VOICES OF IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONAL CHANGE: AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract

Classrooms are rich environments characterized by change. Children grow physically, mature socially, and develop cognitively. Learning, at its most essential, is about growth and change. Teachers, in response to their students' development, work to provide meaningful learning experiences that will enhance and facilitate further growth. Amidst this constant change and intense emotion, teachers develop evolving understandings of who they are: the self that teaches (Palmer, 1998). Through conversational interviews, this interpretive inquiry explores the nature of the relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity in the lives of seven elementary school teachers in an urban school jurisdiction in southeastern Alberta, Canada. While some educators found their experiences to be characterized by feelings of loss and grief, findings of this study indicate that professional relationships exert a powerful influence prompting, sustaining, and assuaging change. Recommendations emerging from this inquiry include recognition of the value of collegial conversations to offer new understandings of professional context and of the deeper self who interacts with children. In addition, this study suggests a reappraisal of the role of jurisdictions, schools and administrators; significant and tangible support for activities and practices that invite the consideration of professional change honours the lived experiences of educators, shapes evolving teacher identity, and ultimately, enhances learning for children.

Acknowledgements

It is only when persons experience themselves as taking risks,
embarking on new beginnings, that the predictable gives way to the possible.

There are always possibilities of new developments,
not only in ourselves and in our thinking, but in the lived world itself.
(Greene, 1990, p. 69)

This inquiry extended many invitations to explore what is possible. As a new beginning, it had its roots deep within my past. Growing up in a family in which education was valued highly, my understanding of who I am as a learner was nurtured and refined from childhood. These deep roots provide the stability and confidence needed to look forward and engage what is possible: for this I am grateful.

Many gifts have been bestowed upon me over these months: the gift of time, the gift of wise counsel, and the gift of friendship. Inevitably, when one member of a family embarks on a new beginning, it becomes also a new beginning for the rest. Generously, all three made space within their lives for this new beginning. You are loved.

Wise counsel sustained me through the challenges presented by an inquiry that only gradually assumed shape and form. Often what appeared to be an end was actually another beginning; together Pam and Leah offered guidance, support, and meticulous attention to detail. I count you as friends.

Finally, I am affirmed in my belief that teaching is a profession of courage. The willingness of each individual involved in this study to reflect deeply upon his or her professional journey and to share those understandings with me invited a rare, and often poignant, glimpse into who we are as teachers of children. Thank you for entrusting those parts of your selves with me.

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Greek philosopher
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before you finally find out what you want to do.

Cheryl

It's a feeling of confidence knowing where I've come from
and knowing I've already made changes and been successful . . .
that because I've been successful in the past, I can be successful now.

Susan

There's nothing constant in the world,
All ebb and flow, and every shape that's born
Bears in its womb the seeds of change.

Ovid
Roman poet
43 BC - 17/18 AD

Introduction and Rationale

Classrooms are rich environments characterized by change. Children grow physically, mature socially, and develop cognitively; learning, at its most essential, is about growth and change. Teachers, in response to their students' development, work to provide meaningful learning experiences that will enhance and facilitate further growth. The relationship between teachers and students is complex and laden with emotion. Hargreaves (1998) maintains that "emotions are at the heart of teaching" (p. 835) and anyone who has spent time in an elementary school classroom will attest to the ever-changing and emotional nature of that experience.

Amidst the constant change and intense emotion within this environment, teachers develop evolving understandings of who they are; this is the self that teaches (Palmer, 1998). It is a dynamic process, this fashioning of an identity: an on-going construction and reconstruction, shaping and reshaping, of who a teacher *is*, and who a teacher *is becoming*. In his text, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Palmer (1998) poses a single question crystallizing the search for teacher identity: "Who is the self that teaches?" (p. 7). He believes that in its answer lies both the essence of who we are and the purpose of the work in which we engage daily with children in classrooms.

My personal search for the self who teaches has been an unsettling experience. While many realities contribute to these feelings of ambivalence, they are augmented by the lack of formal attention given in schools to the development of teacher identity: we only rarely talk about who we are as teachers in the context of the struggles and successes we experience with our students. It is ironic, that in an environment characterized by

rapid growth and deep emotional connections, we are not engaged in more meaningful discussion about our evolving identity and emotional wellbeing. This inquiry emerges out of observations made about my own quest for the self who teaches; I have a growing belief that if we could talk about who we are amidst the constant change and intense emotion that characterizes our context we could begin to uncover who we are becoming.

As a researcher, I am curious about experiences of professional change as they are lived by teachers in the process of discovering the self who teaches; as a writer I am intrigued by the notion of phenomenological text. Van Manen (1997) describes this kind of writing as "compelling and insightful" (p. 8) and sets this challenge for the writer: "the essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner" (p. 10). A challenge, indeed.

Ultimately, we have the voice of our own experience and the belief that within broader human experience there exist understandings with the power to resonate and connect us one to the other. This inquiry extends to me a number of invitations - as a researcher looking to uncover shared understandings about experiences of professional change; as a writer crafting these understandings into text that has the power to inform and resonate; and finally, as a teacher of children, who, within this environment characterized by constant change and intense emotion, is herself developing evolving understandings of who she is becoming: the self that teaches (Palmer, 1998).

Exploring the Research Question: Assumptions and Semantics

What is the nature of the relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity in the lives of elementary school teachers?

Assumptions

This research question rests upon three essential assumptions: first, there exists a dynamic relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity; second, the nature of this relationship is worthy of examination because who the teacher *is,* the self who teaches, impacts children and learning in real classrooms; third, it is appropriate to examine this relationship through the methodology of qualitative or interpretive inquiry.

The relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity could be represented conceptually as two horizontal and parallel arrows, each pointing at the other, to indicate a reciprocity of influence. This image, however, creates both a linearity and a causality that may not be accurate. Moreover, lived experiences seem to be more complex and complicated than the neat image offered by two, opposite-pointing arrows. Another model is required.

It may be more accurate to consider this relationship as a Venn diagram embedded within a larger circle:

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

A significant portion of the two inner circles overlaps in the middle, each influencing the other, thereby creating something new, something fresh, something "other." The enclosing outer circle represents the personal and professional environment in which an individual is located and within which self-concept or identity is developed. Professional identity, or "who I am" as a teacher, exists as a subset or component of an individual's identity and is represented as the portion of the left-hand circle overlapping with the right-hand circle. While teacher identity is an important, and arguably substantial part of the overall identity teachers hold of themselves, it may be incorrect to identify the entire left-hand circle in this way. Rather, teacher identity might more logically be placed within the circle representing one's individual identity which is, in turn, embedded within a personal and professional context - as are experiences of change - both personal and professional.

Our lives in the early 21st century are characterized by change. A common axiom states that there is nothing constant except change and, while experiences of personal change likely have considerable impact upon teacher identity, this study is focused more specifically upon those experiences of professional change that directly interact with a teacher's evolving identity. As such, the inner circle representing lived experiences of change is embedded within an individual's context and represents all aspects of change that an individual may encounter; however, for the purpose of this investigation, the circle overlaps teacher identity only during experiences of professional change.

It is this central ellipse, created by the overlap of a teacher's identity and experiences of professional change, which forms the area under examination in this research project. The idea of two circles overlapping and infusing into each other to

create something different is often associated with the process of mixing primary colors: red and yellow create orange, blue and red create purple, and yellow and blue create green. Even the image of the overlapping circles is used in the color wheel to demonstrate the relationship between two primary colors and the secondary color produced. Always something new, something fresh, something "other" is conceived of in this area of overlap. It seems, then, an appropriate image to conceptualize the relationship about which I am curious between evolving teacher identity and experiences of professional change.

The second assumption supporting this research question relates to a belief that who the teacher *is* has an impact upon children and their learning and is, then, worthy of investigation. Hamachek (1999) offers these observations about teachers and the work they do with children:

> Teachers teach not only a curriculum of study, they also become part of it. The subject matter they teach is mixed with the content of their personalities. Curriculum content of two kinds infuse the lifeblood of every classroom. One is the curriculum prescribed by teachers. It is reflected in the books students read; the units they study; and the exams they take. It is the chief reason students go to school. It shapes what they know. The other type of curriculum is inscribed in teachers. It is reflected in their body language, tone of voice, and in their attitudes toward themselves and others. (p. 208)

He sums up his position regarding the relationship between a teacher's identity and the classroom by stating: "Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously we teach who we are" (p. 209). For Hamachek (1999), it clearly matters who the teacher *is*.

The final assumption foundational to this research question is related to methodology. My personal views of the world and how that world is known have shaped a research question best explored through the use of qualitative or interpretive inquiry. Hathaway (1995) suggests that "research methods are not merely different ways of achieving the same end. They carry with them different ways of asking questions and often different commitments to educational and social ideologies" (p. 557). Glesne (2006) explains in more detail this relationship between a researcher's ontology, epistemology and inquiry methods:

> The research methods with which you feel most comfortable say something about your views on what qualifies as valuable knowledge and your perspective on the nature of reality; you are attracted to and shape research problems that match your personal view of seeing and understanding the world. (p. 5)

It is not sufficient to say that the research question dictates the inquiry method selected. More accurately, the very question emerges out of the particular way in which a researcher understands the world, one's ontology, as well as an understanding of how the world is known, one's epistemology (Glesne, 2006). This question is, then, a reflection of what I believe to be true.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) maintain that "the province of qualitative research, accordingly, is the world of lived experience" (p. 8). Hathaway (1995) writes that "the goal of interpretive research is to get as close to describing the participants' understanding as possible" (p. 551); researchers working within this broad paradigm "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3) all the while believing

that "rich descriptions of the social world are valuable" (p. 10). Van Manen (1997) states that human science research, and phenomenology in particular, "always begins in the lifeworld" (p. 7) and aims at gaining a "deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Rooted in my personal view of the world, this research question invites investigation of how teachers see themselves experiencing change and how they make sense of their evolving professional identity. Accordingly, qualitative or interpretive inquiry methods will best facilitate such an examination.

Semantics

The four phrases selected to create this research question reveal interesting nuances of meaning and intent. These phrases are: nature of the relationship; experiences of professional change; evolving teacher identity; and lives of elementary school teachers. Each phrase is deconstructed, examined for word meaning, and then reconstructed to more fully illuminate the intended meaning and purpose of the research question.

Van Manen (1997) asserts that phenomenologists do not pose problems seeking "to obtain correct knowledge, effective procedures, winning strategies or calculative techniques" (p. 23); rather they ask about the meaning and significance of certain phenomena, the essence of a particular lived experience. In this way, the phrase *nature of the relationship* clearly directs the focus of this research toward what is essential in the relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity. The Oxford English Dictionary (1971) defines the word *nature* as "the essential qualities or properties of a thing, the inherent and inseparable combination of properties essentially pertaining to anything and giving it its fundamental character" (p. 1900). The word

relationship is identified as "kinship, the state of being related" with the root word *relation* offering perhaps the most comprehensive understanding: "that feature or attribute of things which is involved in considering them in comparison or contrast with each other; the particular way in which one thing is thought of in connection with another" (p. 2478). This phrase chosen to open the question requires a researcher to consider the essential features, attributes, and qualities that exist to hold together or connect what is to follow.

The phrase *experiences of professional change* can be examined word by word in the following manner: *experience* is rooted in the Latin *experientia*: "act of trying; the usual, conscious perception or apprehension of reality or of an external, bodily, or psychic event; something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977, p. 403). Van Manen (1997) identifies the word *experience* as foundational to an understanding of human science research: "to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5). The word *professional,* as found in the Oxford English Dictionary (1971), is related to the word *profess* which calls upon an individual to declare openly, to announce, to affirm, and to avow; a *profession* was originally thought of as a "public declaration, promise, or vow made upon entering a religious order" (p. 2316); and *professional* is identified as "pertaining to, or connected with, one's profession or calling" (p. 2316). The word *change* offers numerous definitions for consideration but the one most helpful refers to *change* as "an alteration in the state or quality of anything; the fact of becoming other than it was" (OED, 1971, p. 377). Accordingly, a meaningful understanding of the phrase might be: something that is

personally lived through, connected to one's calling or profession, that causes that same profession to become other than it was.

The third phrase to be considered is *evolving teacher identity*. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1977) cites the word *evolve* as rooted in the Latin verb *evolvere*, to unroll, to work out, to develop. The Oxford English Dictionary (1971) offers more detail: "to unfold, to unroll something that is wrapped up, to open out, to expand, to disengage from wrappings, to disclose gradually to view, to unwind, to bring out what exists implicitly or potentially" (p. 911). The noun *teacher* is identified as "one whose occupation is to instruct" from the verb "to teach: to instruct by precept, example, or experience" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977, p. 1195). The Oxford English Dictionary (1971) defines the word *identity* as "the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties" (p. 1368). This is more clearly stated in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1977) as "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual; individuality" (p. 568). This phrase can be understood, then, as the unfolding, unrolling, or gradual unveiling to view of the implicitly existing characteristics or individuality of someone whose occupation it is to instruct by word, example, or personal experience.

Finally, the phrase *in the lives of elementary school teachers*: the word *lives* is the plural form of the word *life* meaning "the quality that distinguishes a vital and functioning being from a dead body; the period from birth to death (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977, p. 663). Van Manen (1997) imbues the word *life* with additional meaning and significance by maintaining that "phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them in our everyday

existence, our lifeworld" (p. 11). The question is concerned with a meaning of the word *life* or *lives* that is deeper and more complex than simply being physically alive and directs attention to the "structures of meaning of the lived *human* world" (van Manen, 1997, p. 11). *Elementary school* is used in this question to identify the grades from kindergarten to grade six inclusively; *teachers* is the plural form of the word *teacher* which, as discussed above, is someone whose occupation it is to instruct by word, example, or personal experience.

A phrase by phrase analysis of the original research question results in the following:

> What are the essential features, attributes and qualities that exist to hold together, or connect, that which is personally lived causing one's calling or profession to become other than it was and the gradual unfolding, or disclosing to view, of the implicit and potential characteristics of those whose occupation it is to instruct individuals from kindergarten to grade six by word, example, or personal experience?

While awkward, this rewording serves two purposes: first, it offers general clarity regarding the words and phrases chosen to frame the original research question with particular attention to the way in which it fits within a phenomenological framework; second, it provides critical analysis of the word *evolving* which is not to be misunderstood as having its meaning, in this context, associated with scientific thinking as outlined by Darwin in his work *On the Origin of the Species* (1964).

Review of the Literature

Introduction

A vast and varied body of research and literature informs the relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity. Some aspects of this study are rooted in the field of education while others are grounded in the disciplines of psychology and sociology. This review is a preliminary examination of the existing research surrounding the notion of self-concept as well as ideas relating to the nature and role of emotions in the life of an individual. Recognizing that these concepts are vast and intricate areas of study that have in themselves formed the lifework of academics working in these fields, it is the intention of this section to provide sufficient background to illuminate the dominant themes supporting this research inquiry.

The following literature review is structured to examine these topics by responding to three areas of interest related to the research question presented and explored in the preceding section:

- What is teacher identity and how is it formed?
- What is the nature of the context in which teachers find themselves?
- How might teachers' experiences of change be examined for understanding?

What is Teacher Identity and How is it Formed?

Korthagen (2004) writes that, while an enormous amount of research has been carried out over the past century in a variety of disciplines regarding the terms "identity" and "self", only recently is attention being directed to a more comprehensive and substantial understanding of the term "teacher identity" (p. 82). It is appropriate, then, to begin any exploration of ideas related to the concept of teacher identity with an

investigation of the words *self*, *self-concept*, and *sense of self* within the complementary disciplines of psychology and sociology; these terms are used interchangeably with the word *identity* throughout the literature and, in fact, some psychology and sociology texts offer no definition for the word *identity* and direct the reader to the term *self.* This review, following the precedent set within psychological and sociological literature, will consider the four terms to be similar enough in meaning to be used synonymously.

Development of self from psychological and sociological perspectives. At least since the times of the Greek philosophers, human beings have attempted to understand and record what makes each individual different from, yet similar to, all other human beings (Magill, 1993b, p. 2166). Magill (1993b) maintains that the self is a "complex and multifaceted entity" (p. 2162) constructed from what an individual would like to be, what an individual is currently like, and what others would like the individual to be. Early Greek philosophers recognized the need to investigate the context of an individual including the familial environment, the opportunities and challenges experienced, and the people who inhabit an individual's life (p. 2166). However, it was not until the late 1940s that the research of Karl Lewin provided the first empirical support to suggest that the environment shapes the self: "the other individuals with whom a person comes in contact will have a profound impact on who the person becomes" (Magill, 1993b, p. 2166). The social construction of one's self or identity is evident within psychological thought.

The other component of *self* emerging from the discipline of psychology is that "identity has a temporal element as well as a lifelong duration. That is, identity as a personality characteristic undergoes transformations throughout the life cycle" (Magill, 1993a, p. 1256). This occurs because an individual's identity, created in part by the

attributes, abilities, and attitudes of the person as well as by biographical experience, is constantly influencing, and being influenced by context: "Once a person has a fairly stable idea of who he or she is and what he or she can do, that idea influences the situations in which that person finds himself" (Magill, 1993b, p. 2164). There is, then, on-going interaction between who a person is and lived context.

Johnson (2000) states that "from a classical sociological perspective, the self is a relatively stable set of perceptions of who we are in relation to ourselves, to others, and to social systems" (p. 277). It is organized around self-concept to the extent that the ideas and feelings we have for ourselves that are based on how we think other people see and evaluate us. He believes an individual's sense of self emerges from several sources but, that is essentially, a socially constructed entity shaped through interaction with other people and with ideas embedded within the social context. The individual is not, however, a passive agent in the development of a sense of self but an active participant in the process and "can have a powerful influence over how this process and its consequences develop" (p. 277).

The disciplines of psychology and sociology provide a foundation upon which to develop a more particular understanding of teacher identity. In particular, two threads emerge: first, developing a sense of self is a lifelong endeavor and consequently, there is no such thing as a fully developed identity. Second, this dynamic and evolving nature of the self exists because the context of an individual is constantly influencing, and being influenced by, an individual's existing sense of self. These notions inform the following discussion and a review of the educational literature specifically related to teacher identity.

Development of teacher identity from an educational perspective. Borich (1999) suggests that a teacher's self-identity represents his or her "sense of self in relation to significant others - for example school administrators, peers, supervising teachers, and teacher educators - a sense of self built upon the reflections and responses supplied by these external sources" (p. 98). Lasky (2005) describes teacher identity as "how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others" (p. 901). This apparently simple statement is explained in greater depth by Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000):

> Teacher identity can generally be defined as who or what someone is, the various meanings people can attach to themselves, or the meanings attributed by others. Nowadays, identity formation is conceived as an ongoing process that involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences as one lives through them. Through self-evaluation, one's identity is continually informed, formed, and reformed as individuals develop over time and through interaction with others. (p. 750)

Hamachek (1999) suggests that "being aware of who we are as individuals and how we are perceived by others" (p. 209) is an important part of who we are as teachers; Flores and Day (2006) understand "identity, then, as an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences. Becoming a teacher involves, in essence, the (trans)formation of the teacher identity" (p. 220) that is characterized by the "interplay between different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs and practices" (p. 219).

Kelchtermans (2005) replaces the construct of "identity" with what he believes to more accurately reflect human experience. He explains:

> I purposefully have avoided the notion of "identity" because of its association with a static essence, implicitly ignoring or denying its dynamic and biographical nature (development over time). Instead I have used the word "self-understanding", referring to both the understanding one has of one's 'self' at a certain moment in time (*product*), as well as to the fact that this product results from an ongoing *process* of making sense of one's experiences and their impact on the 'self'. (p. 1000)

By choosing the term "self-understanding", Kelchtermans highlights both the static and dynamic character of self development: we are, at once, as well as someone who is involved in the process of becoming a 'self.'

Feiman-Nemser (2001), writing specifically about identity formation in the early years of teaching, recognizes that constructing a professional identity is a "complex, ongoing process" (p. 1029) often characterized by competing images of who and what teachers believe they should be. For example, the call to be an authority in the areas of discipline and classroom management needs to be reconciled with the desire to be seen as a friendly, caring person. These types of competing images make the development of teacher identity a complex process accomplished by combining parts of a teacher's past, including personal experiences in school and teacher preparation, with pieces of the present in an individual's current school context, and images of the kind of teacher and colleague each wants to become (p. 1030). When the past, present, and future converge and re-converge, a "coherent sense of themselves as professionals" (p. 1029) is created.

This discussion identifies the development of self, or self-concept, or teacher identity as a dynamic, on-going, evolving process. Numerous authors write about the

fluid nature of identity formation and the fact that there can be no arrival - one is always in transit. Kelchtermans (2005) suggests that an individual, at any given moment, is both in process as well as whole. Zembylas (2003) raises this critical question regarding the development of identity: "First, how valid is it to claim that an individual is the same or virtually the same over time - or is the notion of a fixed and stable identity an illusion?" (p. 111). This is a good question, the answer to which may be that as long as an individual lives, the development of identity is incomplete. The reason for this may lie in the forces and experiences that influence and prompt the construction and re-construction of the self.

A number of the authors cited in the preceding discussion have alluded to, or explicitly outlined, the influential role of both personal and professional contexts in the development of teacher identity. This view is supported by the "classical sociological perspective" (Johnson, 2000, p. 277) articulated by both Magill (1993) and Johnson (2000) when they identify the social environment as critical to the formation of identity. It is characterized by the notion that who a teacher is today has been shaped by his or her unique landscape of personal experiences. Hamachek (1999) states that the subject matter teachers bring to the classroom is "mixed with the content of their personalities" (p. 208) and "consciously we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are" (p. 209). Who we are is rooted in our personal experiences that, in turn, play a crucial role in shaping our professional selves.

In his book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Palmer (1998) frames his argument around the fundamental question: "Who is the self that teaches?" (p. 7). Calling for teachers to connect with the "teacher

within" (p. 29), he maintains that "teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul upon my students, my subject, and our way of being together" (p. 2). This relationship of the teacher self and the individual self is highlighted in a further question posed by Palmer: "How does the quality of my selfhood form - or deform - the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world?" (p. 4). The "teacher within" belongs to what is real and true in one's self (p. 31). It cannot be viewed as a discrete entity but rather as an integrated reflection of who a person truly is defined by Palmer as "an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self" (p. 13). It is "a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, the diverse forces that make up my life" (p. 13). He identifies the self who teaches as emerging for both inner and outer "forces" but does not address the specific part played by the professional context in developing teacher identity.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) outlines the role that past and present experiences of schooling and learning play in nurturing a teacher identity among beginning teachers (p. 1030). Nias (1996) suggests that the view teachers have of themselves is shaped by early influences, as well as by subsequent professional education and experience. All of these influences have historical, social, and cultural roots and contexts that "transmit belief systems and perpetuate social and organizational structures. So, the unique sense of self which every teacher has is socially grounded" (p. 294).

In a study that used narratives to examine the effects of government-mandated change on the identity of secondary school teachers Lasky (2005) discovers that:

> Teacher narratives revealed that both their early professional training along with the larger political and social context mediated the development of their professional identity. Their notions of identity were inextricably interlaced with their beliefs about the right way to be a teacher, and the purposes of schooling. (p. 912, 913)

Within this context of substantial and significant change, core aspects of teachers' identities were threatened. Lasky's research explores the effects of these changes upon the beliefs and purposes of teachers and concludes that, in the face of pressure to teach in ways contrary to their core beliefs, participants were unwilling to "change their identity as individuals working in a human-centered profession, which required making real connections with students" (p. 913).

Flores and Day (2006) maintain that "research has highlighted the powerful interaction between personal histories and the contextual influences of the workplace" (p. 230). In investigating the many contexts that shape new teachers' identities, they identify the workplace as one influential factor. They content that "the identities of the new teachers in this research had been strongly personally embedded at the beginning of their teaching careers, but destabilized by the negative school contexts and cultures in which they worked" (p. 230). Flores and Day conclude that:

> The influence of workplace played a key role in (re)shaping teachers' understanding of teaching, in facilitating or hindering their professional learning and development, and in (re)constructing their professional identities. Despite the strong connections between personal biography and stable sense of identity, it is clear that in most if not all cases, history was mediated by context. (p. 230)

Clearly the role of context cannot be underestimated in the construction and reconstruction of teacher identity. The research of Flores and Day (2006) identifies a clear connection between the positive and negative influences within a particular context and the on-going formation of teacher identity.

In summary, and in answer to the question posed at the outset, the identity of an individual and, by implication, the identity of a teacher, can be broadly understood as the complex, dynamic, evolving and on-going process of determining who or what someone is. This process takes into account the various meanings people attach to themselves as well as the meanings attributed to an individual by others. Palmer (1998) suggests that teacher identity can be discussed by considering the question "Who is the self that teaches?" maintaining, together with Hamachek (1999), that an individual's personal identity is an integral aspect of any learning environment. The literature, including definitions rooted in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, maintains that context, together with innate qualities and personal biographies, shapes an individual's identity. Lasky (2005) and Flores and Day (2006), by specifically researching the influences of professional context, conclude that the workplace is an influential environment that shapes and re-shapes, constructs and re-constructs a teacher's identity. It is important that this environment is described and understood for what it is.

What is the Nature of the Context in Which Teachers Find Themselves?

Teachers work with students in a variety of contexts; some environments are established according to the age of the children and some according to the special learning needs of the students. Today, rich learning environments can be constructed virtually using the internet and involving students in learning activities where they may

never actually see the face of their teacher. No matter how a classroom is configured, the professional experience of a teacher is never confined to this immediate, or virtual, environment. It is not possible for teachers to take refuge in the classroom believing they can avoid the influences of parents, their colleagues, a school jurisdiction or government mandates - all of which have opportunity to influence and shape teacher identity.

In the absence of a single, uniform context, descriptions of the characteristics of teachers' experience transcending individual environments may allow essential qualities to be considered. This review will explore the world of the teacher and present literature to substantiate the notion that teaching is both an emotional practice and one characterized by change; as essential components of a teacher's context, the emotional nature of teaching and the existence of ever-present change have the power to influence evolving teacher identity.

Teaching is an emotional practice. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) state that there is "surprisingly little recent research about the emotional aspects of teachers' lives" (p. 327). Although citing an increased interest in emotion within the discipline of psychology, they suggest "it takes time for findings in one discipline to be applied to another" (p. 328) and offer a further explanation for why there may exist a paucity of this type of research within the field of education:

> When we say someone is "emotional" we usually mean irrational. Emotions, although sometimes thought of as a guide to our true selves are often thought of as out of control, destructive, primitive, and childish, rather than thoughtful, civilized, and adult. If researchers who pride themselves on their rationality and logic hold these latter beliefs, it is not surprising that little research has been conducted on the emotions of teachers and other workers. (p. 328)

In their comprehensive review of the literature focusing on teacher emotions, Sutton and Wheatley (2003) maintain that not until the mid-1990s and the publication of a special edition of the *Cambridge Journal of Education* did this topic emerge as important within educational and academic circles (p. 328). Edited by Nias (1996) this special edition explores the view that "as an occupation teaching is highly charged with feeling" (p. 293). She explains her motivation in editing this volume as follows:

> In choosing the focus for this Edition, I have sought to draw attention to several decades of neglect of a topic which is of daily concern to practitioners. Despite the passion with which teachers have always talked about their jobs, there is relatively little recent research in to the part played by or the significance of affectivity in teachers' lives, careers and classroom behaviour. (p. 293)

By selecting this topic for investigation, she invites academic discussion about issues of emotion and teaching; subsequent studies have been rooted within theoretical understandings of emotion from psychological and sociological points of view as well as examinations of the practical implications of emotions in the real lives of teachers.

Nias (1996) offers three reasons to support her claim that emotions are of fundamental importance to educators, and therefore, worthy of serious consideration. First, teachers feel passionately about the work they do. She claims: "this is a living reality for teachers of all age groups, radically affecting their professional efficacy and the development and exercise of the 'competencies' by which this is increasingly judged" (p. 294). Second, if emotions are rooted in cognition then feelings cannot be separated from perception or affectivity from judgment: "It follows that one cannot help teachers develop their classroom and management skills without also addressing their emotional

reactions and responses and the attitudes, values, and beliefs which underlie these" (p. 294). Finally, she maintains that:

> . . . neither cognition nor feeling can be separated from the social and cultural forces which help to form them and which are in turn shaped by them. The emotional reactions of individual teachers to their work are intimately connected to the view that they have of themselves and others. (p. 294)

This argument connects emotion, cognition, and context to teacher identity and convincingly urges increased attention on the role of emotions within the lives of teachers.

Nias' editorial, entitled "Thinking About Feelings: The Emotions of Teaching", is considered and cited by many as seminal writing; researchers have built upon her work in the decade since its publication. One of the strengths of her writing is a rich and complex description of the world of a teacher:

> Teachers have hearts and bodies, as well as heads and hands, though the deep and unruly nature of their hearts is governed by their heads, by the sense of moral responsibility for students and the integrity of their subject matter which are at the core of their professional identity. Teachers are emotionally committed to many different aspects of their jobs. This is not an indulgence; it is a professional necessity. (Nias, 1996, p. 305)

She offers three observations about why educators are so intimately, and emotionally, connected to their students and to their work. First, while the work of many teachers is unique and profoundly shaped by the particular needs of their students as well as by the context in which they teach, it is, essentially, a job which involves "interaction among

people and inevitably therefore has an emotional dimension" (Nias, 1996, p. 296). The very nature of teaching, regardless of circumstance or context, requires intensive personal interactions; teachers spend the bulk of their working lives "in close, even intimate, contact with other human beings for whose conduct and progress they are held responsible" (Nias, 1996, p. 296).

Second, teachers invest themselves in the lives of their students, often so intensely that their sense of personal and professional identity merge and their classroom "becomes a main site for their self-esteem and fulfillment, and so too for their vulnerability" (Nias, 1996, p. 297). This intimate connection between who they are and what they do - the personal and professional self - precipitates experiences of emotion such as joy, excitement, exhilaration, and deep satisfaction when teachers believe their students' learning needs are being met. However, teachers may also experience feelings of fear, frustration, guilt, anxiety and anger when they feel thwarted in their ability to facilitate successful learning opportunities, or when they feel forced to act in ways that contradict their values and beliefs (Nias, 1996, p. 297).

Third, and emerging out of the second observation, is the recognition that teachers work hard for their students, spend a great deal of time with them and often "come to love them and though they may dislike individuals, they rejoice in the growth and successes of them all and grieve for their disappointments and failures" (Nias, 1996, p. 298). This interest in students and their development, both scholastic and personal, requires an investment of one's self in the lives of others and inevitably results in powerful emotion. Hargreaves (1998b) supports this claim by stating that "emotional labor is an important part of teaching, and in many ways, a positive one. For many

teachers it is a labor of love" (p. 840).

Hargreaves (1998a) offers a comprehensive description of teaching and the emotional involvement that characterizes teachers' lives:

> Teaching is an emotional practice that also involves heavy investments of emotional labour. It cannot be reduced to technical competencies or clinical standards alone. The emotions of teaching are, in this sense, not just sentimental adornment to the more fundamental parts of the work. They are fundamental in and of themselves. They are deeply entwined with the purposes of teaching, the political dynamics of educational policy and school life, the relationships that make up teaching, and the sense of self which teachers invest in their work. (p. 330)

Not only do Nias (1996) and Hargreaves (1998a) explore the emotional nature of teaching, they offer clear statements regarding the influence this emotional context plays in a teacher's sense of self or identity. Lasky (2005) suggests that embedded within a teachers' identities are the beliefs and purposes they hold for their work (p. 913); Nias (1996), Hargreaves (2004), and Schmidt and Datnow (2005) discuss the emotional implications of expectations that threaten an individual's core beliefs.

One of the most profound sources of negative emotion - anxiety, impatience, depression and anger - occurs, when this investment of self is compromised or threatened by colleagues, parents, or official educational representatives. If teachers believe that their central purpose, helping children learn, is being circumscribed by forces outside of themselves and beyond their control, then feelings of affective satisfaction and emotional security are breached. The resulting emotions are "hostile passions" (Nias, 1996, p. 300).

Hargreaves (2004) supports this observation by stating that "inclusive change and reform processes that engage teachers' knowledge and commitments are more likely to increase teachers' professional involvement in school improvement and reduce the anger and anxiety that divert their emotional energies into attacking others and protecting self. (p. 306). Schmidt and Datnow (2005), researching the responses of teachers during times of educational reform, link emotional responses to the degree to which an individual feels a sense of power or agency. They suggest that "emotions vary depending on the extent to which teachers feel *powerful* or *powerless* in the reform process" (p. 951). A sense of purpose and agency produces feelings of positive emotion; hostile passions emerge when purpose and agency are challenged or, as Nias (1996) suggests, "teachers have experienced, or anticipate experiencing, loss" (p. 301).

The emotional nature of teachers and teaching is comprehensively documented. In addition to Nias, Hargreaves, and Datnow and Schmidt's research, others have studied the emotional nature of teaching using various methodologies. Two examples of recent inquiries illustrate researchers' growing interest and commitment to exploring this aspect of teachers' lives. Winograd's (2003) self-study, conducted through analysis of his daily journal entries, explores the varied landscape of teacher emotions in a primary grade classroom. A college professor on sabbatical, Winograd did not originally intend to make emotions the focus of his inquiry. However, the context of his experiences gave him little other choice: "I found that teaching was a profoundly, all-encompassing emotional endeavor" (p. 1641) and "soon after the year started, the struggle for survival and the concomitant search for my identity as a teacher became the

research focus" (p. 1650). Winograd concludes his exploration by offering a final recommendation, drawn from his emotional reflections:

> In teacher education classes, in teacher lounges, at staff meetings, and elsewhere, it is time to recognize the emotional experience of teaching and to let those stories be told, studied, and acted on: stories good, bad, and ugly. (p. 1671)

This call for increased attention to affectivity and its role in the work of teachers emerges from Winograd's immediate experience of children and the challenges existing in his own classroom.

Van Veen, Sleegers, and van de Ven (2005) explore one teacher's identity, emotions, and commitment to change through an in-depth case study. By using David, the subject of their research, to examine the impact educational reforms have on a teacher's identity and commitment to change, van Veen, Sleegers, and van de Ven present an exploratory case study that concludes by calling for additional research into this area of teacher emotions and workplace conditions which, they maintain, has the power to inform "national, local, and school policies on the quality of teaching of current and the next generation of teachers" (p. 932).

Teaching is characterized by change. Linked closely to the emotional nature of teaching and the development of teacher identity is research examining experiences of change. Fullan (1991) states that "we have become so accustomed to the presence of change that we rarely stop to think what change really means as we are experiencing it at the personal level" (p. 30). Marris' (1996) perspective is that "uncertainty is a fundamental condition of human life" (p. 1). Hargreaves (2004) writes about the "endless change" (p. 287) teachers encounter over the course of their professional lives stating that

it can be "embedded in the very nature of teachers' work [or] imposed on it" (p. 287). He further describes it as "self-initiated" (p. 304), "mandated" (p. 304), and "inclusive or exclusive" (p. 287). Regardless of its genesis change pervades a teacher's work and, according to Hargreaves, is connected to emotion in an essential manner:

> Change and emotion are inseparable. Each implicates the other. Both involve movement. Change is defined as 'movement from one state to another', while emotion comes from the Latin *emovere*, meaning to 'arouse or stir up'. There is no human change without emotion and there is no emotion that does not embody a momentary or momentous process of change. (p. 287)

Nias' (1996) analysis places the emotional nature of teaching at the very heart of an educator's work. Hargreaves (1998a) describes teaching as "an emotional practice" (p. 850) and augments this understanding by stating that emotion is bound tightly to experiences of change (Hargreaves, 2004). In summary, and to answer the question posed at the outset of this section, an analysis of the context that transcends individual job particularities must include description of both its emotional and constantly changing nature.

It is essential to connect the two questions posed so far in this review; together they clarify the purpose and importance of this study. If it is understood that teacher identity, the complex, evolving understanding of who teachers believe themselves to be, is influenced by the context in which it is embedded and if that context can be described as laden with emotion and subject to endless change, then there is good reason to expect that experiences of professional change will significantly impact who and what teachers believe themselves to be. Moreover, if, as Hamachek (1999) and Palmer (1998) contend,

teacher identity is a significant part of the curriculum taught within the classroom, then an exploration of evolving teacher identity during experiences of professional change is a worthy subject of inquiry. The next question will explore how these experiences might be examined and understood using a model developed around notions of loss, grief and restoration outlined by Marris (1975).

How Might Teachers' Experiences of Change be Examined for Understanding?

Nias (1996) suggests that in times of change teachers experience, "or anticipate experiencing, loss: of status, of valued collegial relationships, of self-confidence, of reputation" (p. 301). As educational reform continues they may feel diminished autonomy and influence with the most significant loss being the loss of self: compromised beliefs and purpose.

Marris (1975), in examining various situations involving individuals at times of "crucial transition" (p. 1), recognizes a common theme emerging out of his research:

> It seemed to me that the concept of grieving could be applied to many situations of change which we would not ordinarily think of as bereavement; that whenever people suffered loss - even though they might also desire change - their reactions expressed an internal conflict, whose nature was fundamentally similar to working out of grief. (p. 2)

"The seminal nature of this book often overlooked in the field" (Frankenberg, 1996, p. 217) is based upon the psychoanalytic work of Bowlby (1961) who studied the effects of a child's separation from his or her parent by conducting numerous studies that, for the first time, gathered "emotional data rather than economic, medical, or social data, which was commonplace in social science at the time" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 62). He calls for

understanding of the mourning that follows the loss of attachment and outlines his central thesis as follows:

> Once the child has formed a tie to a mother-figure, which has ordinarily occurred by the middle of the first year, its rupture leads to separation anxiety and grief sets in train processes of mourning. I believe that an understanding of the nature of these unfavourable outcomes turns on a clear grasp being obtained of the nature of the mourning processes themselves. (p. 317)

Bowlby's thoughts in the field of attachment theory "remain relevant although controversial" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 60), and provide the psychological foundation upon which Marris explores these themes of loss, grief and mourning, extending his remarks well beyond the scope of Bowlby's original research with deprived children to include experiences of change including, but not limited to, the loss of a loved one to death.

By observing individuals in various situations of transition, Marris identifies the basic human need for continuity as central to his understanding of change and its impact on individuals by stating that "the impulse to preserve the thread of continuity is thus a crucial instinct of survival" (p. 20). He holds as a central assumption the notion that the impulse to defend the predictability of life is a fundamental and universal principle of human psychology (p. 3) explaining that "we assimilate new experiences by placing them in the context of a familiar, reliable construction of reality. This structure in turn rests not only on the regularity of events themselves, but on the continuity of their meaning" (p. 8). When faced with experiences of change, an individual's ability to handle the shifting situation relies upon conserving the fundamental structure of meaning that has been established over a lifetime (p. 19); Marris calls this the "conservative impulse" (p. 12)

maintaining that it is "an aspect of our ability to survive in any situation" (p. 3).

If unable to preserve the thread of continuity by conserving the meaning of past understandings within experiences of change, an individual will experience feelings of loss and grief. Marris does not suggest that all change causes these feelings of loss. For example, when change is incremental and built upon meanings previously formulated by the individual, or when experiences do not disrupt or alter this thread of continuity, change is assimilated and accepted. Integrated change takes place when new purposes are imposed on circumstances whose meanings have not been disrupted (Marris, 1975, p. 25). However, when that thread of continuity is compromised, or severed, feelings of loss will result:

> When a pattern of relationships is disrupted in any way for which we are not prepared, the thread of continuity in the interpretation of life becomes attenuated or altogether lost. The loss may fundamentally threaten the integrity of the structure of meanings on which this continuity rests, and cannot be acknowledged without distress. But for life to go on, the continuity must somehow be restored. (Marris, 1975, p. 24)

In addition, he contends that the greater and more significant the severing of meaning, the more profound the feelings of loss and grief experienced by the individual.

Marris outlines, both theoretically and practically, what is required during these experiences of change when it becomes impossible for an individual to conserve the meaning surrounding what has been lost. The restoration of continuity is achieved, not by ceasing to care for what has been lost, but rather by "abstracting what was fundamentally important in the relationship and rehabilitating it" (p. 38). It is not enough to simply

replace old, lost meanings with fresh, new ones. Marris states:

> Recovery from grief depends on restoring a sense that the lost attachment can still give meaning to the present, not on finding a substitute. The purpose and feeling it expressed has somehow to be abstracted from its past setting and reformulated so as to make present and future behaviour interpretable as rewarding. (p. 159)

He offers a number of practical suggestions to help guide individuals through these experiences of change. First, he suggests careful scrutiny of the changes being advanced; even when sweeping redesign would be more efficient, more practical, more beautiful, or more desirable he urges consideration of "whether such abrupt discontinuities are worth the stresses they set up" (p. 160).

Second, he urges recognition that in times of change an individual will experience feelings of loss and grief to which attention must be paid:

> The restoration of the lost attachment absorbs most of the victim's energy. Even when the loss is peripheral, the sense of disorientation, of experience being drained of some part of its meaning, sets up a nagging anxiety. If this minor grief is ignored, I think it may be more upsetting, in unrecognized ways than it may have been. (p. 160)

Finally, he calls for a "moratorium on other business" (p. 160) during experiences of disruptive change. He argues that people need to "give their minds to repairing the thread of continuity in their attachments" (p. 160), and that to overburden an individual with several simultaneous experiences of change is to endanger both their emotional resilience and physical wellbeing. In addition, the process of reform must always expect and even encourage conflict because "whenever people are confronted with change, they need the

opportunity to react, to articulate their ambivalent feelings and to work out their own sense of it" (p. 166). These three guidelines for managing grief - a careful consideration of whether the changes suggested will be worth the accompanying emotional and cognitive turmoil; a recognition of and commitment to attending to experiences of change for what they are and what they will bring; and the need for time to reflect on one's losses and repair, often through conflict, the threads of continuity within severed meanings - offer practical suggestions for individuals to assist themselves, and others, through experiences of change.

Taylor (1999; 2000), using the work of Marris to help educational institutions and corporate organizations understand the meaning of change in their environments, maintains there is an urgent need for those who both seek and promote change to recognize the inevitability of loss, and therefore, the experience of grief, during any change process: "It is no longer acceptable to see change only in terms of organizational missions and priorities" (Taylor, 2000, p. 534). He summarizes the arrogance of those in leadership positions who neglect to attend to the loss and grief experienced by others:

> When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they have only to explain, and, when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. (p. 166)

Leaders in all fields and disciplines have a responsibility to first understand the complex process of change within individuals and then to guide their colleagues through these experiences.

Marris' model for understanding experiences of change is more than theoretical.

Emerging from personal observations of real life situations involving recently bereaved widows, slum clearance, and African tribal relocation, his theory has the power to inform genuine issues relating to change in the early 21st century. By direct attention to the essential components of human experience, his work transcends the thirty years since first published to offer significant insight for today; Taylor's use of his understandings of loss and grief is evidence of its applicability.

This inquiry uses the model of loss, grief, and restoration articulated by Marris as scaffolding for structuring the questions posed and for understanding the data gleaned through interviews and personal narratives relating to experiences of change. If human beings have the need to conserve meaning and maintain threads of continuity, as outlined by Marris, then aspects of this should be present in their responses. Furthermore, if experiences of change sever these threads of continuity, then feelings of loss and grief should, in some way, characterize the themes embedded in their narratives of change as they talk about how these experiences have influenced who they are as teachers. Finally, it may even be possible to locate within the conversations of elementary school teachers substantiation for how Marris suggests meaning can be restored to the disrupted threads of continuity. This model of change, loss, grief, and restoration provides a structure for exploring and perhaps understanding the nature of the relationship that exists between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity in the lives of elementary school teachers.

Conclusion

Three questions were posed initially to guide and provide focus for this review. The first question examined research and literature informing a definition of teacher

identity and how it is formed. In the disciplines of psychology and sociology the terms *self*, *self-concept*, *sense of self* and *identity* are used interchangeably; although within educational research the term *teacher identity* seems to be most favored. There appears to be general agreement with the straightforward definition offered by Lasky (2005) that teacher identity is "how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others" (p. 901).

More discussion was generated around the question relating to how teacher identity is formed. This is a particularly important notion for individuals concerned with developing professional identity in pre-service teachers; however, given the dynamic, on-going, and evolving nature of the self who teaches this concern cannot be limited to those critical initial years of teaching, but must continue to be of interest for as long as individuals consider themselves a teacher. Much of the literature identifies context as instrumental in influencing teacher identity. Specifically, recent research by Flores and Day (2006) draws a direct correlation between the nature of the workplace and the (re)construction of professional identity; both positive and negative influences from within the professional context influence who the teacher is becoming.

The second question posed explored the nature of a teacher's context. If, as research suggests, one's professional context shapes and reshapes teacher identity, what characterizes that environment? The work of Nias (1996) was used to carefully describe the emotional nature of this context. She makes a clear argument in support of recognizing and validating the emotional practice of teaching; Hargreaves, whose research and writing in this area of teacher emotion has been prolific in the last ten years, supports Nias in urging an appreciation for the pervasive and complex nature of affectivity in the lives of teachers.

Identified as significant within a teacher's context is the ever-present and constant voice of change. Any person remotely associated with teaching and learning over the past twenty years can account for its ubiquity as well as its keen ability to unsettle everyone and everything in its path. Hargreaves, by studying the etymology of the words emotion and change, asserts that change and emotion are inseparable, that they exist one alongside the other, and together describe the context of teaching.

Justification for this inquiry lies in the answers to these first two questions. Identity is the dynamic, evolving construction and reconstruction of, at once, who a teacher is, and who a teacher is becoming. If the shaping of that identity is significantly influenced by the context of teaching, which is substantially described as both emotion-laden and characterized by change, then an exploration of experiences of professional change is a worthy subject of inquiry. Moreover, if one believes, like Palmer (1998) and Hamachek (1999), that who a teacher *is* forms most, if not almost all, of what is taught in classrooms, then how experiences of change influence and impact a teacher's identity is of critical concern. More must be known of the essential nature of these experiences.

The third question considered a framework for understanding this place where experiences of change impact evolving teacher identity. Marris' model, describing how human beings make sense of their world and negotiate experiences of change, may help facilitate an understanding of what occurs when teachers experience change embedded within the fabric of their context. If shifting expectations are easily assimilated into already established understandings held by an individual then the emotional impact is negligible; however, should the changes challenge what the individual believes, the very threads of continuity established over a professional lifetime, then evolving teacher

identity may be seriously undermined by feelings of loss and grief. Moreover, these feelings of loss contribute immeasurably to the already emotionally laden context of the classroom. Endless and unrelenting change, inextricably connected to emotion and experienced by educators throughout their careers, has the potential to threaten, and even destroy, the threads of continuity described by Marris. His model may assist this inquiry by providing scaffolding for framing interview questions and interpreting the data gathered from the conversations and narratives shared by participants; it is believed this framework will be sufficiently complex to support the data gathered, but not so rigid that diverse experiences of change cannot be accommodated and integrated within its overall structure.

A growing body of literature and qualitative research explores teacher identity and experiences of change, particularly within the context of government-mandated reform. The interpretations derived from interviews, case studies, personal narratives, and autobiographical writing explored in this literature review provide significant insight into the work of teachers. It is the purpose of this inquiry to augment these understandings of professional change and evolving teacher identity through a specific examination of lived experiences of change - with the hope of revealing another facet of the complex prism that is the world of the teacher.

Method

Emerging From Assumptions: Question and Methodology

A research inquiry emerges out of the particular way in which a researcher sees and understands the world as well as out of personal beliefs about what qualifies as valuable knowledge. The research question has its genesis within the researcher who, rooted in a personal ontology and epistemology, turns to a phenomenon in which he or she is seriously interested and committed to (van Manen, 1997, p. 30). Glesne (2006) maintains that "qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 4). Particular methods are selected as the most appropriate way of gathering the data needed to further understanding of the experiences or phenomena that, in the view of the researcher, warrant exploration and interpretation.

Van Manen (1997) explains the intimate connection existing between research questions and methods of inquiry:

> The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the methods as such. But of course it is true as well that the way in which one articulates certain questions has something to do with the research method that one tends to identify with. So there exists a certain dialectic between question and method. (p. 1, 2)

Inquiry does not exist in isolation; it is intimately connected to a researcher's assumptions of the world. The ways in which the question is investigated and the choice of methodology cannot be divorced from either the question they are meant to serve or the foundation upon which the question itself rests: these fundamental assumptions.

While dialectic in nature, as suggested by van Manen, questions and methods are, nevertheless, rooted in the assumptions, beliefs, and essential understandings of the researcher.

This inquiry explored the nature of the relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity. The question emerged from a number of my personal assumptions of the world: first, that the classroom is an intensely emotional environment that has the power to shape both the students and the teacher. In almost twenty years of teaching children I have come to believe that no one is left untouched by the emotional climate of a classroom or a school. Second, who a teacher is, the qualities and attributes each of us brings to the classroom every day, contributes significantly to student learning and, if enhanced learning is our goal, we must attend to the evolving nature of teacher identity. Finally, the present climate of educational change often calls for amendments viewed to be in conflict with what we believe our responsibility to children ought to be. This unsettles teachers and prompts many to question their commitment to learning and teaching. A keen curiosity emerged from these assumptions: what are experiences of professional change "like", as understood and interpreted by teachers who are, themselves, in the process of discovering their identity, within the emotional and ever-changing context of the classroom?

As this question assumed shape and form it became apparent that the most effective way to satisfy my curiosity was through the use of phenomenological methods; the more reading about phenomenology I did the more I recognized myself and my assumptions nestled within that methodology. Van Manen (1997) maintains that "from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we

experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5) while at the same time being "addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like? What is the nature of this lived experience?" (p. 42). This is precisely what this inquiry sought to glimpse and perhaps, in a small way, uncover: the nature of lived experiences of change.

Data Collection

Nature of conversational interviews. Having decided to use phenomenological methods to explore experiences of change in the lives of elementary school teachers, I still needed to outline, specifically, how this would occur. Glesne (2006) states that "the open, emergent nature of qualitative inquiry means a lack of standardization; there are no clear criteria to package into neat research steps" (p. 19). While allowing for a sensitive response to data as it is collected and for investigation of emergent themes, this lack of clear criteria and established procedure creates a challenge for the novice researcher trying to negotiate the complexity of a first inquiry. After consideration it became apparent that the most appropriate way to collect data was a semi-structured interview format.

Van Manen (1997) states that the "data" of social and human science research, lived experience, is embedded within conversation and talk:

> Talk is the concrete stuff of human discourse - we can tape it, transcribe it, codify it, analyze it for its content and for certain frequencies of terms or ideas, and so forth. In fact, much of research, of course, focuses on talk or uses written or oral talk as its basic data source. (p. 23)

He calls these conversational interviews. Their purpose is to explore and gather

experiential narrative material that may serve "as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (1997, p. 66).

Preparing for conversational interviews. The first step in this process of gathering data through talk and conversation was to draft a letter to Dr. Linda Rossler, superintendent of Medicine Hat School District No. 76, outlining the inquiry and formally requesting permission to conduct interviews with approximately ten elementary school teachers within this jurisdiction (Appendix A). She responded by granting permission (Appendix B) and, shortly after, meetings were arranged with teachers on three different occasions and in three different elementary schools.

This introductory meeting with staff - fifteen to twenty minutes - broadly explained the focus of the inquiry, outlined the methodology selected and described how the results of the research would be communicated and shared. After offering a clear overview of the intent of this inquiry - to explore lived experiences of change and how experiences of this nature impact evolving teacher identity - a list of interview questions and probes were shared to assist possible participants in developing a deeper understanding of the kinds of experiences and reflections that would structure the conversations (Appendix C). Careful explanation was given of the time commitment expected (initial interview, about an hour in length; possible follow-up interview for clarification and additional comments; validating responses to the interview transcripts and to the final product) with the assurance that each teacher's busy schedule would be accommodated both in location and time. The introductory meeting ended with an invitation to interested teachers to become involved. I answered teachers' questions and distributed an information sheet summarizing the inquiry, requesting interested teachers

to contact me directly and offering contact information (Appendix D). Seven teachers identified themselves as interested in taking part in this inquiry and were given a Participant Consent Form (Appendix E) to return confidentially if they chose to officially participate. Once each participant's consent form was received a convenient time was arranged for his or her conversational interview.

Conducting conversational interviews. Moustakas (1994) states that "typically in the phenomenological investigation the long interview is the method through which the data is collected on the topic and question. The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p. 114). Van Manen (1997) cautions the researcher to be disciplined by the fundamental question that shapes the research: "Before embarking on a busy interview schedule one needs to be oriented to one's question or notion in such as strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere" (p. 67).

During the interview a variety of questions were posed relating to the nature of the participant's experience of professional change, the emotional impact of the experience and the perceived alterations this experience exerted on how each participant has come to view themselves as teachers. These guiding questions and probes were formulated prior to conducting the interviews in order to prompt and focus conversation (Appendix C). Participants were also asked to reflect on the level of resonance they felt with the notion presented by Marris (1975) that "whenever people suffered loss - even though they might also desire change - their reactions expressed and internal conflict, whose nature was fundamentally similar to working out of grief" (p. 2). This model of loss, grief and restoration specifically informed questions eight and nine (Appendix C). It

was not, however, the intention of this inquiry to force a model of understanding upon the narratives of the participants but rather to explore whether or not Marris' notions are reflected within lived experiences. All conversations were digitally audio-taped, notes were made both during and after the interviews, and each session was fully and professionally transcribed.

Reliability of data gathered. Glesne (2006) writes that trustworthiness or research validity is an issue that must be considered during the design of a research inquiry as well throughout the data collection process (p. 37). Creswell (1994) maintains that "qualitative researchers have no single stance or consensus on addressing traditional topics such as validity and reliability" (p. 157) and suggests a number of verification procedures. In order to address the need for internal validity this inquiry relied on participant validation or, as defined by Creswell, "member checks" (p. 158): "sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately" (Glesne, 2006, p. 38). Participants were asked to verify the accuracy of their interview transcripts prior to data analysis as well as to respond to the final phenomenological text crafted from the themes distilled from the collected data. In this way, interpretations arrived at by the researcher and embedded into the final interpretive text were validated against the understandings and experiences of participants.

Data Analysis

Participants. The seven teachers who agreed to take part in this study shared professional experiences of change with a set of voices both rich and diverse. One participant is in her fifth year of teaching while another has just completed her thirty-fifth

year. Classroom assignments range from work exclusively with young children in kindergarten and grade one to teachers of upper-elementary students with various school assignments. One individual supplements teaching responsibilities with administrative duties. Four participants continue to teach in the jurisdiction in which they began their careers while three have moved and relocated throughout their tenure. Six participants recount their experience of professional change as a journey of the past. However, one teacher, currently in the midst of a profound paradigm shift, speaks with the voice of immediacy - this is the experience she *is living*. Consistent with demographics across the broader educational context within elementary schools only one of the seven participants is male. Together these diverse voices offer glimpses into the lived experience of professional change and the ways in which each participant is evolving as a teacher of children.

Method of data analysis. Glesne (2006) states that "data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (p. 147), and that researchers use many techniques to help organize, classify, and find themes in their data but they still must "find ways to make connections that are ultimately meaningful to themselves and the reader" (p. 164). Neuman (1997) suggests that qualitative researchers begin looking for patterns and relationships early in the inquiry, while still collecting data, so that "the results of early data analysis guide subsequent data collection" (p. 420).

Throughout the three weeks during which interviews were conducted, I listened carefully to the conversations and reflected on the ways in which the experiences shared were both similar and different. I began to write about how aspects of conversations were

converging and the themes that seemed to be emerging as each subsequent interview took place (Appendix F). Near the end of the second interview something in the conversation prompted me to ask about the role of reflection as the participant moved through experiences of change. The quality of her response encouraged me to include this question in the interviews that followed. In these ways careful listening and reflective writing, in the early stages of data gathering, offered the opportunity to become more refined in the questions I posed to subsequent participants and to begin the process of identifying broad themes from deep within the data.

These initial themes guided the slow and careful reading of each transcript to formally identify six broad categories for more in-depth analysis. Neuman (1997) defines this first step as "open coding" (p. 442). The 120 pages of text was sifted through and appropriately placed into one or more of the following categories:

- the teaching self
- the experience of professional change
- change as grief and loss
- the role of formal professional development
- professional relationships
- success, confidence and willingness to engage change

These six categories provided a structure for the "progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data. By putting like-minded pieces together into data clumps, you create an organizational framework" (Glesne, 2006, p. 152). Neuman (1997) defines the next step as "axial coding" (p. 423), and its primary purpose is to organize the themes identified during open coding:

categories, concepts or themes may be clustered together and connections between themes may be discovered (p. 423). At this point in the analysis the ways in which data placed within each of the six themes connected or contradicted each other informed the arrangement of the pieces, or sub-themes, into the beginnings of a meaningful framework (Appendix G).

Glesne (2006) suggests that displaying data in a visual representation enables the researcher to see the overall patterns in the data without becoming lost in the details (p. 156). Initially, a visual arrangement of themes and sub-themes assumed the shape of a simple web with six discrete sections (Appendix H). However, these separate sections quickly became entangled with strands leading from one theme to another to yet another. This kind of simple conceptualization did not seem to accurately represent the complexity of the data collected. This process of returning again and again to the transcripts, working through the connections between themes and sub-themes, looking for patterns, and arranging understandings into a structure reflective of the relationships within the data ultimately resulted in a conceptual diagram that is part web, part flow-chart, and part reflexive loop (Appendix H).

The final stage of the data analysis process is "selective coding" (Neuman, 1997, p. 424). Data was scanned for specific examples to illustrate the themes, sub-themes and connections existing among the various understandings that emerged from the transcripts. Using the conceptual diagram and the relationships among the six broad themes transcripts were sifted through and excerpts chosen to offer examples of the connections being made. Van Manen (1997) describes themes as "knots in the webs of our experience around which certain lived experiences are spun" (p. 90) and at this point in the process

of data analysis the voices of teachers were carefully selected to reveal nuances of understanding that thread together a web of connections among experiences of professional change.

Findings

Emerging Themes

This interpretive inquiry explored the dynamic relationship existing between lived experiences of professional change and the shaping of teacher identity among seven elementary school teachers in an urban school jurisdiction located in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Six broad themes were identified as unifying the data gathered through conversational interviews conducted over a three week period in April 2007. These thematic strands transcended the experiences of individual participants and emerged as areas in need of closer scrutiny and more in-depth analysis. The connection of these themes, one to the other, offers glimpses into evolving teacher identity and the influence of professional change in the lives of teachers.

The Teaching Self

The seven teachers involved in this study began their description of the *teaching self* by identifying what prompted them to consider educating children as a career choice. Three participants clearly articulated the desire to "make a difference", contribute to the lives of others and even, in the case of one teacher, coaching and later teaching was seen as a way of repaying some of what had shaped his own personal development. Four individuals indicated that they had been involved in some form of teaching as a young person and related personal experiences that shaped their young lives: instructing swimming lessons, teaching Sunday school and working in summer camps with children. Two participants recalled "playing school" as a favourite childhood pastime and one stated that assuming the role of the teacher was what was most enjoyed. Two participants recalled vivid teacher models from their own schooling that endured and prompted their

career choice. These teacher models were described as "sources of inspiration" with personal and professional qualities that engendered respect and emulation:

> We sang songs and we were actively involved and engaged in our learning. I remembered how much fun it was and I can still remember some of the things that we did because we did that. So I've always tried to model myself around what she demonstrated for us.

Two participants maintained that teaching reflects essential aspects of their personality. One shared that while not sure she will always be a classroom teacher, "I think I will always teach in one way or another." Another declared that when it came time to make a decision about a career path it "seemed as though there was no other choice for me because that was . . . it just seemed to suit my personality. I was at my best when I was with kids and so it just kind of fell into place. I felt as though I was really me."

When asked to talk directly about the self that teaches (Palmer, 1998) three participants described themselves as "innovative" with two of the three supplementing this description by saying that they also viewed themselves as "hard workers." Two declared themselves to be "creative" and another considered herself to be a "facilitator" who "sets up situations for children to discover and to learn." One teacher referred to herself as the "lead learner": "I love to learn. I'm curious and I . . . so I enjoy the process I think almost as much as the children do and I love to see the lights come on."

Two participants linked the work they do with children to essential aspects of their personality. One described teaching as "just energy" and connected her appraisal of teaching with who she is as a person: "Teaching is a part of my personality . . . of who I am because I'm just energetic. I get in there with the kids. I feed off their energy, they

feed off of mine and teaching is just a way to keep my life." The other participant spoke directly about how being with children affirmed her sense of purpose: "I have an overwhelming energy about me and a feeling of peace and energy and happiness that comes with being with them. I come alive. I'm happy to be there. The kids put me in a good mood. I feel as though it's where I am supposed to be."

Five participants spoke about the relationships they nurture with their students as central to who they are as teachers and every teacher referred, in one form or another, to the success and enthusiasm of their students as connected to professional identity:

> When things are really good, I think I am a very good motivator and a person who gives compliments and acknowledges when things are going really really well. I become more creative as a teacher. When I see that the kids are enthusiastic about certain things . . . I'll say, "oh, I wonder what would happen if we would do this?" Then I am more motivated to do my research and try different things.

The Experience of Professional Change

All seven participants described their experience of change as self-selected and their role throughout this experience as one of agency. While one teacher was assigned to a new school with an unfamiliar instructional program upon returning from a leave of absence, she understood and accepted prior to the leave that she would have limited control over school placement or teaching assignment. While external factors precipitated this individual's assignment to an unfamiliar school environment, she has clearly chosen to align herself with the predominant instructional focus of the school and it was this instructional paradigm shift she described in detail during her interview.

Nature of the experience. The nature of the experience of change recounted by the seven participants has been clustered into two sub-themes. One participant assumed a challenging leadership role within the school at the encouragement of colleagues while six teachers described the impetus for change as emerging out of the instructional context in which they found themselves. Of these six individuals, one physical education teacher desired deeper relationships with students than her specialized role could afford; however, the remaining five participants outlined an experience of change relating directly to shifting understandings of how children learn and the role of the teacher in that process.

These observations emerged out of the individual contexts described by each of the five teachers. Two participants related this experience as part of a very early teaching career while the remaining three described the experience as taking place within the context of well established practice. In her first year of teaching one participant was offered the opportunity to observe the ways in which a variety of teachers interacted with students in her school: "I saw several different ways of being a teacher and the way you have as a teacher, how much that affects the way your students respond to people who are in that role. I think watching that was a real advantage for me because it helped me figure out how I want to be."

The second teacher to locate the experience of change early in his career assumed the instructional practices of the previous classroom teacher. After five years of using readers, workbooks and "all that kind of stuff" he decided that what had structured his classroom practice to this point was simply not working. He described his experience of change as an "epiphany":

> Around my fifth year . . . it was my fifth year, I had a epiphany and just said, 'I can't teach this way because it is not giving me any enthusiasm. I'm not seeing any real progress or insight from the kids.' I didn't know what it was at the time, but I started to group my learning and I remember my first unit was on dinosaurs.

The three remaining participants each identified their experience of change as taking place during a time in their career characterized by well-established instructional practices. Out of this context emerged a growing realization that the learning needs of children were not being met. One participant attributes the beginning of her experience of change to direct observations she made in her classroom relating to two students: one who had "a lot of problems in learning", was absent from school regularly but was sought after as a group member and another who was "bright and had lots of information" but found it very difficult to work productively in a group. These observations precipitated an exploration of Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences and, ultimately, a systematic rearrangement of instructional practices.

Another participant described her shift to whole language methods of literacy instruction within her grade one classroom:

> I got to the point where I couldn't stand, I just couldn't stand, the reader, the workbook, clipping the corners of the phonics books. Reading was not very much fun for the kids when you had to teach them the sight words before they could read the stories and, you know, it just felt like it was so phony what we were doing. It wasn't really connected to any kind of life, you know, and I just had this feeling that you needed to make connections.

The third teacher, currently in the midst of a profound change experience, identified her move away from conventional teaching practices to inquiry-based learning as "the biggest turning point in my career." She portrayed herself as "very workbook oriented, very controlled and structured" but within her new school context finds herself challenged to be a different kind of teacher. Recognizing the value in the instructional shift she is currently experiencing this teacher "wants so badly to learn all I can about teaching this way."

Moving through the experience. Four participants in the inquiry identified their experience of change as a time of stress, with specific reference made to feeling "out of control" and "overwhelmed." These feelings were elaborated on by the one individual in the midst of change when describing her uncertainty and the erosion of her confidence as a teacher: "I feel as though I am not a good teacher. I feel as though I don't know what I'm doing. Most days feel uncertain." Comments made about feeling "really shaky" and "a bit scared" were, however, countered with observations made by five participants about the level of energy and excitement that this experience nurtured particularly once fully engaged: "Oh, it was exhilarating. Once I started to realize that there was a different way to do things and actually got some skills that I could take in to the classroom, it was exciting, it was wonderful. It was like I could stay up all night working on things because I was so happy to be doing what I wanted to be doing."

The notion of "hard work" was directly mentioned by three participants and alluded to by one more. Variously identified as "extra planning", "a lot of energy", "nesting" or the willingness to research and explore new ideas precipitated by the experience, either directly, or indirectly, all participants recognized the role of "hard

work" in moving through their experience. One participant stated: "Well I think one of the things that I needed to do was I needed to work hard." Following this comment the individual proceeded to outline the various ways in which she worked to understand and incorporate new instructional models into her developing practice.

All seven participants clearly articulated the influence this experience exerted on who he or she is as a teacher. Four viewed themselves as "more confident." The successful negotiation of change prompted five participants to talk about how their experience increased the professional motivation to take risks and explore new approaches. This was described by one participant as having "the courage to keep pursuing those kinds of things and learning new things." Three participants linked their experience of professional change to their personal lives. Through her experience one sought to balance the emotional turmoil: "I came to realize that I had to start doing things at home for myself" while the other two teachers identified the successful changes implemented in their classrooms as contributing to increased self confidence.

Two described the ways in which their relationship with students changed. One felt more connected to her students as she "got to know them on a little more personal basis" and called this a "really powerful thing." The other described herself as a more engaged teacher who interacts with children in a different way. Moreover, she believed this change was recognized by her students:

> Now if you were to ask the children they would say I am part of the classroom. I sit with them. I talk with them. I ask them interesting questions so maybe that is it, that I'm more part of the classroom than the one running it.

Change as Loss and Grief

The notion that experiences of change can also be times of loss and grief found resonance with four participants who recalled that during this time of change they wished to return to "how things were." And while one or these teachers conceded that "I have never looked at change as being something to dread or a real bad thing but I think I will probably miss those types of times" the other three were more emotional in their recollection. One stated that "I'd give anything to be back there now." This experience was described as "a mournful time" accompanied by feelings of sadness, loneliness and abandonment and was particularly evident for the three individuals who mourned the loss of relationships. In addition to the loss of collegial relationships due to retirement, school relocation and professional differences of opinion, one individual also mourned the loss of the kind of relationships possible with older students.

The individual currently in the midst of professional change identified most closely with the notion of change as loss: "Loss is a big word and it's a big word for me because it is very true." Loss was described, for her, as a loss of control and a desire to reclaim a time when she felt more in control and more confident. However, while wishing for a means of returning to a time when she thinks she "felt more confident and I was happier" she also recognized that "you can either run from it [change] or you can learn from it and so, my answer to these people is I have a lot to learn and I will be a better teacher. With that, though, is loss."

The idea that change could be experienced as a time of grief and loss did not resonate with three participants. All saw themselves as welcoming new experiences, looking forward, and being enthused and energized by the professional change they chose

to share. One stated that "I can't think of anything in our past that I would want to do now, the way I used to teach or the approaches we used or the technology that we used. I don't think I would want to go back. It's not where I am." Another participant described her response to professional change as opening up "a whole new area of learning for me" and explained that, together with other interested staff members, "we started to change the culture of our school and that was energizing." The third teacher connected change to the notion of "hard work" and establishing new paths for success within a changed environment. This was similar to the teacher previously cited who conceded, while she thought she would miss aspects of the "way things were", essentially she understood that, in times of change, hard work was what was required: "You have to be able to put in more work. That can mean different things. That can be making different connections and instead of complaining about something to get in there and be a part of it and do what you can to change it."

The Role of Formal Professional Development

Four participants referred positively to the role of formal professional development activities during their experience of change. Three teachers sought out multiple workshops to inform a changing instructional paradigm with two participants describing how enhanced understandings were then shared with colleagues. In one case this manifested itself in a close working relationship with the other teacher of the same grade while the second participant described how the collaboration resulted in the implementation of new instructional ideas and techniques ultimately shaping school culture. One attributed the challenges posed by students as motivation for attending conferences. The fourth participant attended a variety of different workshops and saw her

involvement in these activities as affirming existing practice: "You know I'm going to all the different workshops in the past couple of months which has also confirmed that what I believe in and what I'm believing in is the right thing to believe in."

The Influence of Professional Relationships

Professional relationships influenced the lives of teachers involved in this study in three different ways: to prompt, to sustain and to inhibit experiences of change. During the conversational interviews all seven participants talked about the role of colleagues to initiate or prompt their experience of change. One teacher remarked on the value of being surrounded by "people who have the same philosophy as you and the same kinds of interests . . . otherwise you can't grow" while another participant observed how once they began working closely together "we morphed into something similar." Two explained that it was through professional discussion that ideas were generated and two identified classroom visits and seeing other teachers work with children as precipitating questions that led to the exploration of new instructional methods. One participant directly cited the influence of the school principal as the single most important catalyst for professional change: "It was his (the principal) confidence in the way that he valued me as a teacher that gave me the confidence to go and start looking for something I could try. He never even questioned that I could do it."

Five participants cited the influence of professional relationships as sustaining their experience of change. On-going collegial discussion, informal mentoring relationships and the role of positive feedback were all described as playing an instrumental role in sustaining new practice: "I talked and talked and he would always,

you know, ask questions. He was always very good to tell you he thought you were doing a good job, if he thought you were doing a good job. It's just all in your self-worth."

One participant offered observations about the challenge of sustaining change when professional relationships are strained. Initially, this individual described herself as feeling "empowered" and "really excited and ready for the opportunity" but when difficulties emerged within the context of changing instructional practice this initial excitement gave way to feeling "compromised because I was feeling ineffective." The challenge of sustaining new instructional practices without the overt support of colleagues resulted in feelings of abandonment.

Success, Confidence, and Willingness to Engage Change

All seven participants described the ways in which success during their experience of change led to increased professional confidence and how this, in turn, resulted in a willingness to engage change in different contexts. One teacher identified personal growth and development as emerging from her experience of change: "I know that I have other interests that I would like to pursue. You know . . . in the arts. I love painting and photography and even gardening and so I guess what I'm saying is it's given me the courage to keep pursuing those kinds of things and learning new things." Three participants observed that when their students are "engaged" and "enthusiastic about learning" then "I am more motivated to do my research and try different things." One individual, considered to be a senior staff member, described how she has been recently asked by less experienced teachers for guidance; while this felt overwhelming at first she now finds her evolving relationships to be "satisfying." One participant connected her professional confidence to the nature of the respectful relationship she has forged with

her students: "I feel like I can do anything now. I have enough confidence in myself to know that you (the students) do know more and you can tell us about it or bring in a book for me. I have that respect with them and that relationship works for me."

One participant explained that her experience of change offered the opportunity to repair the erosion of confidence she felt as a result of moving to many different schools and always feeling like a newcomer: "I went from being, like I said, rather . . . I guess just having not very much confidence . . . but it's really good to suddenly feel that you're doing something that's really successful. It's working for children and it felt really good." This repair of professional confidence nurtured the willingness to explore new instructional practices, to attend conferences and workshops, and to eventually act as both a mentor and instructor within the broader educational community.

The teacher currently in the midst of profound professional change articulated both the erosion, as well as the restoration, of her professional confidence within this experience. Arriving in a new school with an unfamiliar instructional focus, this individual soon found herself feeling "rattled" which she defined as "a lack of confidence, incompetence, and uncertainty about where I fit in." This uncertainty was in direct contrast to her previous experience as a classroom teacher: "For so many years, teaching in a conventional setting, I was very confident, very happy, very fulfilled because I knew exactly where I was going. I was totally at ease with the philosophy of the school and the way that everybody kind of talked the same." In addition, this teacher observed that "I've learned so much from that feeling of being not confident. When I'm not confident I can actually pay closer attention to what she [mentor teacher] is doing because I want so badly to learn." While recognizing that being in the midst of change is

not easy, this participant identified positive interactions with her students as well as past success as contributing to her continued willingness to engage new instructional practices: "It's a feeling of confidence and knowing where I've come from and knowing I've already made changes and been successful. Because I've been successful in the past, I can be successful now."

In summary, these six themes - The Teaching Self; The Experience of Professional Change; Change as Grief and Loss; The Role of Formal Professional Development; The Influence of Professional Relationships; and Success, Confidence, and Willingness to Engage Change - unify the data gathered through conversational interviews with seven elementary school teachers during the course of this inquiry. By transcending the experiences of individual participants, these themes will help to create a framework for the discussion to follow as they offer glimpses into evolving teacher identity and the influence of professional change in the lives of teachers.

Discussion

I Hear Voices

The cadence of phrasing, the emphasis of one word over another, as well as silence for thinking and consideration, shapes the voices that speak from the text that anchors experience to the page in front of me. I hear each voice as I read through transcripts searching for connections that will offer a glimpse into an experience of professional change in the lives of these seven teachers. I am surprised how quickly I am able to identify the speaker, even though the voice has been removed from its transcript and placed within a category designed to compile and arrange spoken words into themes and sub-themes. The voices have become bits of data and clusters of connections. Thematic conversations take shape among seven separate individuals; yet this is an illusion, a contrivance to facilitate my role as a searcher for connections and meaning. Never having previously engaged in this conversation together, it happens now as part of the process required to structure the data into a form that will represent what I have learned about experiences of change during the course of this inquiry. While strangely disembodied, these clustered voices speak in unison to offer glimpses, shadows, and whispers of understanding.

In considering how best to discuss the findings of this interpretive study, I have a strong sense that the voices of these seven teachers must be given breath. Just as they were spoken, first during the interviews and then later from the text of the transcripts, the words must now be organized and arranged to reveal nuances of shared understanding. The following discussion will explore six themes uncovered during the process of data analysis within three broad strands: Voices of Identity; Voices of Change; and Voices of Becoming.

Voices of Identity

Teaching as an essential aspect of identity. Teachers taking part in this study described their work as an essential aspect of who they are. This is related, in large part, to their sense of purpose and the value placed on their interactions with children. Susan, a participant, offered this reflection:

> I have an overwhelming energy about me and a feeling of peace and energy and happiness that comes with being with them. I come alive. And I can be exhausted and tired and maybe not having a great day at home with my family but when I'm at school I'm happy. I'm happy to be there, the kids put me in a good mood. I feel as though that's where I'm supposed to be.

Lasky (2005) maintains that teacher identity is founded upon the essential beliefs and purposes that shape a teacher's work. Specifically, Nias (1996) suggests that these purposes include a sense of moral responsibility for students and for their learning. Participants in this inquiry substantiated this understanding.

Many of the educators assumed teaching roles throughout their teenage years within recreational settings and explained their entry into the field of education because "I wanted somehow to make a difference." Childhood models of exemplary teaching, "sources of inspiration", were credited by three of the participants as important influences in their later career choice and two participants reminisced about "playing school" and being the teacher.

The act of teaching seems to be so intimately tied to purpose and personal identity that it has the power to transcend the traditional classroom. Sara, a primary grade teacher, stated:

> I think there is a possibility that I will go into something other than being a full time classroom teacher but I wouldn't do that for any type of position, I would do that for something I feel that I could certainly make a really solid contribution. I think I will always teach in one way or another.

Two participants recognized that "teaching is part of my personality." When asked what prompted her to become a teacher, Susan responded by saying that "it just seemed to suit my personality. There was nothing else I wanted to be and so I was happiest when I was with kids. I was at my best when I was with kids and so it just kind of fell into place." While not every participant expressed the notion that teaching is an essential part of their personality, each teacher viewed the work they do with children within the broader context of who they are as a person.

Commitment to student engagement and success. Emerging from these conversations was the commitment of every participant to student learning and success, as well their reflection on the way this commitment influenced them. They described themselves as "a facilitator", "creative", "innovative", and "the lead learner." Student engagement and enthusiasm was mentioned by every participant in some manner. Cheryl, an experienced upper elementary teacher, identified it as the critical factor in motivating her professional behaviour:

> When things are really good, I think I am a very good motivator and a person who gives compliments and acknowledges when things are going really really well. I become more creative as a teacher. When I see that the kids are enthusiastic about certain things . . . I'll say 'oh, I wonder what would happen if we would do this?' Then I am more motivated to do my research and try different things.

Another teacher talked about how, for several years, he has missed the "fun of learning and the fun of how kids learn" and of his desire to recapture this excitement of learning. When asked how he knew he had been successful in his classroom in the past, Tom shared these observations about a series of math lessons:

> I felt it was successful because the kids were engaged . . . they were asking questions of me, of each other . . . they were showing discovery. Not your traditional quiet classroom, hands popping up. There was just so much enthusiasm that they were shouting and being excited!

Engaging students in meaningful learning both motivates and affirms teachers. It is as if the experience of engagement and enthusiasm is as important for the teacher as it is for the students. Diane shared: "I love to learn. I'm curious and so I enjoy the process, I think almost as much as the children do, and I love to see the lights come on." When asked what it feels like to be a teacher in those moments when "the lights come on" she responded:

> Those moments. Joy. There is a lot of joy. It's those unpredictable moments. It's not what's in the teacher plans of what happens in the room. It is a joy. There is a feeling of satisfaction. I like when kids take pleasure in that as well. Not everybody does but I like that enthusiasm that's generated and I hope that I transmit that to the students but certainly they also energize me.

It appears "the self that teaches" (Palmer, 1998) is affirmed and influenced by student engagement, enthusiasm and success. Teachers in this study seemed to monitor and assess their professional identities relative to the level of engagement observed in their students. So important are these qualities that four of the seven participants identified a

lack of engagement and enthusiasm, on the parts of both the students and themselves, as precipitating experiences of professional change.

A profession founded upon relationships. Nias (1996), Hargreaves (1998a; 1998b; 2004), and Lasky (2005) all describe the emotional and relational aspects of teaching. Similarly, teachers interviewed during this inquiry recognized the belief that "in the classroom or anywhere, building relationships is the most important thing. I think that relationships are way more important than curriculum." Bonnie reflected on this aspect of her experience as a teacher and observed:

> I always have very positive relationships. That what I love about teaching . . . the relationships with kids. That's what brings me back every year. You know if it were the paperwork, the meetings, the new programs, the new curriculum then I probably couldn't face it . . . it's the kids who bring me back . . . honestly.

These classroom relationships form the bedrock for understanding their work with children. Built upon teacher identity and aspects of the personal self offered in these relationships, teachers recognize and value the relational quality of their work.

Hamachek (1999) suggests that "consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously we teach who we are" (p. 209). This notion is both appealing and frightening to teachers. Cheryl described one of her goals for the upcoming school year by saying:

> Well, I would like to do more 'artsy' kinds of things. I would like to do more role playing, script writing, photography, more creative kinds of things. In a sense it is letting the students have a glimpse as to what I'm really like as a person.

It is accepted, and even expected, that teachers will attend to the personal interests of

children in their classrooms. By learning more about each student - who plays the piano, who has a new baby sister, who lives with his grandparents - teachers are better able to respond to individual learning and behavioural needs. However, when educators share personal hobbies and interests students are offered a more profound glimpse into the "real person" of the teacher.

Teachers often invest themselves so intensely in the lives of students that their personal and professional identities begin to overlap (Nias, 1996). Sharing of extra-curricular interests offers the opportunity to construct a rich relationship that is reciprocal in nature and characterized by both parties knowing about and valuing the personal interests of the other. Not only did Cheryl recognize that she brought her personal self to the classroom every day, she intended to offer her students a glimpse into who she is as a way to strengthen the relationship between herself and her students.

This desire to share essential elements of identity with students seems to be such a powerful impulse that Susan felt frustrated when she found herself in a situation where she felt unable to "be myself." She explained:

> It isn't my classroom so I don't have control or a feeling of control over the classroom and so most days feel as though I am doing the best I can. I am teaching more the way she would teach because it's her classroom so I'm trying not to make waves there but at the same time I can't be myself really because it's not my room. And so the real me . . . the real me doesn't come out as a teacher.

Schmidt and Datnow (2005) link the emotional response of teachers in specific contexts to their sense of agency. Susan felt powerless to maintain control of the classroom situation. Frustration resulted when the intense need to present the "real me as a teacher"

was thwarted and her true self was hidden or obscured by the particular situation or context.

In addition, every day teachers present their personal values for themselves, for learning, and for students and, in doing so, "teach who we are" (Hamachek, 1999). Sometimes this is done intentionally but, more often, it happens naturally in the day-to-day interactions that build relationships between teachers and students. Tom recalled that, in response to a question asked by a parent regarding his religious beliefs, he stated: "I just told her that I subscribe to my own set of values and those are not just teaching values, they are my own personal values." Teachers in this study indicated that they taught who they are by sharing personal interests with students and through the values they embody within the classroom.

Revealing who we are can also be a frightening prospect. While teachers have some element of choice about which parts of their personal self they share with their students and colleagues, Sara realized that "children can sense if you don't really show them who you are are." The recognition that a kind of personal transparency seems to exist within classrooms was unsettling to this primary grade teacher. She said:

> I think that the notion of showing who you really are is scary because none of us is perfect and it is difficult to accept that the parts of your personality that you don't like so much are there for so many easily influenced your students to soak up.

However, rather than being overwhelmed by the thought that children in her classroom seem to be a able to see through her, Sara acknowledged, "That's a motivator to do a lot of work but difficult work sometimes."

Emotional and ever-changing nature of teacher identity. The most intimate glimpse into the emotional and ever-changing nature of teacher identity is afforded through comments offered by Susan, a teacher in the midst of profound professional change. She described herself, when teaching in a more conventional setting, as "confident, very happy and very fulfilled because I knew exactly where I was going. I was totally at ease with the philosophy of the school." The beliefs and purposes Susan held for her work shaped a confident and fulfilled sense of who she was as a teacher.

The intimate connection established between the merged personal and professional self - the *who* and the *what* - precipitates emotional experiences of joy, excitement, exhilaration, and deep satisfaction when teachers believe their students' learning needs are being met. However, teachers may also experience feelings of fear, frustration, guilt, anxiety, and anger when they feel thwarted in their ability to create successful learning opportunities (Nias, 1996).

Susan attributed a great deal of the frustration and anxiety she was currently experiencing to her perceived inability to meet the learning needs of the students in her classroom: "I feel as though I don't know what I'm doing. I can't learn fast enough. I feel as though I could study all night, every night and try to come up with everything I could . . . and I still . . . I still wouldn't be able to catch up." If teachers believe that their central purpose, helping children learn, is being circumscribed by forces outside of themselves and beyond their control, feelings of satisfaction and emotional security may be compromised. Now, in the midst of a more challenging environment that has prompted pedagogical change, Susan ultimately confided that "I feel as though I'm not . . . I'm not a really . . . I'm not as good of a teacher as I thought I was."

In conclusion, Lasky (2005) suggests that teacher identity is "how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others" (p. 901). Palmer (1998) writes that teacher identity can be discussed by considering the question "Who is the self that teaches?" Both he and Hamachek (1999) maintain that personal identity is an integral aspect of any learning environment. The literature, including definitions rooted in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, maintains that context, together with innate qualities and personal biographies, shapes an individual's identity. Teachers are emotionally committed to the many facets of their work and this emotional attachment cannot be viewed as an indulgence, or mere sentimental adornment, rather seen as a professional necessity (Nias, 1996; Hargreaves, 1998a).

The voices in this inquiry described themselves professionally as an essential part of who they are. They recognized that teacher identity is founded upon the reciprocal relationships they nurtured with children and directly connected to their commitment to student engagement, learning and success. The emotional and ever-changing nature of teaching was confirmed by the passionate manner in which the seven participating teachers talked about their work, the value they placed on student relationships and their willingness to describe their evolving understanding of the self who teaches.

Voices of Change

Nature of the experience. All seven teachers interviewed described their experience of change as self-selected. Because the emotional response of an individual to an experience of professional change is linked, in large part, to the sense of agency felt by each teacher a sense of purpose manifests itself in positive emotions while hostile passions often emerge when purpose and agency are challenged or thwarted by the

experience (Schmidt and Datnow, 2005). Moreover, when teachers are involved in decisions relating to change and reform processes they are more likely to exhibit increased commitment to professional development and school improvement. This involvement reduces the feelings of anger and anxiety that tend to divert emotional energies into attacking others and protecting one's self (Hargreaves, 2004).

The overall tenor of the responses in this inquiry reflected positive emotions due, as the literature suggests, to a sense of agency and involvement felt by each teacher. While not always pleasant, this experience of professional change ultimately emerged out of a conscious decision made by five participants to explore challenging pedagogies, by one who desired deeper relationships with students than her specialized role in the school could afford or, in the case of Cheryl, by new responsibilities within the school. While external factors precipitated Susan's recent assignment to an unfamiliar environment after her return from a leave of absence she chose to embrace the dominant instructional focus of the school and reflected on her continuing experience of change.

This inquiry substantiates the understanding that the formation of teacher identity is a complex and on-going construction and re-construction. While both Sara and Tom located their experience of change shortly after they began teaching, the remaining five participants described their experiences as taking place during a time in their careers characterized by well-established instructional practices. Results of this study seem to suggest that seeking out and selecting experiences that ultimately influence teacher identity is not limited to particular times or stages in a teacher's career. All seven participants indicated a willingness, and even an enthusiasm, to seek out change regardless of his or her career stage.

Experiences of change as loss and grief. This research utilized the model of loss, grief, and restoration articulated by Marris (1975) to frame interview questions posed (Appendix C) and to guide thematic analysis. Based upon his observations of situations involving recently bereaved widows, slum clearance, and African tribal relocation, Marris identifies the basic need for *continuity* as central to his understanding of change.

When human beings encounter experiences of change, whether selected or imposed, they are placed within the context of a familiar and reliable construction of reality which rests, not only on the regularity of events themselves, but on the continuity of their meaning. Marris describes this the "conservative impulse" (p. 12), maintaining that it is an essential aspect of our ability to survive in any situation. If unable to preserve the thread of continuity by conserving the meaning of past understandings within experiences of change, an individual will experience feelings of loss and grief. The greater and more significant the severing or misalignment of meaning with experience, the more profound the feelings of loss and grief will be.

Four teachers in this inquiry described the initial stages of their experience of professional change as stressful and overwhelming. Sara remembered herself as being "a little bit scared", Cheryl recalled being "very hesitant and really shaky", and Bonnie mentioned that "at first, I didn't feel like I had a lot of control." Susan maintained that, in the midst of change, "most days feel uncertain" and she often feels rattled and incompetent. These feelings have emerged in response to the enormous challenge presented by an instructional paradigm in opposition to her previous understanding of learning and teaching. She explained the nature of this change and her attendant feelings by tracing her experience with schooling from childhood:

> The biggest change for me has been going from a conventional upbringing. I mean, when I went to school it was very conventional. When I went to university it was still conventional. When I taught special education everything was very workbook oriented, very controlled and structured and so going from that to where I am now, which is very inquiry based, creative and critical thinking and all of those kinds of philosophies and ways of thinking, that has been the thing that has rattled me the most.

These four participants, who described the initial stages of their experience of professional change as unsettling and even overwhelming, were the teachers most receptive to the notion that change is characterized by grief and loss.

When asked directly about their feelings during this time of change, all responded positively to the idea that change experiences bring about feelings of grieving and loss. Cheryl described this as a "mournful time" when she felt "totally abandoned" while Sara conceded that there were times when "you long for how things were." Bonnie maintained that ideas of grief and loss were "huge for me" while Susan identified an intense longing for the way things were: "There have been lots of times where I've thought, can't I just go back there where I felt more confident and I was happier?" She displayed tremendous difficulty reconciling her previous feelings of success and confidence with her current feelings of incompetence, and shared that "loss is a big word for me because it is very true. It's a loss of who you were as a teacher. Because that Susan is gone, it's a new one now."

When an individual is unable to preserve the thread of continuity by conserving the meaning of past understandings within an experience of change, Marris suggests that

feelings of loss will result. Results of this inquiry would seem to substantiate this understanding as the four teachers most responsive to the notion of change as loss were, indeed, those most affected in the initial stages by feelings of stress, uncertainty, loss of control, and even incompetence. Moreover, his assertion that the more significant the severing of meaning, the more profound will be the feelings of loss and grief experienced by the individual, appears to be corroborated by Susan's description of her intense desire to reclaim, or preserve, the thread of continuity which had been lost: her confident, professional self.

Johnson (2000) suggests that an individual's sense of self is a socially constructed entity shaped by interaction with others as well as with ideas embedded within an individual's context. Specifically, teacher identity is described as the way in which teachers define who they are professionally to themselves and to others (Lasky, 2005; Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt, 2000). When Susan described her experience of change as a time of loss she located the loss directly within her understanding of who she was as a teacher and who she is now: "that Susan is gone, it's a new one now." The thread of continuity, severed by her experience of change, was her understanding of her professional self.

Susan's observations were emotionally laden. Her need to preserve the thread of continuity was the most clearly articulated of all participants possibly due, in part, to the immediate nature of her change experience. While the other three participants related feelings of loss and mourning, they did so from the vantage point of having lived through the experience. Susan, in the midst of profound change, could not have been sure that her feelings of incompetence would resolve themselves and that she would, ultimately, regain

the thread of continuity - her sense of professional self.

However, the essential quality of what had been lost was, perhaps, even more influential than its immediacy. She described the experience as "the biggest turn or turning point in my career that I didn't see coming", and expressed doubts about her own competence in the midst of this change experience. At times during the interview the essential nature of this professional transition became painfully clear:

> With this change, particularly this year, I feel as though I am not a good teacher. I feel as though I don't know what I am doing. I would say it (the experience) has impacted be greatly because I feel as though I'm not . . . I'm not a really . . . I'm not as good of a teacher as I thought I was.

Her voice, throughout the interview, was one of searching for the assurance that her confident, professional self would be found within the context of a new instructional paradigm. Susan explained her need to persevere in the following manner: "I've said it isn't easy some days. But you can either run from it or you can learn from it and I have a lot to learn and I will be a better teacher. With that though is loss."

Susan's understanding of how she must move forward would also appear to support Marris' notion that the restoration of continuity is achieved, not by ceasing to care for what has been lost, but rather by identifying and distilling what was fundamentally important in the relationship and rehabilitating or renewing it. It is not enough to simply replace old, lost meanings with fresh, new ones. He suggests that recovery from grief depends on restoring a sense that the lost attachment can provide meaning within the current situation. The recovery of a confident professional self, altered in fundamental ways by her experience, was viewed by Susan as her ultimate

goal: "I was thinking I know where I want to go. I think I have come to terms with the fact that it has to be my route. It can't be somebody else's route or that I'm going to be exactly like that (other) teacher. In the end it's going to be me who teaches maybe with some of those qualities but it is still going to be me." With these comments Susan outlined how she believed the "threads of continuity" would be restored as she moved through this experience.

Integrated experiences of change. Three participants in this inquiry described their experience of change as a time of renewal brought about by the gradual adoption of new instructional practices. None felt that ideas of loss and grief applied to the experience of change they described, and used words like "energizing", "exhilarating", "wonderful", and "an epiphany" to share how they felt throughout the experience. All three explained that they sought alternate ways of structuring learning in response to observations made about the quality of student engagement in their classrooms. Diane began exploring Howard Gardner's model of Multiple Intelligences after noting clear differences between two of her students and their learning styles. Tom recognized that "it [teaching] wasn't engaging for me and I had an epiphany and just said, 'I can't teach this way because it is not giving me any enthusiasm and I'm not seeing any real progress or insight from the kids." Jean, who described herself previously as a "very traditional teacher, a very rigid teacher" came to the point where she felt like she was drowning:

> I couldn't, I just couldn't stand the reader, the workbook, clipping the corners of the phonics booklets. I was just feeling like I was drowning. It just felt like it was so phony what we were doing. It wasn't really connected to any kind of life, you know, and I just had this feeling that you needed to make connections.

These observations about the purpose of learning and student engagement led both Jean and Tom on a path that ultimately involved whole language instructional practices, cooperative and inquiry-based learning.

Marris suggests that not all experiences of change result in feelings of loss and grief. Rather, when change is incremental, built upon meanings previously formulated by the individual and when these new experiences do not disrupt or alter an individual's thread of continuity, then change is assimilated and accepted. In other words, integrated change takes place when new purposes are imposed on circumstances whose meanings have not been disrupted. The experiences of these three participants would seem to substantiate this understanding of integrated change.

Unlike Susan described earlier, these three teachers did not find their "threads of continuity" severed by their experiences of change. In fact, quite the opposite occurred. Rather than challenging established understandings of the self who teaches, these experiences of change actually reinforced their essential understandings of what it means to be a teacher. Beginning with observations made initiating change that led, ultimately, to the alternate instructional methods adopted, the desire for enhanced student engagement and learning was the "thread of continuity" for these teachers.

The experiences of change described by these three teachers reflect essential understandings of learning and teaching. All were able to assimilate and accept new instructional practices into their pedagogy as long as student engagement and successful learning was viewed as a key aspect of teacher identity. At least in part, Marris' notion of integrated change, when new purposes are imposed on circumstances whose meanings have not been disrupted, offers a framework for understanding the lack of resonance felt

by these teachers to the idea of change accompanied by feelings of loss and grief.

The role of formal professional development. The role of formal professional development activities during experiences of change was recognized as important by four of the teachers participating in this inquiry. Cheryl described the workshops she attended as confirming essential understandings about learning and teaching, while the remaining three participants sought out professional development activities - conference sessions and workshops - in order to inform new instructional paradigms that emerged from their recognition that student needs were not being met by current classroom learning practices. It was also these three teachers who felt the least resonance with the notion of change as experiences characterized by loss and grief.

Teachers are interested in professional development because they believe it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth, and enhance their effectiveness with students (Guskey, 2002). Due, in large part, to the pragmatic nature of most teachers, Guskey outlines a model of professional development that focuses, first, on student learning and success. He argues that only when teachers observe that student learning is enhanced will they alter their established attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. The contention that professional growth emerges from a deep and pragmatic regard for student learning is supported by others who link the emotional practice of teaching to student success (Nias, 1996; Hargreaves,, 1998a, 1998b). Jean, Tom, and Diane all sought formal professional development opportunities in response to a keen need to know more about instructional practices that observations and they believed would enhance learning in their classrooms.

In addition, as suggested earlier, these three teachers seem to have successfully

integrated change experiences into existing understandings, without feelings of loss and grief, because the notion of student learning and success was central to their understanding of themselves as teachers. New purposes were imposed on circumstances whose meanings had not been disrupted; one of the ways in which these new purposes were explored and defined was through formal professional development activities. Their regard for the information and direction offered through conferences and workshops is rooted in their deep concern for student learning and the recognition that an alternate instructional paradigm could enhance classroom practice.

The influence of professional relationships. However, the most clearly articulated professional influence noted by participants in this inquiry was that of collegial relationships. These relationships exerted a powerful influence to both prompt and sustain experiences of change. While it was recognized by participants that the existence of a vibrant school culture encourages change and that sharing a similar teaching philosophy nurtures growth, all seven teachers identified particular colleagues as instrumental in initiating a change experience. Occasionally, it was the professional example of another colleague that encouraged change. At other times, specific comments pointed to the role of dialogue and emotional encouragement in prompting and sustaining change experiences.

Two participants established deeper professional relationships with colleagues during the course of classroom visits. These sessions of peer observation precipitated discussion and questions about their own practice that ultimately led to professional change. Sara observed: "I saw several different ways of being a teacher. I think watching that was a real advantage for me because it helped me figure out how I want to be. I

talked to a lot of the teachers that I thought were doing such a good job and they shared with me." Susan, in the midst of change, described the role of formal professional development and collegial relationships in the following manner:

> Workshops of those kinds have been a very small part of it. I probably would have got through without them. I would say that it has been . . . I would say that it's been my relationships with my colleagues, number one, and I think there has been a growing feeling over this year, in particular, that where I'm at is o.k. and that's just been through discussions. That has been the biggest professional development for me . . . watching and learning and having an opportunity to do it without feeling judged.

Penlington (2007) writes about conversation and dialogue as a catalyst for teacher change and suggests that during collegial discussions a "teacher is afforded an opportunity to see her reasoning from a point of view other than that she habitually adopts, thereby broadening the interrogation of her reasoning to take into account a much wider set of factors"(p. 10). It is through conversation and dialogue that teachers are encouraged, or even pushed, to examine both the assumptions that structure their practice and the effect their practices have upon students. She suggests that within this culture of trust, where assumptions are questioned and dissonant views are encouraged, a teacher may become "vulnerable to change" (Penlington, 2007, p. 11). Penlington offers a theoretical construct for observations made by both Sara and Susan about the importance of collegial dialogue and its ability to initiate experiences of change within environments of trust.

Professional relationships also have the power to offer emotional support through

tangible encouragement and the recognition of a shared journey. Sara observed that "you learn that what you're going through, probably a colleague has gone through, too. You talk it over with them and even if they cannot offer you a solution they can share that issue." Jean described how the school principal played a crucial role in prompting her to seek out a new instructional paradigm:

> I was just feeling like I was drowning so I happened to have a principal that I could talk to about anything and I shared how I was feeling with him. He suggested to me why didn't I take a look at a literature-based program, see what I could find and he would support me. It was his confidence in the way that he valued me as a teacher that gave me confidence to go and start looking for something I could try. He never questioned that I could do it. So it was that being valued that, you know . . . and being trusted and allowed to do something as opposed to always being told what to do.

Noddings (1991) describes this kind of interaction among colleagues as "interpersonal reasoning" (p. 158). In contrast to logico-mathematical reasoning, interpersonal reasoning is guided by an approach that values the relationship of individuals over any particular outcome and the desire to build the confidence and self-esteem of others. Characterized by an attitude of care and solicitude, interpersonal reasoning is open, flexible, and responsive. Both Sara and Jean described the role of colleagues during their experience of change as supportive and understanding. In particular, Jean credits her confidence to explore literature-based learning as a direct result of her relationship with the school principal and his encouragement and confidence in her abilities. Perhaps the nature and strength of this collegial relationship acted as a

"thread of continuity" that supported Jean through the experience of change and partially accounts for her lack of resonance with the notion of change as a time of loss and grief.

One primary result of this inquiry suggests that while formal professional development activities, like workshops and conferences, offer intellectual stimulation that encourages thinking differently about learning and teaching, colleagues have the potential to play a more influential role in the lives of teachers during times of professional change by both prompting and sustaining change through collegial dialogue, encouragement, and support.

Voices of Becoming

Evolving teacher identity: A complex and dynamic process. The process of constructing professional identity involves educators in coalescing aspects of their past, including personal experiences in school and during teacher preparation, with pieces of their current school context, and images of the kind of teacher and colleague they want to become. Essentially, constructing teacher identity is the convergence of the past, present and future (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Kelchtermans (2005) suggests that an individual, at any given moment, is both in process as well as whole; Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) maintain that identity formation must be viewed as an ongoing process that involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences as they are lived. It has also been suggested that the notion of a fixed and stable identity is an illusion: there is no fixed point of arrival but rather a gradual construction and re-construction of the teaching self (Zembylas, 2003). The seven teachers participating in this study affirm the understanding articulated throughout the literature that uncovering the self who teaches is a complex, dynamic, evolving and on-going process.

Tom, one of the more experienced participants, explained the ever-changing nature of who he is as a teacher when he shared that "I hope I never find out who I am as a teacher because if I do I think that I'm finished." Sara, recognizing a shift in her thinking since her first year of teaching, spoke about the continuum of her professional growth:

> Well, I think it is a constant process. It is a continuum. It is not an end point and I think realizing that is really important. I think when I first started teaching I thought, 'Well . . . I'm going to be so lucky in this place. I have just seen the best teachers that I've ever seen and I am just going to be a fantastic teacher and I am going to be that fantastic teacher in ten years.' And then you realize no, it's a continuum, and you are going to be working toward being that fantastic teacher your whole career.

What appeared to be possible destination early in her career is viewed now as a journey that may never find its completion.

As a result of their experiences of change, teachers in this study generally identified themselves as more confident and resourceful, more engaged in thinking about student learning, and more connected to their students and to colleagues. However, perhaps the most important understanding to be gleaned from this study is that the uncovering of the self-who-teaches is a dynamic, evolving and simultaneous construction and reconstruction of who a teacher is, and who a teacher is becoming.

The influence of uncertainty. Six of the seven individuals participating in this inquiry related their experience of professional change from the secure vantage point of the future. They described their experience as part of a professional journey that had

already unfolded and found resolution. They spoke confidently about the ways in which the experience had shaped them, their professional relationships, their practice, and the ways in which they interacted with children and ideas of learning; in essence, the teacher they were becoming.

Susan, in the midst of a profound experience challenging essential pedagogical understandings, had not yet been afforded the security of knowing how the lost threads of continuity, as described by Marris, would be restored and whether she would emerge with a refined sense of the self-who-teaches. Her uncertainty was one of the most palpable emotions felt throughout the interview: "Most days feel uncertain. I don't have control or a feeling of control over the classroom and so most days feel as though I am doing the best I can."

Helsing (2007) maintains that the literature regarding teacher uncertainty can be clustered into two categories: those that understand uncertainty as either a liability or an asset. Teacher uncertainty, when viewed as a liability, is a result of essential circumstances of teaching as well as a reflection of current organizational reform and restructuring and is often found to be debilitating, painful, and tolerated. The contrasting view suggests that only when teachers allow for some uncertainty about the validity of their own beliefs and teaching practices can they begin to construct new and more effective ones. Uncertainty is viewed, then, as an asset that prompts and sustains change. Susan's description of her current experiences seems to support Helsing's second understanding of the role of uncertainty in the lives of teachers to precipitate growth.

Success, growing confidence and willingness to engage change. All seven teachers described the role of success in building the professional confidence needed to

sustain change. Sara outlined the circular relationship in this way: "And then the next time I went through some form of exercise I started to have a little bit of success and that motivated you because you saw that once you became good at this, what the results were." This understanding was supported by Susan's comment when she explained that "it's a feeling of confidence knowing where I've come from and knowing I've already made changes and been successful . . . that because I've been successful in the past, I can be successful now."

Cheryl directly linked her motivation to explore new ideas to her students: "When I see that the kids are enthusiastic about certain things . . . I'll say, 'oh, I wonder what would happen if we would do this?' and then I am motivated to do my research and try different things." Bonnie related that "when I see the kids do well, I know I've succeeded. So I started to see that I needed to change the way I'm teaching and then when they start to succeed then I feel successful. And that's how I've been feeling lately . . . that I think that I can do whatever is thrown at me." Jean made similar observations connecting professional motivation to student learning. She reflected:

> Then I just started coming up with my own ideas and doing my own things. The children were learning to read and to write and do everything they needed to do according to the curriculum so that gave me some confidence to keep on going.

While early in her interview Susan sounded overwhelmed, she seemed to become more sure of where this experience would lead. Her observations of enhanced student engagement prompted a growing confidence and commitment to change. In addition to speaking about her uncertainty, she reflected on the role of success in nurturing professional confidence:

> I've learned so much from that feeling of not being confident. When I'm not confident I can actually pay closer attention to what she (colleague) is doing. I want so badly to learn all I can about teaching this way. I know this is in my mind where I want to go and on those days where I do have success in the classroom I feel 'oh goodness that was a great critical thinking question' and look at what happened and look at how engaged the kids are. That would never have happened had I been teaching out of a workbook. Now those good days are not every day but those good days are enough to still cement in my mind, this is where I want to be.

Marris' (1975) model of loss, grief, and restoration may offer a framework for understanding Susan's journey through her experience of change. He urges recognition of these feelings of loss and grief, and encourages individuals to work to restore the damaged or severed "threads of continuity" because what has been lost or disrupted may fundamentally threaten the integrity of the structure of meanings on which this continuity rests. In Susan's situation, as discussed earlier, the severed "thread of continuity" seems to be her confidence and trust in the self who teaches. For Susan's professional life to progress Marris suggests that she must work to restore the severed, or altered, sense of continuity.

As Susan related and reflected upon the profound change she was experiencing, this seemed to be exactly what she was doing: reformulating her previous understanding of herself as a teacher - with its confidence and successes - within her current context of uncertainty. She explained that "in-between" place:

> I was thinking I know where I want to go. I think that part of the shift is being ready to say, 'I'm ready for that' and not, 'Oh my goodness, I could never do that!' I want to be even more flexible. I want to be the kind of teacher that can look at the curriculum and pull things out of it to make everything connect for kids. I'm just not quite there. I think this is a lifelong way of teaching for me that I've embarked on. I think I'll get there. But right now I'm still not there. I am not there. I am still partially the teacher who is thinking . . . here's the question and there is the answer I want you to get. That is part of me still.

Susan's efforts to repair the damaged threads of continuity are, as Marris suggests, the journey to establish a renewed, or reformulated, understanding of the self that teaches.

In summary, the voices of the seven participants in this inquiry have been discussed and given breath within a framework that clustered the six themes identified during data analysis into three broad strands: Voices of Identity; Voices of Change; and Voices of Becoming. The model of change as loss and grief articulated by Marris (1975) was used to assist in making sense of the experience of professional change described by each participant. Understandings precipitated by this interpretive inquiry and presented throughout the discussion have contributed to a number of recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Conclusion

The Research Question

Teachers develop evolving understandings of who they are within rich classroom environments characterized by change and complex relationships. Hargreaves (1998a) suggests that "teaching is an emotional practice that also involves heavy investments of emotional labour" (p. 330); even a brief classroom visit will attest to the ever-changing and emotional work in which teachers daily engage. Within this context, teachers develop evolving understandings of their professional self as they seek to answer the question "Who is the self that teaches?" (Palmer, 1998, p. 7).

This inquiry explored the nature of the relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity in the lives of seven elementary school teachers. The research question rested on three essential assumptions: first, there exists a dynamic relationship between experiences of professional change and evolving teacher identity; second, the nature of this relationship is worthy of examination because who the teacher *is* impacts children and learning in real classrooms; and third, an effective methodology for examining this relationship is through qualitative or interpretive inquiry.

Finally, the model of loss, grief, and restoration articulated by Marris (1975) was used to assist in structuring interview questions and probes as well as for interpreting the data gleaned through conversations and personal narratives. Overall, his framework offered flexible scaffolding for understanding the responses offered by the participants in this interpretive inquiry.

Participants: Demographics and Context

The seven teachers involved in this inquiry shared professional experiences of change

with a cluster of voices both rich and diverse. They represented a variety of teaching experiences and a range of years of tenure. Classroom assignments included working exclusively with young children to upper elementary students; one teacher was in her thirty-fifth year of teaching while another had just completed her fifth. Four participants continue to teach in the jurisdiction in which they began their careers, while three have moved and relocated throughout their career. Consistent with demographics across the broader educational context within elementary schools, only one of the seven participants was male. All participants were, at the time of the interviews in the spring of 2007, teaching in elementary schools within a public school jurisdiction in the city of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada.

Limitations of the Inquiry

No delimitations were placed on this inquiry by the researcher, however the number and gender of teachers willing to participate in the semi-structured interviews and share an experience of professional change did create limitations. While presentations were made in three elementary schools outlining the purpose of the study and inviting participation, only teachers from two of the schools expressed interest in becoming involved and, of the seven participants, one was male. This limited the range of voices heard during the inquiry and the data gathered and conclusions offered cannot be considered representative of teachers generally within elementary schools or within the jurisdiction.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Professional conversations and evolving teacher identity. Almost all of the participants commented on how much they appreciated the opportunity to share a

professional experience of change and to reflect on their lives as teachers. Jean stated at the close of her interview that "it's fun to think back. It's fun to go way back to even when I was a child, you know, and to think about . . . like some of these things I haven't thought about for years." Others remarked casually, in the days following their interview, that they enjoyed the opportunity to think through parts of their teaching experience that do not typically form topics of professional conversations.

The most poignant aspect of these conversations was the level of thoughtful consideration given by the participants. Each truly wanted to engage in thinking about his or her work with children and try to understand who they were becoming as teachers. This is illustrated most vividly by Susan who, in the midst of a profound pedagogical paradigm shift, used the interview to clarify, in her mind, the experience of change in which she found herself along with the attendant feelings of uncertainty brought about as a result of the erosion of her confidence. Her level of reflection was illustrated by changing points of view as she considered new elements of her experience and it became apparent that, through this conversation, she was exploring and deconstructing critical understandings and emotions that swirled around who she was becoming. This interview, in particular, reinforced the notion that language and articulation exerts a powerful influence on thinking.

Results of this inquiry reinforced the notion that the process of *becoming* can be discovered during times of conversation that have been specifically structured to explore the very experiences that shape and influence professional identity. While formal professional development opportunities were identified as helpful by some of the participants in this study, the influence of collegial relationships and dialogue was

considered to be essential. Noddings (1991) and Penlington (2007) suggest that not only do these relationships offer support and encouragement but that in the dialogue itself, participants become "vulnerable to change" (Penlington, 2007, p. 11). These kinds of conversations, so rarely held between teachers in busy professional lives, can contribute to new understandings of professional context and of the deeper self who interacts with children. Furthermore, when opportunities are offered for collegial dialogue and reflection, isolation is decreased and teachers recognize that they are not alone in their experience.

Yet, schools are increasingly compromised in the ability to afford this type of professional interaction. Larger class sizes, enhanced curricular demands and even something as mundane as the lack of a designated physical space for teachers make these kinds of discussions that much more difficult to have. A concerted effort will need to be made to make room, both literally and figuratively, for conversations that explore the nature of the work teachers do in classrooms and the way in which experiences of change shape who we are becoming. Ultimately, results of this inquiry indicate that these essential conversations, taking place within relationships of trust, have the potential to nurture confidence and a growing willingness to seek out and engage further change.

Moreover, Marris (1975) identifies ways in which "threads of continuity" can be restored during experiences of change. He suggests that, because they have the potential to absorb a great deal of an individual's energy, feelings of loss and grief must be recognized and addressed. Marris calls for a "moratorium on other business" (p. 160) during experiences of disruptive change arguing that people need to "give their minds to repairing the thread of continuity in their attachments" (p. 160). To overburden an

individual with many, simultaneous experiences of change is to endanger both their emotional resilience and physical wellbeing. These suggestions highlight the need for jurisdictions, schools, and administrators to honour the lived experiences of teachers by offering tangible support for activities and practices that influence and shape evolving teacher identity.

Role of leadership. Jean's description of her relationship with the school principal and his role in initiating and sustaining her experience of change prompts further consideration of how elementary school principals play an instrumental part in shaping evolving teacher identity. While it is certainly true that administrators find themselves assuming a variety and multitude of responsibilities within elementary schools - particularly smaller elementary schools - their role seems to offer unique possibilities to nurture relationships of trust, as well as to include opportunities for reflection and dialogue within regular meeting times. However, in order for school administrators to more easily assume this kind of a role, jurisdictions must recognize the value of such interaction by nurturing a culture of trust and, more pragmatically, by relieving principals and vice-principals of other, more mundane, responsibilities in order to make time for this kind of collegial interaction.

The influence of gender on experiences of change. This interpretive inquiry prompts consideration of another factor that may influence evolving teacher identity. While there was only one male involved in this study further research might be considered to explore the nature of teacher identity among male elementary school teachers. Typically, these teachers have taught within the upper elementary and senior grades; however, men are increasingly selecting primary grades for teaching assignments.

In what ways does a male perspective on the self-who- teaches influence willingness to engage in change? Moreover, is the nature of professional change and teacher identity influenced by gender, or perhaps by personality type? It seems possible that results of an investigation into these kinds of questions could assist both administrators and teachers to support and encourage colleagues in the restoration of severed threads of continuity.

Emerging teacher identity. Finally, this research precipitates broader questions regarding the "birth" of teacher identity. While concerned exclusively with evolving teacher identity among established professionals, this inquiry prompted curiosity about the creation and development of teacher identity within pre-service teachers. It is a dynamic process, this fashioning of an identity: an on-going construction and reconstruction, shaping and reshaping, of who a teacher *is*, and who a teacher *is becoming*. Results of further inquiries investigating how the professional self is born, nurtured and shaped among pre-service teachers could have critical implications for teacher training programs and, by extension, the future of classrooms and the quality of learning opportunities for children.

Listening to the voices. The voices of teachers in this interpretive inquiry echoed enduring understandings that emerge from shared human experience. Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, suggests "nothing endures but change." Cheryl, a participant in this study, acknowledged the uncomfortable and often challenging nature of change by saying that "sometimes you have to fumble your way through before you finally find out what you want to do." Susan, in the midst of a profound paradigm shift, understood the influence her experiences were exerting on her identity as a teacher and on her growing willingness to engage further change:

> It's a feeling of confidence knowing where I've come from and knowing I've already made changes and been successful . . . that because I've been successful in the past, I can be successful now.

Ovid, a Roman poet writing in the first century, maintains that constancy is not even a possibility because deep within each new shape lie the very seeds of its alteration:

> There's nothing constant in the world,
> All ebb and flow, and every shape that's born
> Bears in its womb the seeds of change.

Results of this inquiry appear to offer contemporary support for the notion that change is an essential quality of lived experience. Amidst the change and intense emotion found within the classroom, teachers recognize and respond to the professional challenge offered as they develop evolving understandings of who they are. It is a dynamic process, this fashioning of an identity: an on-going construction and reconstruction, shaping and reshaping, of who a teacher *is*, and who a teacher *is becoming* as each seeks to answer the question, "Who is the self that teaches?" (Palmer, 1998, p. 7).

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Appendix A

Letter Requesting Permission to Conduct Research

December 12, 2006

Dr. Linda Rossler
Superintendent
Medicine Hat School District No. 76
601 – 1st Avenue S.W.
Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 4Y7

Dear Dr. Rossler;

I am conducting educational research as part of my final project toward completion of a Master of Education degree. The University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education Human Subject Committee granted approval of my application on November 10, 2006; this letter is formally seeking permission to gather data by conducting interviews with approximately ten elementary school teachers in Medicine Hat School District No. 76.

The purpose of this interpretive project is to explore the dynamic relationship between lived experiences of professional change and the shaping of teacher identity. It is believed that this research will contribute to a growing understanding of how teachers see themselves and the work they do. Because change is an integral component of the environment in which teachers work, it exists as an influential component in the forming and reforming of teacher identity. Through semi-structured interview questions (Appendix C) data will be gathered from participants willing to reflect upon experiences of professional change and their evolving understanding of who they are as educators.

Teachers volunteering to become involved in this project are assured that their anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the inquiry both in the transcripts made from interview data and in the final phenomenological text. Any portions of participants' responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms.

Confidentiality will be protected by ensuring that only I, as the sole researcher, will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and to the transcripts in electronic and hard-copy form. Audio-tapes, interview notes and electronic data stored on external memory devices will be preserved in a secure filing cabinet for five years and then destroyed.

The data collected in the course of this inquiry will be used as part of the work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree from the University of Lethbridge. As such, results will be shared in a written report and a full copy of this final report given to each participant. Aggregate results may be published in scholarly journals or offered as part of conference presentations.

Information relating to anonymity, confidentiality and the sharing of research results will be clearly communicated to teachers during the oral presentation I will make in order to interest volunteers, on the information sheet to be handed out at the end of this session (Appendix D), as well as on the consent form to be signed by all participants (Appendix E).

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I believe this inquiry has the potential to contribute to deeper understandings about our identity as educators that will, in turn, result in enhanced learning experiences for children in classrooms.

Sincerely,

Sharon Allan

Appendix B

Letter Granting Permission to Conduct Research

Medicine Hat School District No. 76

601 – 1st Avenue S.W., Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 4Y7 Fax: (403) 529-5339
Phone: (403) 528-6701

December 14, 2006

Sharon Allan
1345 – 11th Avenue N.E.
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 6G7

Dear Ms. Allan:

Thank you for your letter of December 12, 2006 requesting permission to conduct research in Medicine Hat School District 76. I have reviewed your letter and find it complies with the standards of informed consent. Your compliance with the Ethics Committee of the University of Lethbridge is also noted.

You are hereby given permission to conduct your research in our district. It looks exciting and worthwhile. I look forward to seeing your results. I wish you all the best in your investigation.

Sincerely,

Linda Rossler

Dr. Linda Rossler
Superintendent

LR/sg

Appendix C

Interview Questions and Conversational Probes

1. Describe who you are as a teacher - Describe the "self" who teaches?
2. Talk about an experience of professional change.
3. Describe how you felt during this experience.
4. Describe your feelings about the experience now, in retrospect.
5. How did you respond to/accomodate the feelings prompted by this experience?
6. In what ways did this experience affect how you saw yourself as a teacher at that time?
7. In what ways did this experience affect how you see yourself as a teacher now?
8. Sometimes experiences of change are described as times of loss - how does this idea fit with your experience described earlier?
9. If your experience of professional change felt like a time of loss describe how you worked through those feelings?

Appendix D

Teacher Information Sheet

I. Purpose of this Research Project

Classrooms are rich environments characterized by change. Children grow physically, mature socially and develop cognitively; learning, at its most essential, is about growth and change. Teachers, in response to their students' development, work to provide meaningful learning experiences that will enhance and facilitate further growth. This relationship, existing between a teacher and his or her students, is complex and laden with emotion.

Amidst this change, teachers develop evolving understandings of who they are. The fashioning of a professional identity is an on-going construction and reconstruction, shaping and reshaping, of who a teacher *is*, and who a teacher *is becoming* and is rooted within the context of each teacher's experience.

The purpose of this interpretive research project is to explore the dynamic relationship between lived experiences of professional change and the shaping of teacher identity.

II. Importance of this Research

This project hopes to:

- contribute to a growing understanding of how teachers see themselves and the work they do.
- enhance learning for children in classrooms.
- offer a deeper understanding of the human experience through the crafting of a final phenomenological text.
- facilitate personal insight through the conversations and reflections that may emerge in the semi-structured interviews.
- explore some of the positive and negative implications of professional development processes on evolving teacher identity.

III. Details Regarding Involvement

Participants will be asked to:

- share their understandings and reflections about who they are as teachers, an experience of professional change and their emotional response to this change.
- take part in an initial, conversational interview of about 1 hour in length that will be audio-taped for transcription purposes. All interviews will take place at a time and location selected to accommodate each individual's schedule.
- verify interview transcripts for accuracy.

- offer clarification or elaboration of comments made in the initial interview in a second interview, if necessary. Either the researcher or the participant may precipitate these comments.
- respond verbally or in writing to the final phenomenological text.
- in total, offer between three and four hours of their time.

IV. Information Regarding Confidentiality, Anonymity, Use of Data and Consent

Participants are assured that:

- their willingness to participate in this inquiry will be held in confidence and the subsequent signing of the consent form will take place in the presence of the researcher only.
- if an individual chooses to withdraw from this inquiry prior to data analysis and the writing of the final report his or her data will not be used in the analysis. The validation of interview transcripts will assume ongoing consent to participate.
- all interviews will be conducted in private so as to ensure the anonymity of each participant and at a time and location suitable to each individual's schedule.
- there are no potential risks anticipated within this interpretive inquiry. However, for some participants the time required to engage in the interviews may be seen as an inconvenience. In the event of a participant disclosing something he or she may later regret, opportunity will be provided to review the interview transcript, to verify its contents for accuracy, and to request that specific comments to be removed for personal reasons.
- the researcher is the only individual who will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts in electronic form. Audio-tapes, interview notes and electronic data stored on an external memory device will be preserved in a secure filing cabinet for five years and then destroyed.
- their anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the inquiry both in the transcripts and in the culminating phenomenological text. Any portions of participants' responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms.
- the results of this inquiry are not intended for commercial purposes. This research project is, however, part of the course work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree and, as such, will be shared in a written report. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations.
- they will receive a copy of the final inquiry report summarizing and interpreting the research findings.

V. Contact Information:

If you would like more information about the purpose, objectives, or procedures involved in this inquiry or are willing to participate in this research project please contact the researcher either by email or by telephone. Your participation will remain confidential; consent forms will be signed in the presence of the researcher only.

Researcher	Sharon Allan 403.527.8986 sharon.allan@uleth.ca
Supervisor	Dr. Pamela Adams 403.329.2468 adams@uleth.ca

Appendix E

University of Lethbridge
Faculty of Education

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Experiences of Professional Change and Evolving Teacher Identity: A Study of Elementary School Teachers

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Experiences of Professional Change and Evolving Teacher Identity: A Study of Elementary School Teachers* that is being conducted by Sharon Allan. Sharon Allan is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact her by email or by telephone if you have further questions: sharon.allan@uleth.ca or 403.527.8986. As a graduate student, she is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Education degree. This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Adams who may be contacted by email or by telephone: adams@uleth.ca or 403.329.2468. In addition to being able to contact the researcher and her supervisor at the above email addresses and phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting Dr. Rick Mrazek (Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge): 403.329.2425.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the dynamic relationship between lived experiences of professional change and the shaping of teacher identity. Research of this type is important because it contributes to a growing understanding of how teachers see themselves and the work they do. Because change is an integral component of the environment in which teachers work, it exists as an influential component in the forming and reforming of teacher identity; our professional identity directly affects instructional practice. As teachers arrive at increased understanding and appreciation for their own experiences as educators and how that affects their instructional practice, student learning will be enhanced. This inquiry is important for its contribution to deeper understandings of our identity as educators that will, in turn, result in enhanced learning experiences for children in classrooms.

You are being asked to participate in this study because, as an elementary school teacher, you have experienced professional change as an embedded part of the work you do with children within an ever-changing classroom environment; you may also have chosen to become involved in professional development activities that precipitated experiences of change.

There are no known or potential risks anticipated with participation in this interpretive inquiry. However, for some participants the time required to engage in the interviews may be seen as an inconvenience. In the event of a participant disclosing something he or she may later regret each participant will be provided the opportunity to review the interview transcript, to verify its contents for accuracy, and to request that specific comments to be removed for personal reasons.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to talk about and understand your experiences of professional change. When voices are heard and taken

seriously, personal insights often emerge that enable individuals to construct more meaningful understandings about those experiences.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include an initial interview of about an hour in length; a follow-up interview for clarification and additional comments; and validating responses to the interview transcripts and to the final phenomenological text. Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate you may withdraw, without any consequences or any explanation, at any time up until the data is analyzed and the final report is written; your data will not be used in the analysis.

To ensure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, you will be asked to verify the accuracy of each of your interview transcripts. Your verification will be your indication of ongoing consent.

Anonymity will be completely protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the inquiry: both in the transcripts and in the final phenomenological text. In addition, any portions of participants' responses that may identify actual individuals will be replaced by pseudonyms. Your confidentiality will be protected by ensuring that only the researcher has access to the raw data (audio-tapes, interview notes) and the transcripts. Data from this study (audio-tapes, interview notes, electronic transcripts saved on external computer storage devices) will be preserved in a secure filing cabinet for five years and then destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data (audio-tapes and interview notes) and the transcripts.

This inquiry is part of the course work required in fulfillment of a Master of Education degree. As such, results will be shared in a written report and a full copy of this final report given to each participant. Aggregate results may be published in journals or offered as part of conference presentations.

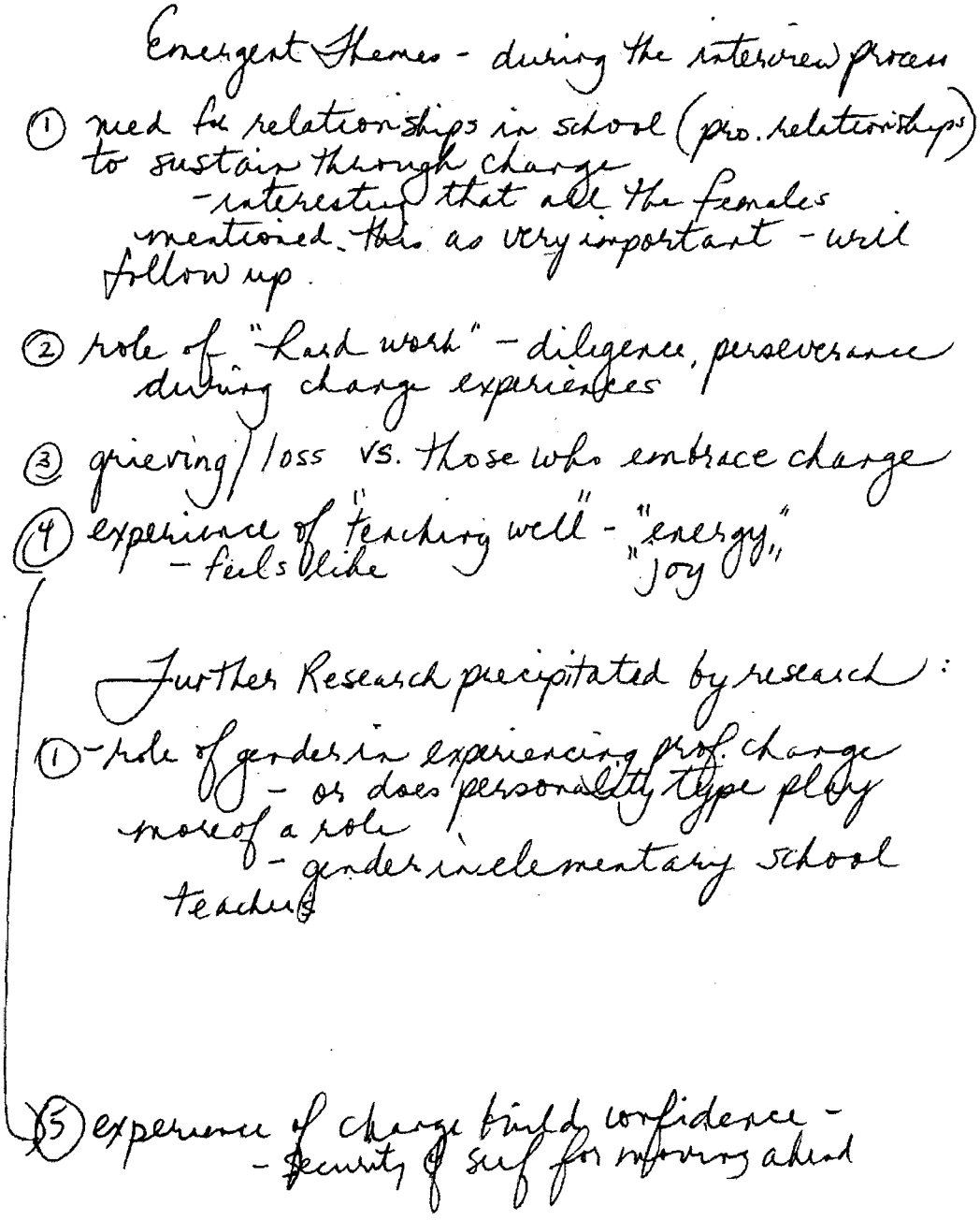
Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

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

Appendix F

Emergent Themes and Reflective Notes



* Write about how sharing who we are as teachers affirms what we do - comments made afterwards

Numerous participants spoke to me afterwards about how the process of sharing their their reflections, thoughts, questions in a non-threatening environment was something they at first were worried about but found helpful. Especially helpful to clarify their own thinking.

This is, I think, helped by the fact that the interviews were not conversations but rather prompted internal conversations - conversations with ourselves - outloud but in our own heads. This "space" created by the interview invited the participant to reflect and reassess, redefine, consider, re-consider their own journey.

synthesize

Comments made like...
"I don't take time to talk about this"

At first teachers seemed to be nervous/ self conscious, not as relaxed - didn't meet my eyes etc - but after they got rolling and the words started to spill out they relaxed visibly.

I wonder if . . .

→ grieving and loss are more immediate to those who are more timid about change?

→ "working hard" through change is a gender quality? personality trait? other?

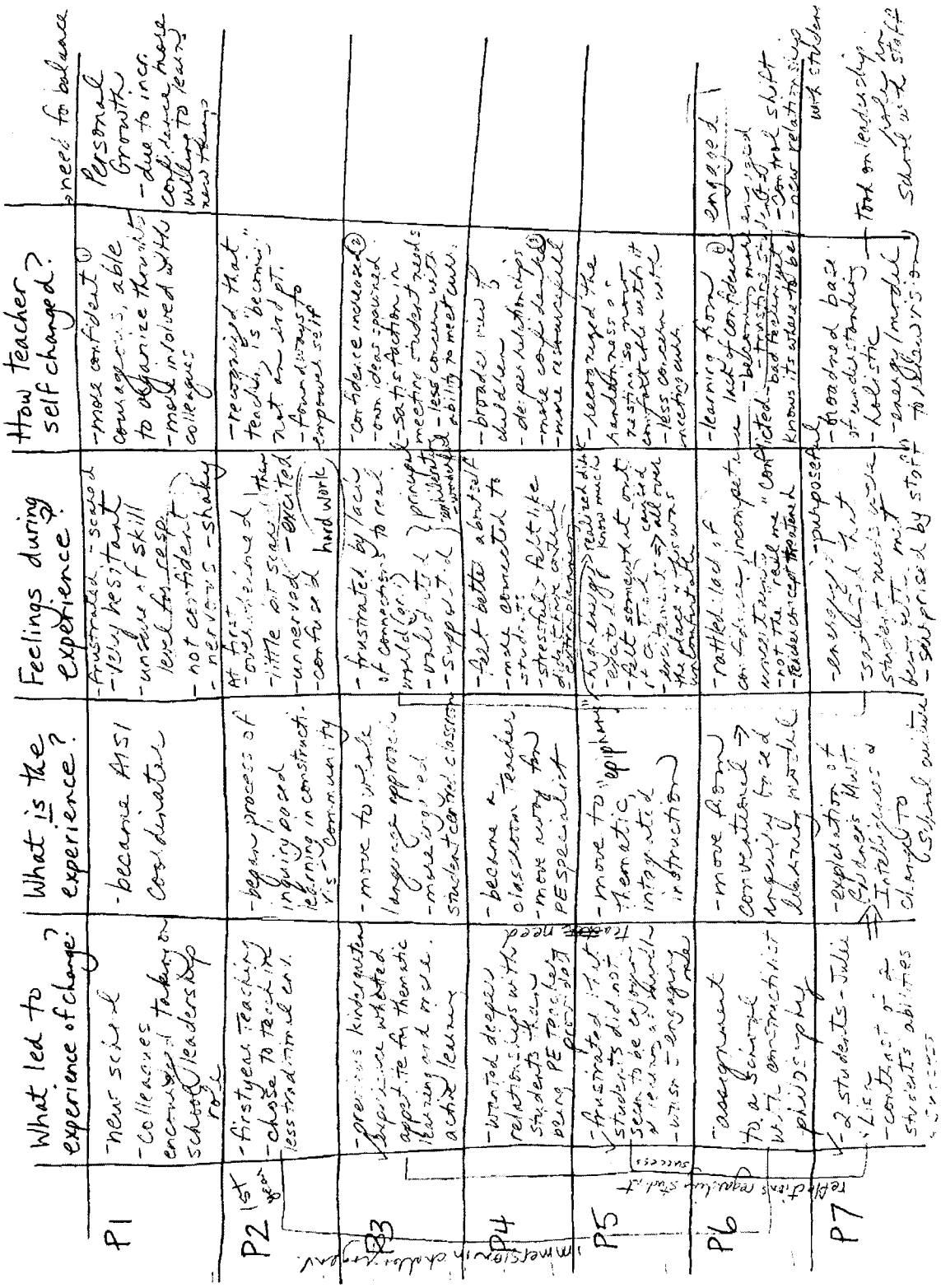
→ the need for relationships in schools reflects personal characteristics or is more pervasive?

→ proactive person vs. passive person is the key to embracing change?

→ reflection has a key role in negotiating change?

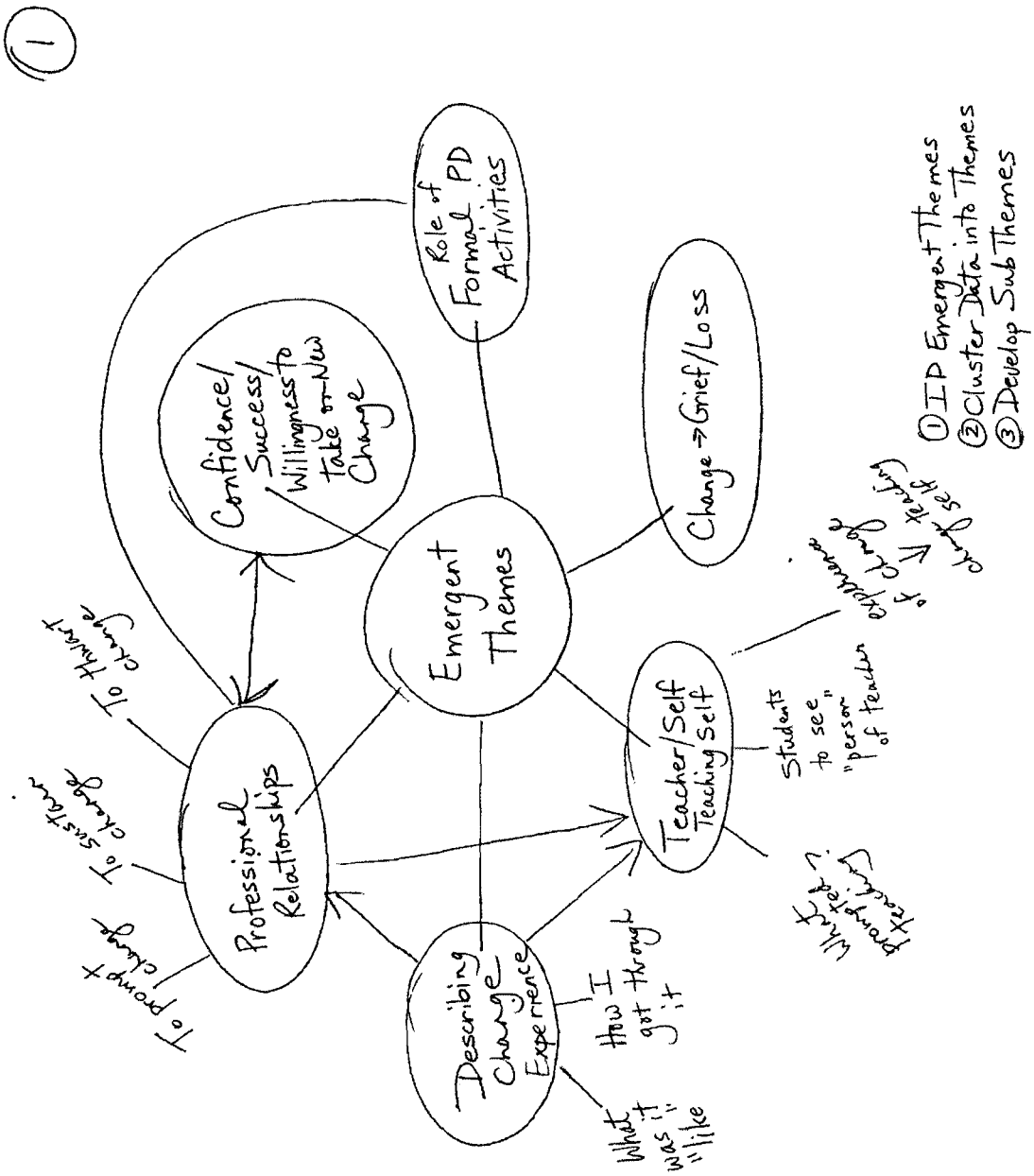
Appendix G

Framework for Data Organization



Appendix H

Conceptual Beginnings



Appendix I

Conceptual Understandings and Connections