shows cracks. Next, the

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expectations; the curriculum was a means to an end. Useful, to be sure, but in a similar vein as a boat; the vessel does not provide meaning, the journey does. The wall crumbles with the expectations; there is nothing left to evaluate except faces. Smiles here now where once there was nothing—success. Finally, the walls of the school and its rules and codes of behavior. In the past, they were the walls of an institution, now all she has left are her ethics and values. And her lessons.

She emerges from this portion of her path a new woman, yet not someone indistinguishable from whom she has always been. Where Ms. Pearce has melted away, Nicole walks on. She steps over the rubble and looks forward to the horizon. Teaching? Maybe... Counseling? Perhaps. Purpose? Always. She has learned the lessons she can. She counts herself lucky that she had taken the time to find herself in a place where she was ready to learn them. But the path moves ever forward and is beset by the vague faces of people she will meet as she travels further. They may not know her name just yet, nor she theirs, but she sees them. She directs herself to them, unshackled and with strong steps. She is not there to cure them, she seeks only to meet them, to understand them, and to celebrate them with joy, humor, comfort and perhaps a touch of sass. For as Ms. Pearce diminishes, Nicole walks on, looking towards those faces and, undoubtedly, new lessons.

Painting a clear picture of Nicole's path of *becoming* is a difficult task. Understanding the roads that led her to her Bachelor of Education and forecasting where those roads will now take her is an exercise in meta-interpretation; Nicole, above all other participants, is the hardest to draw a line from intention to action, meaning to understanding. She has flipped back and forth throughout her adult life on whether or not she would become a teacher, even after entering the

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Bachelor of Education program. She desperately wants to help young people, but can become frustrated with the institutions and structures designed to facilitate that help. Nicole maintains a strong moral compass and self-efficacy, even quitting a job that allows her to assist young people because of philosophical differences with supervisors. She is passionate and unapologetic, but often throughout our conversations, when she became passionately unapologetic, her words and manner seemed to belie self-doubt, as if somehow Nicole was beginning to wonder why the path she was taking did not feel “right.”

The influence of Nicole’s parents is a prominent theme throughout the interview process. Nicole’s mother was a teacher and it was her who initially encouraged Nicole to become a teacher. Nicole, considering and priding herself on being the “black sheep” of the family, resisted, but still chose an undergraduate degree in a field she was not interested in but that which her mother thought would be appropriate and useful to Nicole. Where her mother was a strong influence on her professionally, Nicole’s father instilled in Nicole a sense of self-worth and resiliency. He frequently encouraged her to rise above people’s expectations and to not let herself be limited by what others think and say.

Graduating from her initial degree, Nicole attempted to enter the field of social work, but was denied. She then turned to teaching, the career she had been avoiding because of her mother. This profession, however, offered Nicole an opportunity to do that which she was most consistently passionate about: to work with young people. Having worked in a number of coaching and youth leadership roles, teaching provided Nicole a professional opportunity to continue this line of work, one in which she felt confident and purposeful.

The process of becoming a teacher, professionally, has left Nicole feeling frustrated at times. She stated that she has felt bullied by others, particularly males, in her class. She believed

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that she was a target because she refused to sit quietly and take a dispassionate stance towards the program. She spoke frequently of those in the program and profession who “don’t get it” and often made strong judgments against those in her program who prided themselves on their content knowledge.

Nicole felt that perhaps teaching in a classroom was not going to be her final calling—certainly not in a typical high school classroom. Instead, she felt that she would be ancillary to the school system, a counselor whose role was to support those in the school, a position where she would not be confined to what others believed she should do. Even after the interview process was complete, however, Nicole’s path in the profession remains vague and undefined. The only consistent notions she has maintained throughout my time with her is that she cares deeply for the youth, she wants to work hard for their benefit, and she will let no one tell her what is capable of doing and achieving. By will alone, she believes, she will accomplish that which she desires.

5.3.1 Self-image

Nicole’s self-image is primarily composed of contrasts; she sees herself through a lens of tension between who she is and how others appear to her to be. Early in the interview process, Nicole was very quick to describe herself as the “black sheep” of her family. She resisted becoming a teacher, despite loving working with youth, because her mother was a teacher and it was only after a period of setbacks that she was willing to apply to a Bachelor of Education program. Even then, upon acceptance, she identified early on that her final goal was not to teach in a classroom, but rather serve as a counselor for students. The “black sheep” notion continued throughout her B.Ed. experience, as Nicole defined who she was as a student and teacher by what she saw in others. She suggested she was humble where other teacher candidates were not:

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I'm like, "Okay, I don't get it. I need help. Who can help me?" And I use my associate teacher a lot, for sure. And I didn't go in with almost like this arrogance. Like, "Oh, I've got it nailed." I think some some people [were arrogant], which kind of gave off the wrong vibe. Whereas I was more like, "Okay, I'm more like... I kinda know how kids think and I can anticipate behavior before it happens. Just because I've done it for such a long time.

Nicole repeatedly suggested that there are those in the B.Ed. program who "get it" and those "who don't get it"; "it" being a focus on the students and not their own careers. Nicole has a particular, nuanced understanding of what she perceives as arrogance in others and self-confidence in herself and it is within this understanding that she paints her self-portrait.

Asked to reflect specifically on how she sees herself, Nicole responded with a typical array of descriptors: "funny," "easy-going," "fair, but firm" and most often, "sassy." It was her students, Nicole suggests, that first described her as such and she seemed to incorporate that characteristic into her self-image: "Some of my students called me... sassy [laughs] and not in like a bad way, just like in a, like... I will... if they tease me, I don't mind teasing back in an appropriate way."

The relationship building Nicole engaged in, often times through humor or "sass," is a crucial part of who she sees herself as a teacher. She describes herself as "approachable" and "wanting to get to know everyone" and believes she is extremely capable at developing relationships with students. Nicole wishes the curriculum did not get in the way of getting to know the students and she found it frustrating that the focus of the school was content and academics as opposed to personal development. It was this frustration that led her to the notion that she does not want to be a teacher, per se, but rather a counseling resource for students. When

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I asked her why she thought it should be her who counsels, she was confident in her reply:

“Because I’m good at it.”

Although self-assured in a number of aspects of her personal and professional life, there were still elements of her self-image where Nicole seemed to be struggling to come to terms with. In particular, Nicole struggled with the idea of whether or not she was a *teacher*. She suggested:

It’s hard because I feel like I’m in the middle. I feel like when I’m in the staff room, I don’t fit in the staff room. I feel like when I’m in the classroom, I don’t fit with the students because I’m not a student. It’s like the “in-between.” I don’t know how to get the ground... you know what I mean? I’m still working on it. I think it’s easier for me when I’m not around other teachers to feel like a teacher...Do I feel like a teacher? Not yet. I feel like there is more to learn. I feel like I’m on my way. Which is kind of why I want to do a Masters, just to learn more and I think it’s my age too, I feel young, in comparison to others.

This “in-betweenness” manifested itself quite explicitly as Nicole struggled with what she would like to be called by her students. Her second associate teacher demanded that she be referred to by her last name, “Ms. Pearce,” but Nicole suggested that she would prefer to be known simply by her first name or, at least, as she was known during her first placement: “Ms. P.” Our discussion around her name choice was quite confusing, as at times she said being called “Ms. Pearce” made her feel old, but at other times she liked being called that “because it’s unique, it’s authentic. Kinda individual to me.” She suggested that respect from the students is not determined by the name and that she did not mind being called “P-Dawg” at times, because it helped her develop her relationships with students as they could see she had a sense of humor;

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the oscillation between caring about the name and not muddies the picture of Nicole's self-image. With her associate teacher demanding she be referred to by her full name, one wonders if the "black sheep" imperative in Nicole's mind and history not only influences name choice, but her entire self-image.

5.3.2 Self-esteem

Nicole is a confident person and knows she has made positive impacts on the youth she has been responsible for teaching and guiding. Nicole's confidence, however, requires consistent self-affirmation, an "I can do this" mantra. She has faced her fair share of setbacks in the years since leaving high school, but, as she describes it, her parents instilled in her a strong sense of self-worth and confidence, which has helped her overcome challenges. That confidence, however, seems to arise most commonly through tension with others. When Nicole feels others doubt her, she pushes herself to prove them wrong:

I think it also comes from my parents always telling me that I can. I liked playing sports with the boys as a kid. And the boys wouldn't let me play and my dad would say, "Well, what's stopping you? Just go on the field. They can't stop you from going on the field." And it's like, "Ya! They can't. They don't have control over me. I can go play soccer and they can't stop me unless they physically beat me up, but like, I can go on and play..." So it was always like, if someone tells you that you can't, there's a way that you can. And I think my parents taught me that and I believe it in myself.

In another instance, it was a professor in her B.Ed. who suggested Nicole, as a teacher-coach in a high school, would not have the time to advocate for her students. Nicole responded aggressively:

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And I was just, I was completely taken aback because I was like, ‘No, you don’t know me and what I’m capable of doing. I can’t believe you’re telling me that I can do something. You don’t know me.’

During our conversations, there were few instances where Nicole described self-doubt about being capable of success in a situation. She stated that she knew she was good at forming relationships with students and is a strong physical education teacher. When asked to describe what she wanted to improve upon in her practice, she suggested she needs to learn how to cover the content quicker because she likes to dedicate a significant amount of time to relationship building. Even in instances where she felt she had made the mistake of getting to know students prior to her practicum “too well,” she still believed that she was capable of rectifying the situation by “putting her foot down.”

Nicole’s self-confidence, however, did not prevent her from taking feedback when she received comments from veteran teachers. When told she appeared to be disengaged in meetings, she did not deny or shift blame, but rather acknowledged that she could certainly appear that way and although she could rationalize her appearance, she recognized she needed to change. Nicole believes this perspective on criticism is a new discovery and thanks the B.Ed. program for opening her eyes:

I’ve learned... I guess... through this program for sure, that, you know, people do have different perceptions, people do have different expectations of you. People don’t necessarily agree with what you do, or what you say or how you act and it’s easy to respond in a defensive way and to, react aggressively because that’s kind of like a natural response and it takes more work to sit back, not get angry, you know, digest what’s being said and then respond.

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Nicole is a confident young woman and that confidence has helped her persist through life's struggles, most importantly, to accept the fact that although she is capable of success, she remains imperfect and willing to improve.

5.3.3 Task perception

Nicole's notion of what her job as a teacher is focuses squarely on the student and largely ignores content and curriculum. For her, those are simply a means to an end, an end she describes explicitly: helping students become "better individuals." A "better" individual, to Nicole, is someone who is more "resilient," a "leader" in the world. Nicole repeatedly employed the word "build" as she described the job of a teacher:

[A teacher's job is] to build resiliency in students and to empower them. And to encourage them and provide them with opportunities that maybe they don't have elsewhere... [It's] more than just being an educator. You're a counselor, I mean, sometimes you can be a nurse, you can be a parent, a lot of the times. You can be so many different things. It's... I think outside looking in, when people look at teachers, I don't think they really see that it's more than what it is.

She described her task as to "build students as complete individual," even at the expense of the content. Indeed, she riffs a number of times against colleagues and teachers who treat the classroom as their personal stage for the demonstration of their content knowledge. She employs "getting it" again when she describes these teachers as those who are more focused on themselves and their own performance than they are on the students':

It's not just like... sometimes you're putting on a performance, okay? You can put on a façade, okay, and be like, "Ya, I'm the greatest science teacher ever" but I don't think those type of people get it. Because you don't need to talk about how good you are to be

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good. The more people have to talk about themselves, or what they did in the classroom or share, “Today, I did this!” It’s like, no, no. You don’t get it. Because you’re talking about yourself. You should be talking about your students. Talk about... how... you know... “So and so did a really good job today. I’m really impressed by what they did in class.” Those people get it. Those are people who understand.

Perhaps most interesting is the unintentional connection Nicole makes between what her job is and the *future perspective* of Kelchtermans’s framework. She sees it as her responsibility to be a symbol for what students can aspire to. She believes that many students, particularly those in the Urban Priority school setting do not have anything or anyone to aspire to, and it is therefore the teacher’s responsibility to be that symbol. Part of becoming a symbol is also demonstrating the desire to be better yourself:

I think that’s why you want to be a better person because the better you are, the less likely you are to make a mistake or mess up or do something wrong, right? And I, there are not a lot of people that you can admire in society and I think teachers are very important figures in student lives and I think that being someone that students can admire or aspire to be like is important.

It seems rather presumptuous, however, for Nicole to suggest that her students, simply because they are students in an Urban Priority School, have no one to aspire to. This sentiment speaks to not only her *task perception*, but also her *self-image* as teacher-savior.

Above all else, Nicole believes the job of the teacher is to “care” about their students. She believes students will not learn “anything unless they know their teacher cares about them.” She knows it can be difficult to sustain a sense of caring throughout a career because teachers can learn to “care more” but they can also learn to “care less.” They get “buried in other things and

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other factors and lose sight of [what they] cared about.” In Nicole, one can clearly see a sense of purpose in her work. Ironically, the strong sense of purpose that pushes her to build relationships with her students and care about them as individuals has the opposite effect on her motivation to become a teacher. Her fear of failing her students, of losing the passion behind her purpose, prevents her from enthusiastically joining the teaching ranks—she does not want to become someone whose spark has been extinguished.

5.3.4 Motivation

The fear of burnout is palpable for Nicole. She experienced a significant decrease in the amount of motivation at the end of her first semester of her B.Ed. As with other participants, it was her colleagues to whom she ascribed blame: “I was exhausted by the end of last semester. I needed a break, I needed a break from the people I was surrounded by.” Nicole felt that because she cared deeply about learning and teaching, she was “picked on” by other students who did not share the same level of passion. She noticed this type of attitude not just in the B.Ed., but in her practicum school as well. Teachers who did not want to stay late or go beyond their contractual obligations bullied those who did. This attitude terrifies Nicole and that fear threatens to limit her motivation.

What may sustain Nicole throughout her career of working with youth is a sense of purpose. Nicole’s purpose in becoming a teacher was made quite clear throughout the interview process: she wants to help young people become “better” individuals. Like the other participants, Nicole finds meaning and motivation in what she believes her job to be—her *task perception*. She suggests, “I think that through the various endeavors working with youth and kids I discovered my purpose...and it keeps me going.” She feels validated and subsequently motivated

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as she develops relationships with students. Working from a sense of purpose and being successful in that work creates a positive, motivating feedback loop for Nicole.

What underlies that sense of purpose, however, and what motivates her to work harder to achieve that purpose in each individual is personal and helps to paint a clearer picture of the teacher candidate. For Nicole, although she seemed to reject the notion, I could not help but get the sense that her competitive nature to be better than people's expectations of her plays a significant role in her motivation. Throughout the interviews, she frequently suggested that she thrives off "breaking barriers... proving people wrong." She said she wants to be the one to find success where no else could:

Then it also makes me want to reach out to the students who wouldn't necessarily say hi to me in the hallway and I don't know why, because... I want to be that person that they want to talk to but they don't want to talk to anybody else. I don't know why, because there's just... maybe it's a challenge, or maybe it's like, "Ya, I bridged that connection when everybody else didn't think that they could."

She knows she is "stubborn" and "more likely to do something when someone tells [her] she can't do it," but when asked if she feels competitive with other adults, she disagreed: "It's not competitiveness, it's that I feel like people give up easily on youth and kids and are quick to blame them versus themselves."

At times, Nicole described herself as almost desperate to engage with troubled youth and has taken on a personal responsibility for helping them:

Even if I don't know that student and I know that they're going through a hard time, I still feel somewhat responsible for them, even though I may not even have a relationship with them. And I think that's what makes me good is because I don't stop trying. I'm

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always... I'm always trying to make relationships with youth. Because I almost need to do it.

During the focus group interview, Nicole suggested that being in an Urban Priority School environment had turned her into someone who needs students to “break down” so she can help them. She refuses to rest on laurels and feels unfulfilled thus far in her life:

I think that's a personal struggle of mine because I'm always trying to push myself forward and I always make new goals for myself, and it's like, once I've obtained that goal, it's like, “Okay, that wasn't enough. I need another one.” Instead of just being happy in the moment.

This need to “save” students from their own crises was a persistent theme in Nicole's responses. I cannot help but be concerned that an interest in satisfying this need while denying the professional responsibilities of a teacher or counselor suggests that Nicole's priority may not be so much helping students, but rather in using these students to satiate her own personal need to feel successful or important.

5.3.5 Future Perspective

The specter of burnout looms large over Nicole and shapes her *future perspective*. The threat of becoming that which she loathes—an uncaring teacher—initially pushed Nicole's path through the classroom, leading out to some form of guidance or counselor position. She did not want to be limited by the constraints of the curriculum and felt that she would be able to better serve students if she were in an official counselor position. However, as the interview process developed, even that position seemed to be too restrictive for what Nicole wanted to do. It also contains the pressure of guiding students into the “right” career and life path:

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I feel like a guidance counselor is prevented in some ways to really do that because of the career focus. There's kind of a career component to a guidance counselor where it's like... you have to deal with the students' courses and what not and you know you have to try to guide them towards a career which is what a lot of curriculum is starting to come out with and I don't know if I want to do that because maybe it's more of a fear, I could guide students in the wrong way, into a career that they're not good at, so I would rather allow them to discover their strengths and pick a career themselves and explore those avenues themselves.

School administration is no better: "I think you get really dragged down in the administrative component and lose sight of who you're administrating for." She sees herself, instead, as perhaps working in an "alternative" school where the focus is more on the individual and their personal issues, as opposed to the curriculum. Months after the initial interview process concluded, I received an email from Nicole updating me on her progress and at that moment she was applying to be a supply teacher in a public school board, but she remains committed to her "goal of eventually being able to counsel young people."

Although there is clearly doubt and inconsistency in Nicole's *future perspective*, what remains clear are the values underneath her personal and career choices. She wants to be known and remembered for "the joy and humor I brought to my classrooms and...students [knew] that I cared... and I would really go out of my way for each individual." Nicole describes herself as becoming more "appreciative" of the life and opportunities she has had since becoming a teacher. She is "becoming an individual who is really trying to always see the other person's side of things...appreciating people and being thankful for people."

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The reflective process she engaged in with this research project allowed her to come to a stronger understanding of who she is and what she wants to accomplish with her life:

[It] reinforced how I feel about myself. And kind of, I guess, what I believe in myself I was actually able to put into words which I don't I think I've ever done before, so I think I've learned a lot about myself in that way... [it] helped a lot with helping me to discover the type of person I continue to aspire to be when working with youth.

Although Nicole's path remains to be walked, what she was able to accomplish with this reflective process was a crystallization of not so much *where* she was going, but rather *who* she would be on the journey.



5.4 Catherine

Promises and Miles, As We Know

Her steps are sure, a pace borne of confidence and experience. Her path appears before her not as some dusty snake on an open plain showing her the way, but rather a snow-covered suggestion in a pristine forest. There are no signposts, merely vaguely familiar trees, providing shape and substance to her journey. She is young, but old enough to recognize faces among the trees. They remind her of bygone friends, challenges and opportunities. She finds comfort in this, but knows she cannot linger; promises and miles, as we know. The trees invite her forward and she is ready to move through them. New friends, challenges and opportunities to meet. But first, like any good adventurer worth one's salt, she first checks her tools.

She knows her path will be thick, difficult to trudge through and with a depth she can only begin to imagine, but she is ready. Snowshoes she has designed herself, borne of her personality, dispositions and the skills she has developed. She will walk this path prepared, knowing at times she may sink, but these shoes will carry her on.

She knows what will define her path, and that route is with students, but she is ready—flag tape for boundaries. She builds relationships as she builds her path, but she knows she will never lose her way. These relationships have meaning and the boundaries give them such. She will walk this path prepared, knowing where the lines are drawn.

She knows there is a fire burning already inside her, lighting the way. But she cannot wait while the fire grows itself—so lighter fluid for instant radiance. She needs to see each step she takes and the impact she has. She will walk this path illuminated.

She knows that the further she walks down this path, the stranger the trees will become. However, she carries with her a backpack filled with experiences, each one a caterpillar in a

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cocoon, waiting to emerge when its time is right. She will call these butterflies to her when needed, walking this path prepared.

She knows she will need sustenance as she walks. For now, her belly is full, satiated with past successes. Houses, camps, and classrooms; just a few of the locations in which she has dined. Full of the energy she needs, she is ready to continue forward. She is prepared.

Finally, she knows she needs some semblance of direction on this path. A compass of purpose in her hand; its bearings, goals. The text of each slowly coming into focus now with the arrow strongly pointing to one and many simultaneously: the students, of course, but also society, happiness, engagement, choice. She points herself away from negativity, burnout, selfishness, apathy. She clutches purpose in her hand, prepared.

Looking up to the trees again she smiles, accepting their invitation to move through them. She walks steadily, head held high. Each tree she brushes up against is better for it. Some waking from a long slumber, some rising higher above the tree line. She disappears into the forest and the forest is grateful to have her. The sounds of her steps diminish and drift away, but their imprints do not fade.

Catherine came to her Bachelor of Education and this research study with both significant experience in education and a strong self-efficacy of competency. A child of an educator (a principal, in fact), Catherine presented herself as someone who had entered the profession for the “right” reasons. Among all participants, Catherine had the most highly developed sense of herself as a teacher—at times, perhaps, to a fault.

Catherine left her undergrad and quickly joined a Canadian-based development agency, specializing in community and youth projects. Catherine, stating that she was the youngest hire at the time of her joining the organization, was responsible for the care and education of

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adolescents on a full-time basis, living with students and working with them to develop life skills and coordinating volunteer projects. This experience led Catherine to complete a Masters of Education degree where she explored the long-term impact of curricular outcomes on students' lives. Upon completion, Catherine considered enrolling in a PhD in Education program, but felt that she was more interested in the practice of education and decided instead to begin her Bachelor of Education⁴ in the same school in which she completed her M.Ed.. Catherine stated that during her M.Ed., and in particular a research portion of the degree, she developed a number of relationships with professors and it was my impression that she thought of herself as slightly elevated above the typical student in the B.Ed. due to both these relationships and the M.Ed. degree experience itself.

An avid athlete, coach and outdoors enthusiast, Catherine was heavily involved in her practicum school in a variety of avenues. She became head coach of a major varsity sport, organized and supported leadership camps for students and participated in outdoor education activities like winter camping and snowshoeing. Her capacity to undertake a number of initiatives and maintain a strong program in her classroom was evident throughout our discussions. Catherine placed a heavy emphasis on relationship building with her students and recognizes one teacher of her own who showed her that great teaching can not only *co-exist* with strong relationships between teacher and student, but that these relationships are imperative in becoming a great teacher.

Catherine's participation in the research process was different than the other teacher candidates' in that her experience appeared to be much less emotional. Where other participants

⁴ In Ontario, the Bachelor of Education degree is a professional preparatory program necessary for entry into the Ontario College of Teachers, the certifying body for teachers. The Masters of Education, although typically completed by practicing educators, can be completed by an individual who has not already completed the B.Ed.

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found the reflective and interpretive processes emotionally significant in that they described learning things about themselves through our reflection and finding a deeper sense of commitment to their chosen profession, Catherine's experience seemed more research-oriented. She was happy to help inform my study, but the focus was more on her sharing her experiences and ideas as opposed to learning from the sharing itself. Again, the maturity and self-confidence in her was a consistent theme—she walks into her classroom purposefully, teaches purposefully and is not shy to share the accomplishments she has achieved. Catherine seemed to be forward-focused, ready for the next challenge, pausing only occasionally to consider the moment she was in.

5.4.1 Self-image

Catherine sees herself as a teacher and a very capable one at that. She did not need a Bachelor of Education degree or necessarily any formal teaching experience to think of herself as being capable of being a good teacher, as she recalled that from an early age “lots of people had told me that I would be a good teacher.” Her father had been a teacher and Catherine included this anecdote as supporting rationale for her own entry into the field. When asked why she wanted to become a teacher, Catherine sprinkled the conversation with comments about not only the reasons for her choosing the path of a teacher, but also with brief authentications of that choice:

I definitely tutored a lot of people in university so even when I took first year calculus, I thought it was a breeze and I taught three people the whole course in like three days. And their grades went from like low C's to high B's so I could see an impact there... it felt like a success for everyone involved. [laughs]. Then I definitely spent a lot of time mentoring some of the younger students through some of the programs I was involved in

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and I worked in the athletics department so I was involved in training and supervising, so definitely seeing, I think, learning in other people from skills sets that I had...

Catherine sees herself as a leader in all that she does and one gets the sense that even in a role where she is subordinate to others in both title and responsibility, like a teacher candidate, she refuses to see herself as such.

Catherine is a few years older than many of the other teacher candidates in her program and has filled those years with life experiences. Although she acknowledges that she does have colleagues who have more experience than her, she spent significantly more time speaking about those whom she views as being young and inexperienced, specifically that those colleagues do not have the experience necessary to understand themselves; experience she has:

Like, I definitely feel like I'm sitting, and 'In three years once you've done something other than being an undergrad, you're going to learn so much and then you're going to figure out if this is really the right career path for you or not.' And sometimes I think that I like, have to take myself back and be like, 'Okay, they just haven't had this kind of experience yet.' ...there's definitely people that I feel like sometimes, 'You just need a little bit more experience or, this would be way less nerve racking for you once you've had other experiences', because sometimes I think it's easy.

Although Catherine does not describe herself as feeling like a "grown-up," it is clear she sees herself as more prepared than her classmates for the challenges of teaching.

Catherine believes her greatest strength as a teacher is her ability to form relationships with others. With students, she suggests that she's "not scared to talk to [them]" but she is able to maintain a professional distance:

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I think when they know that they could come to you if they needed something, but they also know there are boundaries. I think that's really important and I think I definitely learned that a lot in past things, just like established a good supportive relationship, but not a friendship.

The distance Catherine has put between herself and the life-stage of her own students allows her to support her students without descending into a relationship where lines of professionalism become blurred. Catherine knows that her role, at some point during the year, is to evaluate her students and in order for that evaluation to be reliable and interpreted appropriately by students, they need to see her as someone whose professional opinions are credible.

Catherine also feels confident in her relationships with other teachers. She describes herself as a teacher who is not afraid to ask others for help and is “pretty good at networking.” She sees herself as someone who may not know “everything” but is “not scared to ask when I have a problem.” Later in the interview process, after Catherine had completed her second practicum, she stated that she had become a resource for a number of the full-time teachers in the school, particularly a first-year teacher struggling with his own lesson planning: “I gave resources to a whole bunch of teachers, I’m still helping a few of the other teachers with things and I want to be a teacher who does that.”

It became clear throughout the interview process that Catherine, beyond any other participant, already understood herself as a teacher. Her self-image was more stabilized in its description and even difficulties she encountered were framed through a lens of mistakes others had made—her second AT, the athletic director at her school, etc. The one moment where the image she had constructed of herself showed frailty was when, reflecting on her second practicum, she stated that she “was waiting for someone to call me out as a fraud...”; a frequent

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concern of new professionals, not just teachers (de Vries, 1990). Although quite established, her self-image, and confidence in that image, are not so cemented that there is no room for self-reflection and *becoming*, but the margins within which that growth may occur appear narrow.

5.4.2 Self-esteem

Where other participants spoke of crises of confidence and self-doubt rather frequently, Catherine, even at her most vulnerable, consistently remarked on her own accomplishments and capacity in the classroom; her success is never in doubt. Confidence born of self-efficacy and experience pervades Catherine's responses to interview questions and although she rarely states that she is a "good" teacher, she injects her responses with enough self-promoting anecdotes that I could not but help believe Catherine feels as if she has arrived.

While often early-career teachers struggle with discipline and classroom management, Catherine stated this was not the case for her: the students "respect me for sure, because I had very few classroom management issues with my students." Catherine believed the challenge lay not in building relationships with her students, but rather in reminding the students that although their relationship with Catherine may be friendly and they may like her, the students would still engage in the required curricular activities, despite their resistance to some tasks.

Where Catherine's self-esteem becomes interesting is in her relationship with the curriculum and content areas she was required to teach. Her first placement was in a subject area where she felt entirely sure of herself: "I think when I'm in [my first practicum] and super comfortable... I feel very, very comfortable with the subject matter and I've done lots of workshops with it for this, so, I think they can tell that I have the knowledge." She finds certain elements of the curriculum elementary and sees herself, at times, as being more of a content expert than her peers:

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I'm in class and our biology teacher will quiz us... and I think that I generally get... have been pretty good at knowing the answer, but I'm surprised by how many of people in the room that can't answer simple science questions. Because I think that stuff sometimes you're like, "I learned it..."

However, the contextual influence on her self-esteem was revealed when she began her second practicum and her AT had an advanced degree in science from a prestigious university and although Catherine believed she "wasn't the best teacher, she has such amazing content knowledge that I always felt on edge around her."

Throughout the concluding interview, Catherine seemed to have lost some of the assuredness she had felt about herself during the initial interviews. She had struggled to hold a sports team together after being thrust into the head-coaching role and she felt "horrible" about some of her teaching. In recounting her frustrations, Catherine frequently chose to highlight how a lack of support or overt interference from some of the other adults in her school had been the source of her frustrations. The Athletic Director left her without guidance, her AT provided little concrete feedback and often put her own needs above Catherine's and other teachers and student teachers in the school were rude, obnoxious and negative towards her.

Catherine, however, stated that she did not "lose confidence" in herself because she "pulled it off"; the "smartest kids" told her that they missed her and Catherine stated that it was not "like the dumb ones that are like, 'Oh, you dumbed it down and are an easier marker.'" Catherine's self-esteem, like others', is constructed from the feedback she receives and the manner in which she interprets that feedback.

Content knowledge and delivery of high level content was a consistent theme in the interpretation of Catherine's self-esteem. When asked what she hoped to improve upon in the

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early stages of her career, Catherine suggested that she felt very comfortable in the urban high school setting, but now was concerned that should she be given a job teaching in a high school with higher-achieving students, she would find teaching higher-level content more difficult. This, to me, suggests that she believed her classroom management and student engagement strategies had developed to the point where she was not concerned, but now merely needed to study and fill her brain with content so that she would be ready to meet all levels of learners.

5.4.3 Task Perception

Catherine's understanding of what her responsibility is as a teacher is clear and well defined. Although she worked in different roles outside of education at different points of her adult life, her focus on working with others for the betterment of society rarely strayed. In her role with community-based project organizations, she felt a strong sense of satisfaction when her students' lives seemed to improve from the lessons she taught. She could see herself making a positive contribution to their lives and they seemed to be happier and better for her involvement. She believes her role, in whatever educational capacity she is located, is to help the individual learn—both content and the process of learning; she wants to be a catalyst for an individual's "growth."

When Catherine became a teacher, the same sense of purpose motivated her, although in our conversations, she seemed to have difficulty expressing exactly what that purpose is:

Andrew: Okay, do you feel like you have a sense of purpose in your work or your life?
And those are two different things, but connected.

Catherine: Ya. Ya. I definitely do. I think that for a long time I've known that I wanted to be an educator and I think I'm just shaping out how that will look and I think that for me now, as opposed to doing something in the educational field, I think that teaching is

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the way that I'm going. But I think that that purpose... the purpose of doing that is getting time with youth. And so, in lots of other contexts where I could have been an educator, I don't think you get enough time with youth to...ya

Andrew: To what?

Catherine: To help. I don't know. To influence in a concrete way, umm... and just because I think there's definitely problems with the system and because students are in the education system for so much of their lives, I would like to be part of that and part of making that better.

At different moments during our discussions, Catherine suggested that she had had teachers that she had disapproved of and in fact had "called out" during her own career as a student;

Catherine's task is to improve the educational experience beyond that of her own experience.

Verbally conceptualizing how she can provide that improved educational experience was difficult for Catherine. Although she knew how she felt about education, describing who she needed to *be* for her students was a challenge. She wants teachers to be "true" to themselves, which to her means

not letting the stress or the time that it takes to make something honest while you're doing it, that to leave... and if you're in... if you're true to yourself you're being honest with your students, open, obviously, but still professional and you're connecting to things that... the subject matter to things that connect for you, as well.

Describing *who* and *how* someone needs to be to achieve a particular outcome is no easy task for Catherine due to the ineffability of the topic. She believes she enrolled in teachers college to "become" and she feels a "personal responsibility" to the students she will encounter in her career. However, what these purposes look like in practice is not entirely clear for Catherine.

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5.4.4 Motivation

Like other participants, Catherine's motivation to teach waxed and waned depending on the context she currently found herself in. As a student in the B.Ed. program, Catherine reported decreased levels of motivation because of the attitudes and behaviors of her colleagues in her classes:

I feel like there are a lot of students that aren't taking advantage of what's being given and a lot of people take the process for granted, so, ya... I feel like sometimes I slip into the like, stereotype, and I feel like sometimes the people around me help me to do that.

Catherine, although wanting to have a positive outlook on the coursework she must engage in to become a teacher, must consciously resist descending into an apathetic frame of mind. Among both peers and more senior teachers in her practicum school, Catherine struggled to maintain her motivation and values. She puts the varying levels of motivation and engagement she sees in others in perspective, knowing that age, seniority, and experience are not the sole determinants of motivation. Her confidence in herself, however, is a sustaining factor. She is not so much afraid of becoming unmotivated, but rather afraid that she will be "the only one" engaged in her school.

Catherine's positive motivation is derived primarily from the interactions she has with her students. She spoke frequently of the moments she would receive feedback from a student about how she had motivated the student to take on a new challenge, or how a student felt that their class was not the same since Catherine had left. Student engagement and the relationships Catherine developed with her students motivated her to work diligently at creating new and interesting lesson plans:

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I like testing out lessons. I like seeing if they work, I like hearing from students that they've actually accomplished something or figured something out or help them click, even if that's at lunch or after school and I like when I like when I have stuff planned, seeing how it turns out...

Catherine suggested that her students did not realize how much of “guinea pigs” they were for her lesson planning and creativity. Although largely focused on student learning and success, Catherine’s motivation in her teaching also appears to contain a slightly egocentric element—she wants to be a good teacher not only for her students, but because it feels good to be good.

Underlying the positive and negative motivations Catherine feels to teach is a sense of responsibility she feels towards society in general. She worries for future generations and wants to make a positive impact on today’s youth so that they will be able to live and participate in a sustainable world. She believes teachers need to show the youth of today what will happen if we keep “treating the world the way we’re treating it.” Catherine, as in other instances, struggled to articulate exactly what she wants to help improve in society, but stated that if “we’re all horrible teachers...[we’ll] just produce a whole bunch of... I don’t know.” She feels motivated by a “sense of responsibility for society [because], if they’re going to pay me to do this, then I should be doing a good job...as best I can.”

5.4.5 Future Perspective

Catherine sees herself becoming a “good teacher. Someone who is supportive of my students.” The theme of support is a prevalent one throughout Catherine’s discussion of her future perspective. When asked what she hoped students would say about her at the end of her career, she paused for quite some time before responding: “I think I hope they say I was supportive.”

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She would like to be known for having taught her students “something,” but stated that her primary focus is on the interpersonal relationships she has and will continue to develop.

Early in our conversations, Catherine spoke of how her father, a retired teacher, continues to have former students approach him in public and comment on what he taught them. Having a retired educator in the family has given Catherine perspective on the length and breadth of a teaching career, and what it can look like at its conclusion. Because of her upbringing, Catherine has had more opportunity than others for taking a long view of her teaching career. Unlike other participants, she does not see herself projected towards school or system administration. Early on she saw the role of the principal as one that distances the individual from the best parts of teaching—the relationships with the students:

I just don't see the time... like, enough of the time being allocated to being around students. And I think that unfortunately, so much of the time gets spent on administrative tasks that you don't have the same connection to students and you're not able... maybe for those very few students that are hugely at risk, you can definitely help them. But I don't know that you get enough time.

Instead, Catherine sees herself as a department head—someone who is able to maintain their own teaching while acting as a support for other teachers. In our discussions, Catherine already seemed to enjoy a supporting role and spoke about the help she had provided a new teacher in her department.

Although confident, self-aware and purposeful, Catherine is not without doubt and fear about the future. She looks at a former teacher of hers, one who served as mentor and motivation for Catherine's own career path and she sees a man who is not what she remembers. His focus has shifted to his own growing family and he told Catherine that he simply does not have the

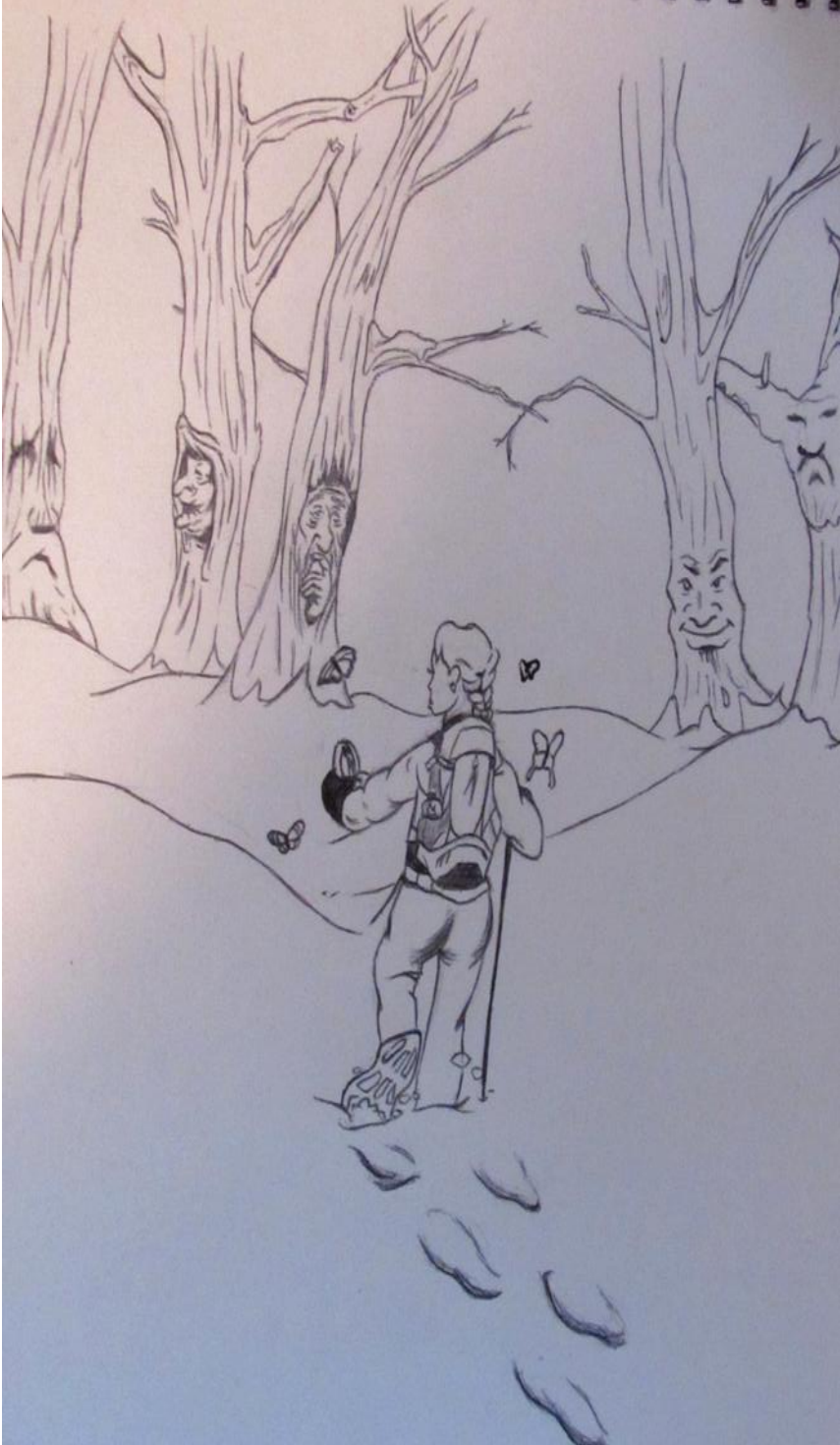
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time or energy to be as involved in the school as he did when he was young. Catherine fears this path:

I'm also very reflective on the idea that later in my teaching career I'm going to be a different person I think and not wanting to change so much that I lose sight of the things that I value now, because I think I see a lot of teachers that start out with one goal and then closer to the end, just like, 'Well, there's only a few... a few years left. I'm just going to let it all go.' So I hope I don't lose sight of my values and my goals now as I get further in.

Amidst the fear, however, remains Catherine's confidence. She believes she will not become "stagnant" as a teacher because of her openness to learning and professional development. She sees stagnation manifest itself in schools through teachers' attitudes towards their own learning and professional development. Catherine believes, however, that it is the perspective one takes on professional learning that is essential to one's own sustained positivity and growth—although confident, she believes she can always improve and she has no intention of settling when there are always more students to support.

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Chapter 6: One Interpretation, Many Paths Ahead

Oftentimes researchers will state that certain themes *emerged* from the presentation of findings. I acknowledge here that the themes I identify and discuss below most likely *emerged* because I went looking for them; because I *called* them to me. The nature of the phenomenological approach I took—hermeneutic and existential—concedes that there can be no separation between the *knower* and the *known*. Who the person *is* that is doing the interpretation influences what that person *sees*. It is my experience as a teacher, a school administrator, a Bachelor of Education professor, practicum supervisor and as a historical *person* that brings forth the “emergent” themes and casts them into the light. It is with my own existential understandings that I meet the participants and therefore, any other researcher with the same information in front of them may *see* themes differently. Indeed if I were to re-visit these transcripts in a number of years, I might marvel at what I missed or how I interpreted particular responses. Even the questions I asked, how and when I asked what I did and perhaps even when I nodded in agreement all had an impact on the responses provided by the participants. I did not ask my participants to merely speak, to tell me what they thought; I nudged and prodded them down their paths. When I asked them what they cared about, I implied to them they *should* care. When I asked what they believed made for an authentic learning experience, I suggested that they should examine how they saw themselves as both individuals and as teachers. The following discussion describes *emergent* themes and their implications, but the reader should not forget that these themes emerged because *I* beckoned them into the light.

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6.1 Becoming, existential themes unconcealed and implications

If “being” is “becoming,” as Sartre (1988) suggests, to understand the participants’ *becoming*, one can approximate, through interpretation of interview responses and reflective journals, participants’ understandings of their own “being.” Kelchtermans’s (2009) framework provided the interpretive lens to address the individuals’ sense of themselves as teachers through *professional self-understanding*, but classification of responses alone would not suffice if I was to get a clearer picture of the path of *becoming* the individual teacher candidate was walking.

As I moved through the data analysis, categorizing various statements into the components of the framework, I began to notice that different notions of being would appear in the research conversations and would strike me as particularly informative. Frequently these existential ideas would be hinted at or tangentially expressed and it was only through a hermeneutic moving back and forth between the individual responses and my broader sense of the teacher candidates that the existential themes I discuss below—*becoming*, fear, responsibility, authenticity, the self and purpose—came into relief. For each theme, I discuss how intersecting components of Kelchtermans’s framework provided the space for the existential theme to emerge and the nature of that theme as presented by the participants. I conclude each thematic analysis with a discussion of what the implications of my findings could be for future teachers candidates and the Bachelor of Education schools in which they are enrolled.

6.1.1 *Becoming*

Existentialists consider *becoming* to be both a characteristic of being as well as a process in which an individual recognizes their “unfinishedness” (Friere, 2000, p. 84). This study sought to make sense of teacher candidates’ understanding of their own *becoming* as they moved from their Bachelor of Education program into their formal teaching careers. The participants in this

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study, through their responses in our conversations, revealed their sense of *becoming* either through explicit discussion or through my interpretation of their responses.

It was in the space between Kelchtermans's *self-image* and *future perspective* elements where the participants' understanding of their *becoming* was made most obvious. The participants, through the reflective process, described a sense of themselves as both a person and teacher, and then, with my assistance, imagined who they were *becoming* as they entered their teaching career. One could almost see the distance between their current and ideal sense of themselves and the micro-narrative and imagery I created for the students helped them to gauge and understand the path they travelled towards their future perspective horizons.

My analysis of the participants' responses consistently revealed the influence of *others* on the teacher candidate's sense of *becoming*. Each participant, as will be discussed in more depth in section 6.1.5, used their peers, other teachers and their ATs to describe their *self-image* and *future perspective*. It was most often the AT who the participants measured themselves against, highlighting both their own deficiencies and strengths in comparison to their AT. How they saw themselves and their opinions of the proficiency of their AT gave them both an understanding of who they were as a teacher and what they could aspire to (not) be like in the future. It was the AT who created the space for an understanding of the teacher candidate's *becoming*, but I am left to wonder if any AT understood or acknowledged the existential impact they had.

Reflecting on the interview responses, it became clear that three of the participants—Nicole, Heather and Robert—were more engaged in and aware of their own *becoming* than the fourth participant, Catherine. These three all, to me, seemed to more “wide-awake” (Greene, 1977) than Catherine, more willing to acknowledge elements of their personality and being which they wanted to improve upon. Nicole, although seemingly focused solely on trying to

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guide her students without remaining within the professional confines of being a teacher, acknowledged that she believed she was becoming more considerate of others, pausing to think about alternative perspectives instead of being dismissive of others. Robert, too, believed as he became a teacher he was becoming more empathetic, more patient with others and happier with himself because of this *becoming*. Heather found herself embarrassed of her past behaviors, believing teaching was helping her to *become* the best version of herself, a person her students could look up to. Catherine, on the other hand, merely suggested that the only thing that remained for her to improve upon was content knowledge and becoming more comfortable teaching in more suburban contexts. The difference in the type of “becoming a teacher” the participants engaged with reflected Mayer’s (1999) dichotomy of teacher education addressed in Chapter 2: learning to teach can be either learning the tools to *be* a teacher or developing a sense of oneself as you *become* a teacher. The first three’s engagement with their own existential understandings of themselves seemed to help them walk along their path, while Catherine almost appeared to believe herself “arrived,” suggesting she needed only more variety of experience to complete her preparation.

What is also interesting to note is that throughout the research process, I always felt that Nicole, Heather and Robert were the three most emotionally engaged in our conversations. They expressed emotion, self-doubt and passion when discussing both practical and philosophical ideas, where Catherine seemed to be simply sharing her understanding with me, not expecting anything back. My suspicions were further validated when the three earnest individuals all followed up with me via email weeks and months after the conclusion of the formal interviews, sharing new ideas and perspectives, as well as further thoughts on the value of the reflective process. These emotional commitments to the reflection process suggest that the personhood of

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these three was more “at stake” during their teacher education than perhaps Catherine’s was (Kelchtermans, 2005; Nias, 2006).

How the teacher candidate understands their process of *becoming* a teacher is inextricably linked and can be hermeneutically interpreted with who they see themselves *becoming* as a person. Nicole, Heather and Robert all spoke of the personal growth they have experienced as they moved through the B.Ed., their practicums and our reflective conversations and how that personal growth impacted their professional lives. One cannot be in a state of *becoming* personally and not professionally, and vice versa. It is the teacher candidates’ entire *being* that is at issue in *becoming* and lessons learned in one context become situated and manifest in another. As Heather, for example, began to filter the type of language she used with her students, so did she also change the way she spoke and interacted with old friends; she could not take something with her without leaving something behind.

The role I played in the participants’ *becoming* is certainly open to interpretation, but I imagine that providing the micro narrative and image helped to shape their self-understanding in some way. Elements of their life I chose to focus on and highlight brought certain aspects of their character into relief and, in some cases, also shrouded and suppressed other self-understandings. In each case, the aesthetic expressions I supplied were idealistic interpretations of the participants’ *becoming*; I was loathe to critique or criticize and it is possible I did the participants a disservice by presenting an overly positive description of their path.

The implications of these findings can be addressed to both Bachelor of Education programs as well as any organization or program inducting new teachers into their profession. The most important lesson I took and can offer is this: “something” *happens* to teacher candidates as they *become* and become a teacher (Britzman, 2003). What that *happening* is, is

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personal, impactful on professional practice and can be understood as a manifestation of their *becoming*. B.Ed. programs and new teacher mentors must acknowledge that the act of becoming a teacher is emotional, personal and existential while also requiring of the new teacher significant efforts to acquire the contextual and practical knowledge of their new profession. Although a number of mentorship programs exist that address the emotional needs of new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003), there are few that address existential notions of the new teacher's *becoming*. These programs could move beyond providing emotional support and instead could encourage reflective practices where the new teacher's experiences are examined with an attunement to their *becoming*; something is *happening*, regardless of whether or not that happening is intentionally addressed, and providing opportunities for the teacher candidates to engage with the emotional component of becoming a teacher may help to sustain the new teachers in their careers.

Also, in recognizing the influence of the AT and other teachers on the teacher candidates' understanding of *becoming*, I believe B.Ed. programs should consider preparing ATs for the existential impact they will have on their teacher candidates. This could be accomplished through a combination of reading, discussions/in-services with B.Ed. professors and utilization of specific reflective practices in order to guide lesson and program debriefings. Training ATs to help their teacher candidates work through Korthagen's (2013) onion model, for example, could provide a tool for important reflective practices. These preparatory activities may also contribute to the ATs own self-understanding, providing a positive feedback loop of reflection and support into which the teacher candidate will enter.

6.1.2 Authenticity

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As suggested in the literature review, the concept of authenticity is one that requires unpacking before it can be employed in a thematic analysis. In the preceding review, I considered a number of definitions of “authenticity,” highlighting work that had been done to create a coherent understanding of the term, particularly how it has been employed in the field of education. Vu and Dall’Alba’s (2011, p. 96) definition of authenticity in learning—“a quality of educational processes that engage students in becoming more fully human”—provided an initial impetus for this study, but ultimately became wanting as I explored different notions of *becoming* with the participants. Upon review of the data, it was instead Kreber, McCune & Klampfleitner’s (2010) six dimensions of authenticity (See Appendix A) that became the more appropriate lens with which to understand the participants’ responses.

When asked to consider what the concept of authenticity meant to them, the participants typically responded with notions of being “honest,” “sincere” and “real,” speaking to Kreber et al.’s dimension A, which included understanding authenticity through those elements.

Descriptions such as those only become existential understandings when interrogated more deeply—what does it mean to be honest? Sincere? Real? The participants all struggled to conceptualize what they meant by these platitudes.

The participants spoke more enthusiastically and concretely when they addressed the core notion of Kreber et al.’s dimension E: *care*. When discussing why they chose to become a teacher, the participants all discussed a depth of caring for the students, either as individual students or as those students as a collective future society. The participants spoke of “wanting to make a difference” wanting to work towards “bettering” the lives of their students, both academically and personally. Kelchtermans’s (2010) *professional self-understanding* components of *task perception* and *motivation* provided the space in which the students

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described what they cared about. Each participant described this caring in their own way: Catherine cared about keeping “at-risk students in school”; Heather and Nicole both wanted to help students become “better” individuals and Robert wanted to make students’ lives “a little less shitty.” All these cares fall within the scope of helping and supporting students live happier, more pro-social lives.

Examining the participants’ understanding of the concept of authenticity and its manifestation in their teaching from a more existential position provided connections back to both Kreber et al.’s (2010) framework as well as Heidegger (1953/2010) and Brook’s (2009) interpretation of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity. Kreber et al.’s dimension B describes authenticity as “being true to oneself (...in a Heideggerian sense)”; Kelchtermans’s *self-image* helps to shed light on who the participants see themselves to be. Authenticity, in this dimension, suggests consistency or congruency among the participants’ beliefs, behaviors and their reflection on their actions as a whole, echoing multiple layers of Korthagen’s onion model.

Each participant was very capable of describing themselves both as a person and as a teacher, but it was Heather and Robert who described an engagement with the Heideggerian notion of authenticity in the most interesting ways—that of tension with oneself. Robert was able to closely track the changing sense of self and authenticity through his experiences with his two vastly different ATs and upon reflection, he did not like who he was while teaching in his first practicum. During interviews reflecting on his second practicum Robert suggested that he felt more “himself” and that he liked himself more now that he was working in an environment where his values were more closely aligned with those of his supervisor. Able to engage in the teaching process in a way that felt consistent with his beliefs, Robert described himself as “happier,” more “upbeat” and excited to “light some fires” in his students.

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Heather, the most emotionally engaged of the participants, frequently sent follow-up emails after our discussions and in one such email months after our last conversation, she described teaching as providing her the opportunity to be the best version of herself, and she did not particularly like who she had become while working in a coffee shop. She reflected on her own behavior as inconsistent with who she wanted to be and how she believed her students perceived her as a teacher. She felt unhappy and frustrated when she was not in the classroom and longed to return to the place where she felt she was able to manifest her “true” self more readily. This tension between how the participants understand themselves and their perceived best “selves” provides an opportune space for examination of a teacher candidate’s existential understanding of both who they want to be as a teacher and *how* they can *become* that teacher. For Robert, he needed an AT who demonstrated the values and behaviors he hoped to see in himself; for Heather, she merely needed the opportunity to manifest her passions for students and teaching.

Most pertinent to this study, however, is Kreber et al.’s dimension F: authenticity as a “process of becoming sustained through critical reflection on core beliefs and premises.” The importance of core beliefs, highlighted additionally by Korthagen (2013), was addressed primarily through Kelchtermans’s components of *self-image* and *task perception*; “the process of becoming” primarily through *future perspective* conversations. The connection between these components is of vital importance to understanding the existential nature of the professional path the participants are on. The micro-narratives and images created for each participant helped to provide some sense of that understanding for both me and the participants. The differences among who the participant sees themselves as now, what they believe their purpose in teaching is and who they project themselves to be in the future provides the space in which the reflective

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process can take hold and contribute to positive change in the individual. Understanding the differences among these components, however, requires the researcher to acknowledge and work from an understanding of authenticity as that “process of becoming,” where the participant’s professional self-understanding is never complete, or final, and that they are always walking towards some horizon of self-understanding that they may project themselves towards, but never meet. Teacher education programs frequently provide opportunities for self-reflection for teacher candidates, but rarely consider the importance of existential understandings within that reflective process. Kreber et al.’s notion of authenticity as an act of *becoming* can offer students the opportunity for a deeper, perhaps more meaningful reflective process. Teacher candidates could be encouraged—harkening back to autobiographical work of Grumet and Pinar—to undertake exercises in which they create an autobiography in order to both see the paths they have walked which have led them to this point and acknowledge the process of *becoming* in which they have been engaged for their entire existence. Autobiographical exercises such as a “life path” or “river of experience” have been developed in teacher education by Tripp (1994) and Pope and Denicolo (2001) and is “essential” for teacher development (Korthagen, 2004).

Teacher education programs could also focus on the importance of the role *caring* plays in the teacher’s practice and provide educational opportunities in which what the teacher candidate cares about can be examined and actualized through practice. Noddings (2013) suggests that teacher caring, falling within the field of moral education, is a skill which can be implemented and practiced in a purposeful way. She states that caring can be practiced by teachers modeling caring, dialoguing with students about what their lives are like and what they hope to achieve in their schooling, providing students with opportunities to practice caring, and then confirming the personhood of the student in order to “bring out the best in him or her” (p.

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122). Educating teacher candidates within and about a model of caring can help them move beyond the mere emotion of caring and channel this sense of purpose in their work in a structured, actionable way.

6.1.3 Fear

Fear is a curious emotion: it can be the defining element of a present moment just as it can be a vague specter, looming over some general sense of the future. It can be a powerful motivator, a call to action, just as it can be a debilitating force, cementing one's feet to their current position. Regardless of its manifestation, it is a fundamental existential experience and authors from Kierkegaard to Dostoyevsky have weighed in on its impact and role in an individual's existence. *Fear* was a significant theme throughout the research process as the participants expressed self-doubt, anxiety about the future and concern for their *becoming*.

The theme of *fear* was most prevalent in the *professional self-understanding* components of *future perspective* and *motivation*. When I asked the participants questions around *why* they wanted to become a teacher or what made them work hard to succeed in the face of adversity—"what motivates you?"—the dominant response was, "I want to make a difference." What became clear, however, as I moved them towards imagining their lifelong careers through a future perspective, was that they were afraid they would lose that motivation and *become* someone they would not be proud of. This fear manifested itself in their imaginations in a variety of ways.

Each participant described their experiences with a mentor teacher, someone they had as a teacher who inspired them to become a teacher themselves. This teacher, for each of them, provided a future perspective on who they wanted to *become*, but in some cases, this future perspective was a source of not only inspiration, but fear. Catherine, most explicitly, stated that

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she had encountered her teacher-mentor again recently and he seemed to not be the teacher she remembered. He seemed tired and less involved in the school, a fact the teacher-mentor himself acknowledged. Catherine then described fearing that if her hero could fall so easily, what would that mean for her? Would she succumb to the same fate? Catherine, in her customary self-confidence, however, quickly shifted her thinking not to her own failure, but rather a fear of whether or not she would be the only teacher in the school that actually cared. Robert and Nicole, however, both expressed significant concerns about their own potential for burnout after seeing it in other teachers. Each worried that the cost of caring and “making a difference” would be too high for them to pay over the length of their career without significant consequence to their level of motivation. This sense of fear is not isolated to these participants. It can often be a defining characteristic of new teachers in urban contexts (DiBara, 2007).

Heather’s fear, however, was not that she would not be able to sustain her level of caring, but rather whether or not she could actually *make* the difference she wanted. At times, she wondered aloud: “What if I just *can’t*?” Heather sees her past failures, particularly in her first practicum as harbingers and is afraid that no matter how much she cares, it will not be enough.

It was in moments when participants were asked where they saw themselves moving in their career that they began to discuss the concerns they had about *who* they would become as a teacher; it was the *future perspective*, framed in their own minds as *becoming*, which provided the gateway to understanding the participants’ fears. However, a number of the participants, particularly Robert, acknowledged our research process as having a positive impact on his fears. He believed that imagining where he would go in his career and *who* he might *become* may help prepare him for the difficulties that lay ahead. In particular, he discussed the importance of the reflection being a one-on-one conversation, rather than simply writing a reflection for a professor

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to read. Teacher education programs, recognizing the importance of existential fulfillment as a preventative measure against teacher burnout (Tomic & Tomic, 2008), therefore, may choose to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to identify, describe and consider the fears they have as they become a teacher, over and above the typical “fear of not having a job.” Instead, the reflective process should consider how the candidate’s fears shape their existential self-understanding and professional identities. Guided, one-on-one reflective conversations could create the space in which the teacher candidate can examine their fears and begin to develop strategies that may contribute to sustaining motivation throughout their careers.

6.1.4 Responsibility

In the course of discussing with the participants their *task perception*—what they see as their “job” as a teacher—we explored the notion of *responsibility*. I was searching for a way to consider whether or not the candidates felt their job was more than simply curriculum delivery and more akin to what Huebner (1999) describes as a “vocation.” When I explicitly asked if they believed teaching was a “job” or a “calling,” in much the way service and caring professions are perceived, the candidates suggested teaching was a “calling,” but were unable to express what it meant for their profession to be such. Instead, the existential understanding of a “calling” emerged when we discussed to whom or what they felt *responsible*. Responsibility, from an existential perspective, is an acknowledgement that when “one chooses, they choose for all [individuals]” (Sartre, 1988); life becomes meaningful when a purpose greater than oneself is chosen and worked towards. It was through conversations around responsibility that their task perception took on an existential meaning—they described what they believed was their job as a teacher in terms of what *others* deserved or required. The meaning inherent in an existential understanding of responsibility seemed to give new life to our discussions, providing me with a

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sense of the importance of this type of understanding as it contributes to the participants' motivation; the more responsible the participants felt, the more motivated they described themselves in their efforts to achieve their task perception, echoing Frankl's (1959) notions of meaning, existential purpose and motivation.

The participants described a variety of groups to whom they believed they were responsible. Each participant suggested that they were responsible to the students in their classes. Where the participants were working in an urban priority school environment, many of them suggested that it was their responsibility to meet the "social and emotional" needs of the students, even if that meant it was at the expense of the students' academic needs. The source of that sense of responsibility was not always clear in our discussions, except in the case of Heather, who believed she "owed" it to the students to try to help them transcend their current situation because of the help she had received in her youth.

All four participants, at various times throughout the interview process, described different students with whom they had developed relationships during the course of their B.Ed. In each instance, there was an ineffable sense of responsibility to these students, most potently felt when a participant would describe how they believed they had "failed" a student. For example, Robert spoke of a student who had previously participated in his extra-curricular club, but became distant and eventually took their own life. Robert's sense of responsibility to that particular student was palpable. Other participants suggested that when they were able to get to know students on a personal level, they became more active in the pursuit of the student's success.

Along with responsibility to individual students, Catherine suggested that she felt responsible to "society" in general because she was being paid to perform a job and therefore

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needed to do it well. She believed that it was her responsibility to educate her students and if she was unsuccessful in that task, future generations would suffer—granted, Catherine only spoke vaguely about what the consequences of her and others’ failures might mean (e.g. environmental degradation).

As stated previously, just as important as what was mentioned by the participants is what was *not*. When considering their responses to existential themes, it was particularly noteworthy that no participant acknowledged a responsibility to themselves. They were directed to goals and purposes that they felt connected to, but did not consider their own historicity and a responsibility to the achievements, failures and efforts they had put forth to that point of their life. Greene (1977) would suggest that a failure to recognize their own subjectivity and subsequent responsibility would be a failure to recognize the nature of their very existence.

The participants also did not acknowledge a responsibility to their university professors and Associate Teachers. Indeed, some participants made it explicit that they did not feel responsible to these two groups, even when asked specifically. Although one might surmise that both ATs and professors would suggest that they feel responsible to their teacher candidates, the sentiments were not necessarily reciprocated with this group of participants.

Assuming that motivation can come from a sense of responsibility to individual students, Bachelor of Education programs may want to consider providing opportunities for teacher candidates to develop professional, yet personal relationships with individual students in their placement schools in order to enhance interpersonal connections and a subsequent sense of responsibility. This could be achieved through formal assignments that require the teacher candidate to interview a K-12 student in order to learn more about that student and to get a better sense of the path that student has taken to this point of their life.

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Secondly, it is important for B.Ed. programs to acknowledge the potential disconnect between teacher candidates and their associate teachers or professors. An acknowledgement of the ATs and their own humanity, in particular, may be of vital importance due to the particular influence ATs appear to have on the ways in which the teacher candidates understand themselves as professionals (as well be seen below in sections 6.1.5 and 6.1.6). Although reflective interviews are no panacea to all issues of responsibility, exercises similar to the student-interviews mentioned above may provide an opportunity for the teacher candidates to come to know their AT.

6.1.5 The Self

The reflective process the participants engaged in during this research study provided a number of opportunities for the teacher candidates to examine, in a dialectical manner, who they are as a person, who they are as a teacher, and how those identities converge and become disparate through their Bachelor of Education program. Whether one chooses to employ the term “identity” or, as Kelchtermans would prefer, *professional self-understanding*, there is a clear sense of Britzman’s contention that something is “happening” to the teacher candidates as they move through their education. The “self” of the participants is in its state of *becoming* and Kelchtermans’s components of self-image and self-esteem provide frames with which to come to understand that *becoming*; self-image describes how they see themselves as people and teachers, while self-esteem adjudicates that self-image, confirming positively held self-beliefs, while opening up spaces for growth in areas where the participant feels they have a deficit. From an existential standpoint, these two components, although explicitly addressing the *self*, do not fully encompass the identity of the teacher. *Who* the teacher is is not confined to how they see

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themselves, but also their intentions and their understandings of their role in some larger purpose.

Upon consideration of the data, what becomes abundantly clear is that any identity or self-understanding the teacher may have exists and develops within their dialectical engagement with the world: with peers, with ATs, and with students; in short: with *others*.

The initial interviews for this study took place near the end of an eight-month B.Ed. program and it was clear that each of the candidates had grown frustrated with at least one unnamed colleague in the program, but often those frustrations extended to a group of students sharing similar characteristics. For Nicole, she was tired of those students who she believed “picked on” her because she was a strong female, unafraid to share her opinions. Catherine found some of her classmates to be immature, while both Robert and Heather stated that some of their colleagues simply did not care as much as they felt they did.

The participants’ experiences with different ATs also opened spaces for the particular self-understandings to crystallize. Some experiences, like Robert and Heather’s with their first ATs, made the participants question their self-efficacy and future perspectives. Catherine found herself lacking in confidence because her second AT had more content knowledge than she and contrasted herself with the AT, suggesting that although her mentor teacher had more content knowledge, her classroom management and pedagogical skills were beneath those of Catherine’s.

Both Nicole and Heather experienced a similar frustration with their ATs, which sheds light on the development of the *self* as a teacher. Each teacher candidate had wanted students to call them by the last name initial (e.g. Ms. P., as opposed to Ms. Pearce). Each participant had one of their two ATs insist that they be addressed by their full last name. This demand caused a

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significant level of frustration in the participants—they frequently cited this example as a source of conflict in their professional lives and both stated that when allowed to go by the name of their choosing, they felt “free” and more relaxed in the classroom.

With each experience, either with colleagues or supervisory teachers, the participants used these individuals to describe who they *are not* in support of who they *are*. These definitions- through-contrasts were prevalent throughout, even at times arising when one participant would hint at their perceptions of another participant. The participants’ future perspectives were even influenced by contrast, with some suggesting that they wanted to become an administrator or senior executive in the school board because they believed they would do things differently (i.e. better).

Upon deeper analysis, another interesting notion emerged: the participants’ descriptions of themselves and how they believed their students perceived them were nearly identical. If, for example, a teacher candidate believed she was a funny person, she suggested that her students saw her as funny. Or, if the teacher candidate believed he was a “relaxed” teacher, he suggested that his students found him “relaxed” and “fun.” There is an obvious origin paradox here as I wonder which came first—the self-perception or the students’ perception. Clearly, however, as the participants began to develop their sense of self and teacher identity, student opinions either directly informed or reinforced the participant’s *self-image*.

The impact of *others* on the teacher candidates’ identity and/or *professional self-understanding* can best be understood as an existential component of that self understanding. When they meet their students, colleagues and supervisors, they make sense of themselves in a relational way, *with* their understanding of these *others*. Bachelor of education programs should be encouraged to expose teacher candidates to different conceptualizations of teacher identity,

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professional self-understanding and philosophical/existential considerations of the *self*. They can also provide explicit opportunities for guided investigation into the construction and understanding of these self-concepts through reflective processes such as journaling and one-on-one guided conversations. I would also suggest that students be educated in self-study (e.g. Bullough, 2004) methodologies in order to encourage them to identify their own teaching practice as a site for inquiry. Whereas the “self” and the teacher’s identity will be at issue throughout the teacher’s career, formal exposure to the methodology of self-study may help to prepare new teachers to consistently examine their own beliefs and behaviors as they relate to the overall mission of their teaching (Korthagen, 2013).

6.1.6 Purpose

The most prevalent theme that emerged during my analysis was one that seemed inescapable from the first moment I commenced this research project. Regardless of the topic of conversation of the day, the notion of *purpose* subsumed each interview. When the participants described themselves as teachers, they spoke about what they wanted to accomplish both in their day-to-day teaching and, more broadly, over the length of their career. When asked to consider their sources of motivation to teach and persist in a difficult job market, they spoke about the need to “make a difference.” Upon reviewing the interview transcripts and the participants’ journals, I could not escape the notion that these teacher candidates were attempting to actualize some existential purpose—they wanted to *do something* (e.g. make a difference) and in order to *do that something*, they needed to *become* someone: a teacher.

Kelchtermans’s professional self-understanding framework provides a misleadingly obvious path to accessing the participants’ sense of purpose: task perception. This component examines what the participant believes to be their job. Kelchtermans’s consideration of this

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component, however, does not inherently attend to an existential understanding of what the participant believes to be *their* (i.e. individual, unique) purpose in teaching and how that sense of purpose provides both meaning and motivation in their life. This existential understanding of purpose emerges when one steps back to consider not just what the participant believes is their *job*, but also how those tasks connect with who the participant believes they are (self-image), how motivated they are to complete the tasks (motivation), how that sense of purpose provides a “horizon of significance” (Taylor, 1991) for their future (future perspective) and the self-efficacy they have in their abilities to complete the tasks (self-esteem). The theme of *purpose* requires an existential lens because it is the entirety of the teacher candidate’s existence which is addressed.

Each participant suggested that, in general, their purpose in teaching was to “improve” (Catherine) the conditions in which their students existed so that those students could become “better” (Nicole) or have a “better” (Heather and Robert) life. Throughout our conversations I attempted to drill down into these notions of “better” and “improved,” but when asked to elaborate on what they meant, participants frequently provided synonyms rather than explanation: “help them grow,” help students become “complete individuals,” to “influence youth in a positive way”; these platitudes do little to describe a defined sense of purpose. Robert and Catherine were both earnest in their sense of purpose, but had not yet developed a depth of understanding where they would speak directly to the specific outcomes they hoped to achieve without being prompted. This is perhaps best evidenced by Robert’s comment that he wanted to “make school a little less shitty” for his students. Although this is a positive sentiment, it certainly lacks definition. They are, however, still actualizing some existential purpose, ill-defined though it may be. As Wirth (1952) suggests, existentialists do not care so much as to *what* one dedicates themselves to, but rather that that commitment is made at all.

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Where interesting overlap among participant responses occurred during discussions of purpose was in the case of both Heather and Nicole employing the word “build” when describing what they hoped to accomplish with their teaching. Each was able to select characteristics they hoped to “build” or “instill” in their students. Heather wanted to “build relationships” with her students so that she might “build resiliency” in those individuals. Nicole also described “building resiliency” and helping build students into “strong leaders.” This sense of purpose, described by the verb “build,” suggests a longitudinal process of individual and academic growth in the students. It also reveals some of the ontological and epistemological understandings of the teacher candidates in that they perceive students—particularly the ones in the urban priority settings—from a deficit perspective; these students are lacking in some area and it is the teacher’s responsibility to minimize or eliminate that deficit.

Perhaps most importantly for teacher education programs and teacher candidates is the confirmation of Lasky’s (2005) assertion of teacher candidates’ senses of purpose becoming clearer and more sustainable as they develop in their professional self-understanding. Each teacher candidate’s path of purpose and *becoming* became clearer between practicums as they continued to develop understandings of who they are as a teacher and what they wanted to accomplish with their students. Robert provides the most explicit evidence of this contention after working in his second placement with an AT who showed him what is possible with persistence and dedication to students. He described his progression from practicum one to practicum two as moving from hoping to minimize the number of “fires” in his classroom to lighting some “different [positive] fires” in his student. His focus shifted from negating problems in *his* classroom to engendering growth *others*.

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There are significant implications for teacher education programs as they consider how best to support their teacher candidates on their path of *becoming*. Most interestingly, nearly, if not all teacher education programs in Canada conclude with a final practicum experience. There is no final synthesis or consolidation of learning and students graduate without ever being asked to examine the experience in which they just participated. Universities graduate these teacher candidates at a moment where their understandings are still very fresh and, in many cases, malleable. Upon beginning their teaching career, either as a full-time or supply teacher, these teacher candidates are focused on survival and success in the classroom, not the professional self-understandings that help to precipitate that success. Each participant in this study suggested they were grateful for the opportunity to speak about their second practicum experience and to have time and space to consider the path they had just walked and the path that now lies before them.

It follows then that teacher education program should consider embedding a concluding reflective practice after the completion of the final practicum experience such as an exit conversation with a professor, practicum supervisor or a research assistant experienced in reflective processes—someone outside of the practicum placement itself (i.e. not the AT or school principal to ensure freedom of expression). This reflective practice may include the development of a “life path” (Tripp, 1994) where the teacher candidate outlines both the path they took to become a teacher and a projection of where (and who) they see themselves in the next number of years. As an alternative, the practice could be framed as an exploration of Kelchtermans’s *professional self-understanding* framework with an attunement to the existential themes examined above. Regardless of the form, it is crucial to provide teacher candidates with

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the opportunity to examine their journey of *becoming* a teacher as it is a process with which they remain engaged for the length of their career.

6.2 Areas for future study

If this research study was successful in its intent, the reader should, at this point, have a number of questions in their mind. The presentation of elements from Kelchtermans's framework, the images or the micro-narratives, ideally, would have evoked some emotional or cognitive response in the reader, harkening them back to similar experiences they may have had in their own *becoming*, whether it be as a teacher or human being. The potential areas for future study are limited only by the imagination of those who will come after me. In my mind, however, there are three significant questions I am personally left with.

It is clear from the participants' feedback regarding this research study that the reflective process they engaged in was valuable to them in some form. Whether it was because they had challenged their own existing understandings during our conversations or because they considered new notions about their practice after this study had concluded, each participant suggested that they believed all students would benefit from participation in this style of reflective process. Future studies could address the value of such one-on-one, existential reflection activities from a number of epistemological positions. Some scholars may want to duplicate the process and consider students outside of a cohort-based system and determine whether or not similar themes emerge and how those themes impact the teacher candidate's practice (noting, however, that the interpretive process does attempt to validate or invalidate studies through verification heuristics such as reproducibility). Others, working from a more post-positivist position, may choose to undertake a study that seeks to determine specifically *what* the reflective process impacts. For example, teacher candidates who engage in an

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existential reflective process throughout their Bachelor of Education degree may score higher on measurements of self-awareness or empathy. If, as my participants suggest, there is *value* in this type of process, future scholars may consider the nature of that value.

Second, a major theme of this study was the influence the participants' ATs had on both Kelchtermans's *professional self-understanding* components as well as existential notions of self-understanding. Areas of future study, in my mind, should take up and consider the impact of ATs on the existential understandings of teacher candidates, particularly around the notion of *becoming*. The AT plays a crucial role during the teacher candidate's induction period and the teacher candidate begins to develop their professional identity through, among other vehicles, comparison and contrast of themselves with their AT. How the AT addresses (or, as may be the case, does not address) existential notions with their teacher candidates may provide insight into the teacher candidates' existential understandings.

Third—I hesitate to use “finally”—consideration should be given to the role of the cohort model in which the participants of this study engaged. There were clear instances throughout the interview process where all members, but particularly Nicole and Heather, suggested that the students learning in the urban priority environment needed their help in order to become “better.” Nicole, for example, suggested that many of these students had no positive role models in their lives and Heather stated that she wanted to “save” students from inferior teachers. The language they used and the attitudes they displayed suggested, to me, that they brought a mentality of *deficit* to their understanding of students in this context. Although I believe these participants brought with them epistemological and ontological prejudices into their program, I wonder what role membership in an “urban education” cohort played as they engaged in their process of *becoming*. The word “urban,” for example, carries with it historically-constructed imagery and a

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teacher candidate applying for a cohort addressed to “urban” learners are choosing this context with their own interpretation of the word in mind. As the use of the cohort model increases, particularly in this university’s context, future studies could address themselves to how participation in the cohort influences teacher candidates’ *professional self-understanding* and existential *becoming*.

6.3 Reflections on Kelchtermans’s framework

This research study sought to investigate the sense of *becoming* teacher candidates experienced as they transitioned from their Bachelor of Education program into full-accredited teaching. I selected Kelchtermans’s (2009) *professional self-understanding* framework to organize my understandings of the existential experience of *becoming*. I believed that I could use the five components contained within that framework to elucidate existential themes, despite an absence of this style of employment in the extant literature. Indeed, at no point did Kelchtermans suggest his framework lined up with existential notions, but, to me, the connections were clear and powerful. Upon reflection on the analytical process I engaged in, I believe the *professional self-understanding* framework is an appropriate tool with which to address teacher candidates’ *becoming*, but there are lessons I learned in this investigation that I believe deserve illumination.

First, and perhaps most importantly, the framework is a snapshot of a moment in time and provides little opportunity to acknowledge the historicity of the teacher candidate; although one component allows for a consideration of the teacher candidate’s future, there is no explicit space made for the path that brought the individual to this point. A deep understanding of the teacher candidate’s current self-understanding cannot be developed without delving into what brought them here. Their self-understanding exists within a context of a life lived. The component of self-image, for example, becomes meaningful when considered in its historical

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context—how a teacher candidate sees themselves as a teacher is a product of how they have come to know themselves as a person for the length of their life.

Second, in my opinion, the teacher candidate's *professional self-understanding* is subsumed by one simple yet powerful notion: care. Care, the axiological component of an existential understanding, appears to me as the concept sitting quietly in the corner of the rooms of each component, waiting patiently to be acknowledged as the defining characteristic of the teacher candidate's existence. How the participant sees themselves, their self-efficacy, what they understand to be their *job*, the sources of motivation and where they see themselves in their career can all be explored (however, not fully explicated) through a simple question: *what do you care about?* I asked this question of each participant and through their responses I could see the components of Kelchtermans's framework light up with each sentence they spoke. The connections back to Heidegger's concept of authenticity—concern, care and comportment—were made obvious in that an ontological understanding of the individual is made possible through the axiological concept of care. Any further employment of Kelchtermans's framework, in my mind, requires an explicit address of care. Indeed, I am tempted to suggest that the concept of care become, if not a component of the framework, than an axiological underpinning of the framework itself.

Third, although a framework, by its very nature, requires compartmentalization of components, employment of the framework to consider existential themes requires a hermeneutic tacking back and forth between the specific components and the teacher candidate as a complete entity. Throughout the research process, I *zoomed-in* on the component in order to sit with that particular area of address and then *zoomed-out* to see how an understanding of that component

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influenced my overall interpretation of the individual's *professional self-understanding*, which in turn, influenced my interpretation of the components.

Kelchtermans (2009) does make explicit the interconnections among the components of the framework, but those connections appeared fluid and dynamic during the research process. I identify the overlapping components as they pertain to existential themes, but it was in the spaces between, where the lines between components became blurred, where my analysis seemed to slip through and find that the only satisfying consideration of the topic was found in existential analysis. For example, it is clear the components of *task perception* and *motivation* are interconnected and interdependent, but mere acknowledgement of their relational natures was insufficient for understanding how these components contributed to the participants' *becoming*. Instead, the existential theme of *purpose* creates a foundation for understanding the meaning these (and other) components take on in an explication of the participants' *professional self-understanding*; address of existential themes provide the mortar to keep the building blocks of Kelchtermans's framework together.

6.4 Reflections on this research study

This study could not be anything else than what it is. In my consideration of methodologies, frameworks and research questions, I arrived at what I did because this was the path I saw for myself. Through my reading and conversations with colleagues and friends I called rocks and pebbles, dirt and mud to me so that I might walk a little further down this road. When something did not *feel* right—as in my initial sole focus on the concept of authenticity—I honored that sense and shifted the direction of my path towards new horizons of understanding. If a reader resonates with this study, I believe that it will be because they too can *feel* that the images,

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micro-narratives and analysis are meaningful and they find something in this study that keeps their own reflective “game” alive.

As it stands, there have been no other studies that have worked through teacher candidate understandings of existential *becoming* in the same way this study has. I would encourage future researchers to use aesthetic representations of existential understandings, as it was the imagery and poetry within my understandings which resonated with me; they turned the ineffable into something I could share and say, “Here, *this* is what I *mean*.” I believe and am excited to see future scholars continue this method of interpretation, but I would caution any scholar utilizing this methodology that any search for an “effective” method of conveying understandings of *becoming* is a fool’s errand. This method can never *prove* anything and it should not attempt to, this method *provides* opportunities—for conversation, for understanding, for meaning.

There are four particular limitations on this research study, however, which I believe are deserving of address: the population from which the participants were drawn; the acknowledgment of the subjectivity of the researcher; the problem of language; and the timeframe of the study. Although the conclusions from this study may be transferable to other contexts, the specific design and implementation of the study do not lend themselves to reproduction by other scholars.

The participants were drawn from the Urban Education Cohort (UEC) of my university because of their convenience and experience with reflective practices. However, upon analysis of their responses, further reflection on the UEC itself and the self-selection process from which the UEC acquires its list of potential students, I began to question whether or not these participants were representative of a larger population of Bachelor of Education students. Although there could be any variety of motivations to join in the UEC, from résumé-building to an altruistic

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sense of responsibility to developing communities, self-selection into this candidate pool might suggest a different motivation for teaching than that of teacher candidates who do not volunteer.

These participants, beyond all being non-visible minority, born and raised in Canada citizens who had chosen to teach in schools where the community's makeup did not reflect their own upbringing, they all believed that a teacher's primary responsibility is to develop the social and emotional skills of the students before concerning themselves with curriculum and instruction. These participants prided themselves on their attention to their students' needs beyond the classroom and criticized those colleagues whom they perceived to place content and instruction above the social and emotional. In fact, some participants delighted in the emotional trauma (e.g. Nicole) experienced by the students because of the opportunity it provided for the teacher candidate to be of service to the student. Other teacher candidates may prioritize other beliefs about being a teacher and the absence of a participant working from a different axiological position diminishes the breadth of the transferability; the existential themes which emerged may have been very different had the group of participants held a wider range of axiological beliefs.

The differing histories between researcher and participants were also highlighted in the complexity experienced in working through particular existential concepts during the interview conversations. For example, when asking the participants about the concept of "authenticity," they brought what would be a colloquial understanding of the term, rather than any understanding grounded in literature, existential or otherwise. Although these understandings provided excellent discussions and were informative in their own right, this study may have benefited from the participants being given readings prior to their interviews which explicated

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terminology and provided opportunities for different ideas to emerge and incubate before our conversations.

Third, I engaged in this research project with my own temporal and historical subjectivity, and this fact, by its very nature, limits this study. I was one person, with my own understandings and values, engaged with four different participants in coming to know themselves as teachers—a process I had been engaged in for ten years. The amount of existential reading I had completed, the number of hours I had spent in contemplation about those ideas and the years I had spent in my own *becoming* prevented me from attending to the phenomena of *becoming* outside of my own subjectivity. This limitation is one that exists in any hermeneutic phenomenological study and I am not suggesting my subjectivity is a *defect* in the research process, but rather a natural limitation on the study and the breadth of its conclusions.

This study was also limited in its design; I believe it would have benefited from a longer timeline of data collection. Ideally, a similar study would begin with the participants as they commence their Bachelor of Education program and follow them through to perhaps the conclusion of their first or second year of teaching. The ideas and experiences they encountered in the opening months of their program would have undoubtedly shaped the participants' self-understanding and it would have been intriguing to examine how their development and subsequent sense of *becoming* took shape from their initial academic and teaching experiences. A longitudinal study where the researcher returns to the same participants throughout their career, perhaps at 2, 5 and 10-year milestones would also provide more opportunity for examination of how the reflective process itself shaped the participants' understandings and decisions. Even in the brief amount of time that passed between the conclusion of the interview process and the writing of this study, three of the participants wrote to suggest how important

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they believed the reflective process was to their own thinking. An extended timeframe would have also allowed for more response-analysis between conversations and *some* of the frustrations I encountered in regretting not asking certain questions at certain moments may have been prevented. However, no interpretive process can ever reach a terminal point so the timeframe would most likely always be a limitation, regardless of the time one took with the participants.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

There is a wide-open path in front of me, directed towards a horizon that carries no label. It used to have one, but that mirage was born of youthful certainty. I knew the direction I was headed.

Knew it like I knew the palm of my hand. But the lines traced on both that hand and on my internal map that led me towards the horizon have changed. I am not who I was and therefore am not where I am going. But there is a wide-open path in front of me.

The process has altered me. I have looked inward so much that I feel as though I forget what it means to look beyond myself. I have spent so many hours alone, hands poised and then darting, that I feel as though I forget what it means to sit with others, hands resting softly on my lap. Or in the hands of another. But I have a wide-open path in front of me and I know there are those who wait, just outside the margins, smiling and remembering who I was and who I may become again.

I think of Bilbo and Bruce, of Volcano Choir and Lord Huron, of coffee and hockey—all soldiers in my army these last few years. I thank them quietly, because they will never hear and need no volume. I think of students and friends, of joy and despair, and I thank them all quietly, because they are always with me; memories carried in my backpack, companions on this road. There is wide-open path in front of me, and I feel comforted that they are still with me.

There is a wide-open path in front of me, but it bends behind a tree. The tree stands solitary, obscuring, reminding me that wherever it is I am going, I can never know the destination. The tree, like other trees I have met, is a sentinel, a challenge. Can you walk the path, Andrew, now, not knowing where you are going? Tears. Yes. There is a wide-open path in front of me, but I will walk it, eyes shining.

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I feel tired, thinking of the journey that has brought me here. I am physically worn, carrying too much in my backpack at times. But I think of my path, and the paths in front of others, and I remember that when I choose for myself, I choose for all humanity. I look forward and choose to walk this path, the one that is wide-open in front of me.

The idea of a “conclusion” is counter to hermeneutic phenomenology. There is no finality in this study, nor should there be. Instead, I offer concluding remarks on lessons learned. First, on *professional self-understanding*. *Professional self-understanding* is both a path of *becoming* and the lens with which we attend to that *becoming*: to walk the path of reflection is to leave what you once were and knew and to become someone else who now knows differently. As we walk the path, we tell our stories... “I want to be more like...” or “I want to work with...” We attend to our *becoming* through our theoretical structures and those structures change us. We close the gap between “here” and “there” but a horizon, fresh to our eyes, appears just a ways ahead and a new gap emerges—“We’ll walk there,” we say.

Becoming is not an iterative process, it is a happening and it is our attention and intention to that *becoming* through self-understanding that makes the “happening” happen. *Becoming* and self-understanding are the wind and flying flag. The flag proudly presents itself only through the assistance of the wind, while the movement of the flag shows us wind’s form. They are hermeneutically understood and inextricable.

Finally, and most importantly is the research question. I began this journey considering *how teacher candidates understand the existential process of becoming a teacher*. The “answer” to this question is found in the anecdotes they shared, my interpretations of their stories and the aesthetic expressions located in the spaces among the researcher, the participants and the audience. *How* do they understand their process of *becoming* a teacher? By *engaging* in

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reflective practices where they can consider where they have been, where they are and where they want to go in their lives. They engage in these practices and *unconceal* the distance between their *self-image* and their *future perspective*. They assess that distance through their *self-esteem* and find meaning in it through identification of their *task perception*; and they work to close that gap from their *motivation*. They engage in their reflective process in different ways, at different times and with different existential stakes, depending on their sense of whether or not they have “arrived,” whether or not they are *finished* with their life’s project of *becoming* more fully human.

I know I have offered few, if any practical takeaways for teacher educators or teacher candidates. What I do believe I have accomplished, however, is that I have kept “the game” alive for future teacher candidates and researchers. I have examined teacher candidates’ *professional self-understanding* from an existential perspective, identifying six key themes which are inherent in the act of *becoming* a teacher. I have reminded the reader that although *who* the teacher is, is foundational to their teaching, the *who* is never settled and remains *unfinished* until they no longer teach. I offer an elucidation of a shared existential experience and a reminder to any of those teachers who discover themselves on their own path, unsure of how they arrived there or where they are going. I remind them that paths like this have been walked by countless others before them, but they are responsible for walking their own with the knowledge that their journey will never be complete and that the best they can hope for is to meet some fellow travelers on the way, share stories, and support one another as each walks their own path of *becoming*.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Thirteen features and/or six formal dimensions of authenticity

(from Kreber, McCune & Klampfleitner, 2010)

Dimensions of authenticity	Features of authenticity
A Being sincere, candid or honest	Feature 3: Making education decisions and acting in ways that are in the important interest of students Feature 4: Presentation of a genuine Self as teacher (being candid and genuine) Feature 9: Consistency between values and actions
B Being ‘true to oneself’ (e.g. in an individuation or Heideggerian sense)	Feature 7: Care for what one’s life as a teacher is to be Feature 8: Reflecting on purposes (and on one’s own unique possibilities; those that <i>matter most</i>) in education and teaching Feature 9: Consistency between values and actions
C Being ‘true to oneself’ (e.g. in a critical social theory or Adorno sense)	Feature 12: Self-knowledge and confronting the truth about oneself Feature 11: Self-knowledge and being defined by oneself (rather than by others’ expectations) Feature 12: Self-knowledge and confronting the truth about oneself Feature 13: Critically reflecting on how certain norms and practices have come about
D Constructing an identity around ‘horizons of significance’	Feature 3: Making educational decisions and acting in ways that are in the important interest of students Feature 10: Self-definition in dialogue around horizons of

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E Care for the subject, students and interest in engaging students with the subject around ideas that matter

F A 'process of becoming' sustained through critical reflection on core beliefs and premises

significance

Feature 1: Care for students
Feature 2: Care for the subject

and interest in engaging students with the subject around ideas that matter

Feature 5: Practicing a constructive developmental pedagogy

Feature 6: Promoting 'authenticity' of others (at least their learning and possibly their development in a larger sense)

Feature 8: Reflecting on purposes (and on one's own unique possibilities; those that *matter most*) in education and teaching

Feature 11: Self-knowledge and being defined by oneself (rather than by others' expectations)

Feature 12: Self-knowledge and confronting the truth about oneself

Feature 13: Critically reflecting on how certain norms and practices have come about

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Appendix 2: Recruitment Notice

Good morning Urban Educators,

February 14, 2014

As many of you know, outside of my involvement in the Urban Education Community as a research assistant, I'm also completing my PhD in Education at the U of O. I'm writing this morning because I am beginning the research phase of my program and am looking for 4 teacher candidates to participate in my thesis project; I am hoping that four of you will volunteer your time and energy to this project.

I'm including both a full information sheet and consent form as attachments on this email, but I will quickly outline the project and what your participation would entail below:

General idea of the project: I'm interested in exploring how teacher candidates *understand* the process of *becoming a teacher*. I'm looking to gather information that will provide insight into what this experience of *becoming* feels like and means to you – both now and projecting yourselves into the future as teachers.

Participation: If you would like to volunteer to be part of this project, you'd be agreeing to **four** one-on-one interviews over the next five weeks (at a location of your convenience), **one** interview *after* practicum, and **one** focus-group *after practicum* (last week of April, first week of March). I will also ask for copies of your Statement of Intent when you applied to the program and copies of any professional journaling you've done in your UEC classes.

Your participation will be confidential and your professors will not know who is participating until **after your marks are in**, so there will be no impact (positive or negative) on your grades.

Benefit: I'm not able to pay for your participation, but I do believe that the time spent talking with me about your teaching, learning and *becoming* will have a positive impact on your teaching practice both during your practicum and into your future as you explore the path that has led you to this point, as well as the path that lays before you.

To volunteer, all you need to do is email me. Unfortunately, **I'm only able to include the first four individuals who email**, so if this something you'd be interested in, please don't hesitate. If you are interested but you have questions, please write me and I will do my best to answer any and all queries.

My apologies for the long email but as you can imagine, this project is near and dear to me and I am excited at the opportunity to work on it with you.

Hope to hear from a number of you soon,

Andrew

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Appendix 3: Interview guide

These were the guiding questions for each of the first four interviews. Focus group and concluding interviews were constructed based on the previous sessions.

Interview #1

Tell me about when you first imagined yourself as a teacher.

Tell me about the process you went through when you were deciding you were going to become a teacher – as in – “Okay, I’m doing this.”

Why did you want to become a teacher? Why be an I/S teacher?

Tell me about your B.Ed. experience.

Now that you’re almost at the end of the B.Ed., do you still want to be a teacher? Why?

Have the reasons for *being* a teacher changed during the past eight months? If so, tell me about what has changed.

How would you describe yourself as a high school student? As an undergrad? Now as a B.Ed. student? Do you see any differences? Changes? In what ways?

Tell me about the best teachers you’ve had. Who were they? Why were they special to you?

What sort of people do you look up to? Any heroes? Fictional or real?

What *kind* of teacher did you want to be? Do you think your students see you that way?

What would you say you’ve learned about teaching over the last 6 months?

Interview #2

Tell me about some of the students you taught during your practice teaching.

Picture yourself at your retirement dinner. You’ve just finished your teaching career. A former student has been asked to reflect on your career. What do you hope they say?

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Do you feel you have a sense of purpose in your life? If so, how would you describe it?

Who are you *being* when you are teaching? How would I know if I walked into your classroom? What would I see? What would I hear?

What do you *care* about in life?

What do you *care* about in teaching?

What does *caring* feel like to you?

Interview #3

Have you thought about anything from our last interview over the past week?

What does it mean to care about something?

What do you *care* about in life?

What do you *care* about in teaching?

What does *caring* feel like to you?

Imagine you had a child. What would you want for them?

Do you care about marks you receive on assignments? Why?

Do you think teaching is a vocation or a job? Are certain people predisposed to be being teachers or is it something you learn to be good at?

What are your career goals? What do you want to accomplish

Do you feel you have a sense of purpose in your life? If so, how would you describe it?

Picture yourself at your retirement dinner. You've just finished your teaching career. A former student has been asked to reflect on your career. What do you hope they say?

Interview #4

What does the word "authentic" mean to you?

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What is an authentic learning experience, in your opinion?

What do you think happens to students when they engage in authentic learning experiences?

What do you think it means to be authentic teacher?

How can someone be an authentic teacher?

Do you want to be one?

Are you a different person in front of the class than you are with others?

Does this make you authentic or inauthentic?

How do you come to terms with those different selves?

Whose responsibility is it when it comes to you becoming the teacher you want to be?

Yours? Your ATs? Your student? The Uof O?

Do you feel a sense of responsibility for the choices you make in your life?

Many philosophers suggest that *being* is *becoming*, that we are always directing ourselves towards *something* or *someone*. Who are you becoming?

Authenticity scholars talk about temporality and mortality and our realizations of the finiteness of our lives as powerful confrontations in our being. Do you think about your limited time as a teacher? Do you think about what you want your life to *accomplish*?