STARTING AND STAYING ON COURSE: INFLUENCES OF PRE-SERVICE AND INITIAL PLACEMENT ON BEGINNING TEACHERS

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I consider experiences of two beginning teachers during their pre-service year at the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto and the early years of their teaching careers as they move from student teacher to professional teacher. In particular, I use narratives I created about each woman along with my own to identify the factors which influenced the success of this transition such as the nature of the first teaching positions held, the types of supports and assistance experienced during this transitional phase, and the personal experiences brought to the enterprise of becoming a teacher. Additionally, I look for any changes in their beliefs about teaching from those held as teacher-candidates to those that evolved during the initial years in the classroom and what influence, if any, these professional environments had on such shifts in thinking.

In this study I use a narrative inquiry approach in which my own story is placed along side those of my two participants. By doing so, I acknowledge the close relationship between the primary investigator and the study subjects that is inherent in this qualitative method. My data sources for the narratives I created
include written material in the form of journals, interview transcripts, practice teaching reports, and personal narratives produced by and about my participants during the time under study.

In my concluding chapter, I make suggestions for changes both to the ways in which teacher-candidates are instructed as they begin to learn the intricacies of the art of teaching and to the conditions under which many of these new members of the profession begin their careers. There are many avenues for future research that I did not pursue in this study and some of these are outlined in my conclusions.
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I owe a debt of gratitude to the original members of the Section 11 Project, particularly Denis Mildon, Joan VanDuzer and my two participants.

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Finally, my thanks go to my brother, John, and my sister, Margaret, for believing in me.
# Table of Contents

1. Abstract ii
2. Acknowledgements iv
3. Dedication vi
4. Chapter 1: Origins and Overview 1
5. Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature Associated with Pre-service Teachers’ Life Histories, Beliefs About Teaching, and Early Career Experiences. 12
6. Chapter 3: Constructing a Research Study 80
7. Chapter 4: Antoinette’s Story 110
8. Chapter 5: Anne’s Story 146
9. Chapter 6: My Story 178
10. Chapter 7: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study 209
11. Bibliography 260
12. Appendix A 270
13. Appendix B 273
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my Great-Aunt, Sarah Grace Cooke, whose long shadow as a teacher and lifelong learner was cast across my own life from an early age. Even though we never had the opportunity to meet, I have felt her influence throughout my career in education.
Chapter One

Origins and Overview

It was June when I first met Angela. The school, in which I was the Mathematics department head, was preparing for September when a French Immersion stream would be added to our programs. The students, who had been the first students in the school district enrolled in the French Immersion program throughout their elementary school years, were now poised to become the first class of French Immersion students at the secondary school level. The search for a teacher who was not only fluently bilingual in English and French but also capable of teaching both Science and Mathematics in these languages had not been going well. Until Angela walked into the room we, the interview team, had failed to find anyone suitable. The candidates were either fluently bilingual but not qualified in the required subjects or qualified in the required subjects but lacking the necessary degree of fluency in both languages. Angela had it all. She spoke both languages fluently without the accent of one intruding upon the other. She had received a Bachelor of Science degree from one of the top universities in Ontario with excellent grades and had subsequently earned a Bachelor of Education degree in order to enter the teaching profession in Ontario. Her practice teaching reports were outstanding. She was personable and eager. The only concern expressed by the team when we met to discuss her interview was that she would be a first year teacher in a highly political and highly visible appointment. We had discussed this with Angela during the interview and had come away with the impression that she
would be able to rise to the challenge. The search was over. Angela was hired. None of us in the room, including Angela, was prepared for what would happen in the next two years.

It was May, two years later, when I last saw Angela. Earlier in the week her roommate had accompanied me to their shared apartment. Though she had not seen Angela for days—they were roommates, not best friends she explained—she expected her to be home. Angela had not been at work for days when my principal sent me to her apartment to retrieve her daybook and anything else belonging to the school. She wasn’t answering the telephone or the door. When I called my principal to explain, her roommate, another first-year teacher at the school, was sent to meet me at their apartment to let me in. I entered the apartment with the fear that Angela might be dead on the floor. Thankfully, she wasn’t home. We gathered up all her school materials, including unmarked assignments from the previous semester, and returned to the school. Angela appeared at the school the next day. She was invited to resign her position so that the school board might be spared the inconvenience of terminating her contract and she might be spared the ignominy and stigma of being fired. She resigned and quietly left the school. I never saw her again.

The school year ended. Changes were made in the French Immersion program which resulted in Science and Mathematics no longer being taught in French. My role in the tragedy that was Angela’s career haunted me into the summer. At the time, I was studying for my Master of Education degree and used
a course I was taking as a way of examining what part I had played in her failure. Entitled *Homicide or Suicide: An Investigation into a Professional Death*, I wrote a paper that analysed the various factors that had contributed to the situation in which Angela had found herself. It had not taken long after her final departure from the school for the whispering to start in the staffroom—you know, she wasn’t really suited for teaching in the first place. They made a big mistake when they hired her. Did you know she’s been seeing a psychologist? If they’d known she was unstable, they would never have hired her. It was easier to blame Angela than it was to accept the conclusion I later reached in my paper. We—her colleagues and the system that employed her—were guilty of professional murder. Everyone had talked at or about Angela, but no one had ever really talked to her. Was she unsuited to teaching? Who knows? She never had an opportunity to demonstrate her abilities.

The students who had arrived in that Grade 9 year, whom even the most experienced teachers in the school had found challenging, were proud of the fact that they had caused one of their elementary teachers to run crying from the room as a result of their behaviour. They had nothing but scorn for Angela during the two years they were her students. Eventually, they matured and became leaders within the school. I taught a number of them in their graduating year. One day in May, during one of those classes when none of us really felt like working on Calculus, we had a conversation that went something like this:

Student: Miss, do you remember Ms. A?
Me: Yes, very well.
Student: What ever happened to her?
Me: I don’t know.
(Long Silence)
Student: We weren’t very nice to her back then.
Me: No, you weren’t.
Student: I wish we could apologize for what we did.
Me: I wish you could too.

They, too, had finally recognized that they had never really given her a chance to become a teacher. The atmosphere was very sad in my classroom that day.

As a result of my position as a department head, I had the opportunity to work with many beginning teachers of whom Angela was but one. Most found their way in their chosen profession with differing degrees of difficulty. How they made their various transitions from student teacher to professional teacher became of intense interest to me. Should we have been able to predict Angela’s professional demise? What was it about some of these new teachers that made their journey from one side of the desk to the other seem effortless while others floundered but eventually prevailed and still others, like Angela, quietly left the profession? The need to know the answers to these questions fuelled my desire to understand what had happened in the specific case of Angela and ignited my interest in the life experiences of teacher-candidates and the possible influence they have on the process of becoming a teacher.

At the time that Angela’s career was disintegrating, I became involved in the Section 11 Project, as it was known by its participants. This longitudinal study began with the members of one section of an English curriculum methods course
at the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto agreeing to become co-
researchers with the principal investigator, Dr. Johan Aitken, as they progressed
through their pre-service year and subsequent initial years as professional teachers.
There were twenty-eight participants in the pre-service portion of the study with
twenty-six of those agreeing to remain with the project after graduation. Four
years after the beginning of the study, when I joined the project at the invitation of
Dr. Aitken, most of the original co-researchers were still involved. I was one of a
small group of more experienced teachers whose research interests overlapped
with the aims of the Section 11 Project. We were invited to become co-researchers
with the original group who were now themselves experienced teachers.

At its inception, the Section 11 Project was one of the few studies being
undertaken that used a narrative-based approach to investigate its aims. In addition
to collecting data that included practice teaching reports, post-practicum
interviews with the primary investigator or her graduate assistant, personal
narratives written by the co-researchers on the eve of beginning their first year of
teaching and mid-way through that year, and personal reflection journals that were
maintained throughout the pre-service year and through the beginning years of
teaching, a number of symposia were held off-campus in a retreat-like atmosphere
where all participants were able to talk freely with one another and with the
primary investigator about their moments of joy and of frustration as they
encountered them on their journey to becoming professional teachers. It is this last
data source which I believe made the Section 11 Project unique among similar
studies underway in other venues. In an interim report (Aitken & Mildon, 1992) written late in the second year of the study, which coincided with the participants’ first year of teaching, the principal investigators noted:

…the need for ongoing peer sharing during the first years of teaching. For beginning teachers any personal reflection about their own classroom practice is impeded by their lack of understanding of the possible meanings of what they observe in themselves and others. They need to talk to more experienced teachers, to their professors from the faculty and, as information gleaned at the Symposium in August emphasized, to their classmates from pre-service education with whom they began the journey towards becoming teachers. (p. 33).

These symposia eventually numbered over twenty as the project continued on into the participants’ fifth year of teaching. At each one, there remained the opportunity for the members of the group to continue the collegiality established during their common pre-service year by supplying the space and time to talk to more experienced teachers—those of us who had been asked to join the project after it was well underway—and with one another as was recommended in the interim report. The Section 11 Project is further distinguished from similar investigations into the pre-service and early career years of beginning teachers not only by the duration of the study—five years—but also by the large number of co-researchers who maintained contact with the study throughout that time.

The Section 11 Project started with ten long-range objectives which can be found in the interim report published by Aitken and Mildon in 1992. As a co-
researcher in this investigation I became familiar with all of them and they underpin the aims of this thesis, namely:

- to investigate how each participant’s personal narrative influenced the motivation to become a teacher and how it manifested itself in the classroom,
- to assess the extent to which a biography of each participant contains indicators of success, or possible failure, in teaching,
- to document how each participant viewed him/herself as a beginning teacher in the context of his/her school and how this view did or did not change from that held as a pre-service teacher,
- to search for ways the school systems in which each participant worked influenced her/his development as a beginning teacher.

The word success needs some definition with regards to this thesis. What is success and how do we recognize when it has been achieved? As was pointed out to me by my thesis committee members as I began my work, sheer longevity in the profession does not necessarily equate with being a successful career teacher. I recall walking into the staffroom during the first week of my career, looking around at the many veteran teachers—Ontario was on the brink of a massive influx of neophyte teachers into the profession due to the signing of the first collective agreements between the teaching unions and the school boards in which newly established pupil-teacher ratios created thousands of new jobs—and thinking that if I ever became as jaded as some of my new colleagues appeared to be as they neared retirement I hoped I would have the courage to walk away before teaching became something to be endured rather than enjoyed. During the one-on-one interviews I conducted with my participants in the spring of
2003, I asked them to define what being successful in teaching meant to them. Their answers were remarkably similar in that both indicated that it was a sense of doing something that felt right both for themselves and for the students they taught. They spoke of connection and continuity.

My own understanding of the word success as it applies to teaching does not differ significantly from that of my participants. That first staffroom was filled with teachers who would have, had they been asked to do so, identified themselves as successful members of the profession. One teacher, who was not above routinely using ridicule and humiliation of his students to motivate them, felt his teaching techniques were beyond question and measured his success by the number of students who kept in touch with him after graduation. The bright and talented students, who were not the object of his intimidating tactics, did well in his classes. The others tended to come away from the experience fearful of doing anything in a class that might draw such unwanted attention to themselves or with a low opinion of themselves and their overall abilities. Some completed the minimum number of credits in the subject needed to gain their high school diploma then never took another course in the area thus closing off numerous career possibilities after graduation. Leaving the crushed dreams and aspirations of many of his students in his wake, this teacher considered himself successful. It does not, however, meet my criteria.
In my mind, the successful teacher is the one who manages to engage all the students in the room and assists them to perform to the best of their abilities. The teacher who can help a student who struggles with the subject matter to be as proud of her/himself for achieving a minimal passing grade as the talented student is of earning top marks is successful. The teacher who has earned the respect of the students by the firmness and fairness of his/her interactions with them and whom the students feel has their best interests at heart is successful. The teacher who has created an atmosphere of mutual trust in the classroom and whose actions have resulted in an oasis of calm in the sometimes chaotic world of children and adolescents is successful. None of these criteria is easily met. Nor are they usually all present in one person. However, the teacher who is continually working toward their attainment is, in my opinion, going to be a successful teacher. Popularity, like longevity, does not necessarily equate with success. Some of the successful teacher’s actions in the classroom may not endear him/herself to the students in the moment, but in terms of their long-term, positive effect on the lives of the students entrusted to his/her care those actions will likely be viewed, retrospectively by students and teacher alike, as evidence of a successful career.

As I worked with the materials provided by my two participants and as I developed the aims of this thesis, I returned to the questions I had asked myself after Angela left teaching. These, along with a third question
resulting from my work, became the research questions that mapped out the direction of my investigation. In this thesis I seek answers to the following questions:

- Can the future success/failure of beginning teachers be predicted with any degree of accuracy?
- Are there any common qualities/abilities possessed by beginning teachers who are successful in making the transition from student to professional teacher?
- What role is played by external influences on beginning teachers—colleagues, school setting, system policies and so on—in supporting or impeding their smooth transitions to professional teaching?

I began my search for answers with a review of the relevant research literature which can be found in Chapter Two. As the study of the transitional phase of a new teacher’s career is an ever expanding field that uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods, I grouped the material I considered in this review into three categories that encompassed my four thesis aims, namely: influences of life history, stability/change of beliefs about teaching, and influences of practice teaching placements and/or initial professional experiences. The chapter begins with a description of my criteria for choosing the literature to be included in this overview and concludes with a summary of the main ideas that emerged from the research and their relevance to my own work.

Since my data were drawn from that provided by my participants during their involvement with the Section 11 Project, the nature of this
material suggested to me that a qualitative research stance seemed most appropriate. After considering a number of narrative-based research methodologies, I chose to use a narrative inquiry approach in my investigation. In Chapter Three I outline how I recruited and selected my participants. It also contains a discussion concerning some of the criticisms levelled against narrative research methods and the replies to such concerns, and a description of how I have used narrative inquiry in my work.

Chapters Four and Five are devoted to Antoinette’s and Anne’s stories. Each chapter consists of a narrative I have written about each woman during her pre-service year and the early years of her career using the material contained in their files from the original research study. In Chapter Six I include my own story of transition from student to teacher to be considered along side those of Antoinette and Anne.

In Chapter Seven I present the results of my examination of all three narratives in relation to the research questions I have posed and discuss the degree to which these questions have been resolved. I also ask some of the other questions which arose as a result of my work. Though these are beyond the scope of this investigation and are not answered, they do, however, allow me to make some suggestions for future research. Stories tend to beget stories. I am sure that many readers will find themselves in the stories my participants and I tell.
Chapter Two

A Review of the Literature Associated with Pre-service Teachers’ Life Histories, Beliefs About Teaching, and Early Career Experiences

The following consideration of some of the research into the life histories, experiences, and beliefs of beginning teachers is by no means exhaustive. Such a review would, in itself, constitute a separate dissertation. The studies I have chosen, for the most part, place an emphasis on their participants’ stories and the researchers’ interpretations of those stories and, as such, are themselves examples of research employing narrative-based methodologies. I have used this as a criterion for inclusion in my review based on my choice of narrative inquiry as the methodology for my study and on the narrative nature of much of the material provided by my participants through which I hope to shed light on the stated aims of my investigation and to provide, if possible, answers to the questions I proposed in my introduction. As noted by Kagan (1992), another researcher may have chosen a different group of studies or extracted different meanings from those chosen. Indeed, were I to start this process over from the beginning I, too, might amass a different collection of relevant research publications.

Life History as an Influence on Pre-service and Beginning Teachers

As part of the application process to enter the consecutive Bachelor of Education professional teacher training at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) potential teacher candidates are required to fill out a personal profile. They are asked to list and describe three
experiences which they believe have prepared them for a career in teaching and then to use one of these to outline what insights they gained with respect to teaching and learning. The experiences deemed as acceptable evidence of teaching behaviour are broadly defined so as to avoid the paradox of having to be a teacher in order to become a teacher. What is pertinent to the current investigation, however, is not the nature of the experiences outlined by the applicants, or the value placed on them by the members of the admissions committee, but the fact that the relating of these experiences is part of the formal application process at all. Potential teachers are being identified partially on the nature of these past experiences. Thus an institution is giving some credence to research findings on the importance of life history in teacher education. What is the thinking associated with life experience as it applies to the beliefs, attitudes, and professional education of pre-service teachers?

Interest in the lives and experiences of pre-service and beginning teachers has expanded dramatically over the past thirty years. While this period encompasses my own classroom teaching career, the consideration of my experiences prior to entering a Faculty of Education in Ontario was limited to one question on the application form. In answering the question I was required to self-declare any perceived inadequacies in my educational experience which I expected to be addressed by a teaching preparation program. I remember writing something about having had little to no contact with so-called “general level students” during my high school years and, perhaps, this was an area I would expect my
professional teacher training to address. Other than this one question and a short
description of my summer job as a swimming instructor and lifeguard while in
high school, there was no in-depth consideration of my life experiences or history
as they might relate to my interest in, or my suitability for, becoming a secondary
school teacher. The long history of members of my family entering the teaching
profession and my personal, life-long preparation to do the same was, at the time,
of no apparent consequence or interest to the members of the admissions
committee. How different to the process currently in use at OISE/UT.

An early researcher into the significance of events in the personal lives of
Study*, he considered two groups of teachers; those who had made a childhood
decision to enter teaching and those who had come to that same decision much
later in life. Among members of the first group he identified three factors which
influenced their decisions: the lasting identification of the participant with a
specific teacher in her/his schooling; the continuity of a family occupation; and the
affirmation by significant others of the participant’s suitability to the profession. In
the second group he also proposed three influences on their decisions: the, then,
easy academic and economic accessibility of teacher training as a means of
attaining a college education; the modification of career choices and aspirations,
often by women whose aims were thwarted by parental intervention, to a career in
teaching which was seen as more socially acceptable; and the ease of transfer from
other forms of employment which, though the primary choice of those involved,
had proven to be either unsatisfying or unattainable. Though not present in his study, Lortie speculated on the possibility that a negative experience in school could lead a person to choose teaching in order to contribute to the improvement of the profession.

Along with the influences Lortie identified as affecting a person’s motivation to become a teacher, he also classified the attractors to teaching into five broad themes. He defines an attractor to a particular profession as being the “…comparative benefits (and costs) proffered would-be entrants; it includes money, prestige and power, and the psychic attractions of the occupational tasks.” (p.26) He described the interpersonal theme as being a desire to work with young people in situations where they are not in crisis as may be the case in paediatric medicine or social work. He classified those who see teaching as a calling or vocation, in the same way as one might seek entrance to religious orders, as responding to what he called the service theme. Finally, he outlined the continuation theme which might easily be described as the desire to prolong a pleasurable experience in that those who fit this category enjoyed being in school as students and wished to continue their association with this milieu by moving, metaphorically speaking, to the other side of the teacher’s desk. Though Lortie found many of his subjects reluctant to admit it, the last two themes he identified were the material benefits of teaching, such as money, prestige, and security, and the time compatibility of teaching with its perceived good hours and vacations. It
is the first three that are of interest to the current discussion as these are the ones that have a direct link with the life experiences of teacher-candidates.

Being a student and watching the performances of one’s teachers over a protracted period of time does little to help most people appreciate the inner world of teaching—though some students may have the necessary skills in observation and analysis coupled with imagination to do just that. A student teacher I supervised during my final years in the classroom, who was having difficulty anticipating and reacting to the students’ level of understanding of the algebraic concepts he was trying to explain, opined that teaching was harder than it looked. He had observed me presenting similar lessons earlier in his practice teaching placement and asked why it looked so easy for me to do. I responded that observing good teaching was much like watching a duck swim. On the surface it looks effortless, but one never sees the furious paddling that is going on under the waterline! Similarly, Lortie observed that teaching is unique among the professions in that it is open to long-term observation by potential participants, what he called “the apprenticeship of observation.” (p.61) He wrote, however, of the negative effects of such familiarity in that those who chose to enter teaching tended to underestimate the difficulties faced by the teacher and the scope of the job. Sitting in the student desk, the would-be teacher does not see the hours of preparation and marking, nor the mountain of administrative detail, that often threaten to overwhelm the practitioner. Though students spend more time throughout their early lifetimes in the presence of teachers than with any other
significant adults and continue their observation as young adults, these life experiences are not necessarily positive influences in the careers of those who choose to teach.

Deborah Britzman (1986) has also written about the interweaving of life experience with the process of becoming a teacher. In keeping with Lortie, she points out the invisible, at least to many of the observing students, nature of the work of a teacher and the effect this has on shaping the perceptions of the profession held by novice teachers. Citing social control, the compartmentalization of the curriculum into discrete subjects occurring in finite units of time, and the hierarchical organization of schools, she argues that these three factors produce students who have very specific expectations of their teachers. Despite what may be happening in the classroom to the contrary, the students do expect the teacher to maintain classroom discipline through the enforcement of rules and to present the curriculum content. More than once in my own experience I have had secondary school students complain to me that they expected me to “teach” them the content. Classroom activities designed to allow the students to explore the concepts, come to an understanding of them through working with their peers, and then have their understandings affirmed through presentations and discussions were not usually seen by most students as my teaching them though the research and preparation that went into such endeavours easily outstripped that which was necessary to deliver the same content through the traditional “chalk and talk” transmission method which they viewed as “real” teaching. Britzman continues by
suggesting that this expectation continues to be held by teacher-candidates in the university classroom where they expect to be taught how to teach and not be presented with various courses providing the theoretical underpinnings for their work in the classroom. She comments that the present model for teacher education is akin to that of the apprenticeship used in many trades—plumber, electrician, and welder, for example—where initiates observe a master practitioner and learn alongside him/her by applying the information they have been given in a classroom prior to their time of learning by doing. In following this model, there is a built-in bias toward the belief that the “real” learning occurs in the field.

In addition to observing the overall privilege accorded to classroom experience over theoretical frameworks by teacher-candidates, Britzman identified views of teaching and the role of the teacher, which she calls cultural myths, which were shared by both the student teachers and the teachers with whom they worked. These were: everything depends on the teacher; the teacher is the expert; and teachers are self-made (p. 448). Taken together these myths serve to perpetuate the isolationism of teaching and, at the same time, to strengthen the belief that one learns to teach by teaching.

In her subsequent book, *Practice Makes Practice*, Britzman (1991) reaffirms over familiarity with the teaching profession, resulting from years of interactions within the classroom, as one of the reasons many teacher-candidates arrive in faculties of education with the firm belief that teaching is something that can done by anyone. She asserts that this contributes to a superficial understanding
of both the act of teaching and of teachers themselves, reducing both the activity and the participants to stereotypes. She advocates an image of teaching that “…must be situated in relationship to one’s biography, present circumstances, deep commitments, affective investments, social contexts, and conflicting discourses about what it means to learn to become a teacher.” (p.8). In other words, prospective teachers’ existing understandings of what constitutes teaching, and being a teacher, need to be examined from multiple perspectives that will challenge stereotypical views. She calls the process of learning to teach “…a time of biographical crisis …when one’s past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension…a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and what one can become.”(p.8). Life experiences, in her view, are not peripheral to the task of becoming a teacher. Rather they are integral in that the experiences shape the teacher one becomes while at the same time the teacher one is becoming shapes the experience. Though this phenomenon is not unique to teaching and is present in many other occupations such as nursing and social work to name just two, in this particular instance she argues that many teachers in general, and most student teachers in particular, remain unaware of it. Few question how their beliefs about and attitudes toward teaching have been structured by their experiences as students within various educational institutions. Britzaman cites the acceptance of knowledge as a given that is neutral and can be transmitted from one person to another without the subjective involvement of
either the transmitter or the receiver as one of the contributing factors to the student teacher’s desire to:

...receive practical things, automatic and generic methods for immediate classroom application. They bring to their teacher education a search for recipes and, often, a dominant concern with methods of classroom discipline, because they are quite familiar with the teacher’s role as social controller. ...Consequently, education course work that does not immediately address “know how” or how to “make do” with the way things are and sustain the walls we have come to expect [through experience] appears impractical, idealistic, and too theoretical. Real school life, then, is taken for granted as the measure of a teacher education program, and, as such, the student teaching semester is implicitly valued as the training ground, the authentic moment, that mystically fills the void left by so-called theoretical course work. (pp. 48-49)

She suggests that this segregation of theory and practice, maintained by many student teachers, is one of the four ways in which the separation of knowledge from lived experience is created by educational institutions. She posits that along with the compartmentalization of knowledge, as noted earlier in this chapter, the separation of content from pedagogy and knowledge from interests also contribute to the two solitudes—knowledge and lived experience—that are often present in academic settings. That most student teachers, and not a few teachers with years of classroom experience, view theory and practice as a divorced couple who have little in common and are not on speaking terms with one another rather than as partners in a relationship where they sustain and strengthen one another is a situation she believes must be challenged. In fact, views in which theory and practice are considered antithetical contain a certain irony. No action is undertaken without some reason, read theory, for doing so whether that theory is consciously
acknowledged or not. By challenging practitioners in any field to understand what lies behind their actions, the importance of lived experience as a factor in the process of becoming a teacher—or a nurse or a social worker and so on—is increased.

Twenty-five years after the publication of Lortie’s book, Joy Ritchie and David Wilson (2000) also found evidence of his apprenticeship of observation operating in the participants in their study. They extended this concept by suggesting that there exist dual apprenticeships, which they termed “deliberate” and “accidental”, served by would-be teachers. As their work involved preparing prospective teachers of English they deemed the undergraduate work in this field undertaken by their participants and their subsequent entries into a program of professional teacher training as forming a deliberate apprenticeship while an accidental apprenticeship, like Lortie’s apprenticeship of observation, consisted of much more than this. It included not only the personal life experiences of their participants both in and out of school but also cultural influences such as the images of teaching propagated by such popular movies as *The Dead Poet’s Society* and *Mr. Holland’s Opus* and television sitcoms, popular at the time of their writing and seemingly immortal through the miracle of syndication, such as *Welcome Back, Kotter* and *Mr. Rhodes*. Were they writing today they would, no doubt, have included the dramatic series *Boston Public* despite the fact that the protagonists seemed to spend unlimited amounts of time in the staff room and hallways and
very little in the classrooms actually teaching! They concluded that this accidental apprenticeship:

...plays a much more significant role in determining preservice teachers' understandings of writing, reading, and language learning; their understandings of themselves as teachers; and their visions of education. This other apprenticeship is longer, extending from preschool to young adulthood. This other apprenticeship is more pervasive, involving almost every class these students have taken, almost every teacher with whom they have interacted, and countless media representations of teaching and schooling. Finally, this other apprenticeship is more powerful. It is not the experience of their deliberate apprenticeship in a few teachers’ college and English department courses that shapes their understandings. Instead, it is more likely their intense and prolonged accidental apprenticeship that most determines what these students do as teachers and who they believe themselves to be as teachers. In reality, it is even more complicated than that. It is not their experience—either in their deliberate or accidental apprenticeships—so much as it is the meanings they construct from those experiences as they are filtered through their personal and social contexts. (pp. 29-30)

Echoing Lortie’s continuation theme, Ritchie and Wilson also noted that among the motivations for becoming a teacher articulated by many of their pre-service teachers was a desire for the familiar in that teaching represented for these novices:

...a territory that will not require them to unsettle their conceptions of who they are or how the world operates. ... when their deliberate apprenticeships suggest that there are other ways of thinking about teaching, learning, and literacy—and that these conceptions might require a different role for the teacher—more than a familiar pedagogy is being placed at risk; students’ very conceptions of the kind of life they want to live and their most basic reasons for entering teaching are unsettled. (p.39).
In making this statement, the researchers seem to further acknowledge the power of personal experience as a factor in the making of a teacher and to point to the enormous task faced by teacher-educators in modifying the deeply held beliefs and entrenched attitudes of their students by means of a relatively short program, often only one or two years, of professional teacher education.

As Deborah Britzman did before them, Ritchie and Wilson found that their students’ accidental apprenticeships contributed to their over familiarity with the teaching profession and tended to flatten the profile of teaching by reducing it to a set of observable, reproducible behaviours such as lecturing, setting tests, grading and keeping classroom order. Memories of “good teachers” included not only those teachers who had inspired them by appearing excited and enthusiastic about their own subject material but also those teachers whose classroom control had been maintained through sarcasm, public humiliation, and less than constructive criticism. Since most of the teacher candidates, whose fond recollections of the teacher who was unafraid to call a spade a spade and was blunt to the point of emotional abuse when delivering an opinion of a student’s work, had not often themselves been the recipients of such treatment they were able to romanticize even these examples of poor pedagogy and view these experiences as instances of positive reinforcement—a much needed “boot in the butt”—that was good for them and the class as a whole. As a result of their memories, which given our human nature are not fully nuanced and resemble more closely a “highlight reel”
of one’s experiences, many of these student teachers imagined themselves recreating these roles, both positive and negative, in their own teaching. These imaginings were further reinforced by popular culture as to what constituted good teaching.

While Ritchie and Wilson agree with Britzman’s assessment of the factors that maintain the separation of knowledge from lived experience in academic life they add their own view that the “invisibility of students’ identities and experiences from preservice education” (p.55) is also part of the explanation. They found that their students did not appear to reshape their underlying understandings of teaching as acquired through their accidental apprenticeships but rather tacked on newly developed ideas from their pre-service experiences without any apparent examination of the old. Where the views were in conflict the students seemed oblivious to the tension such juxtapositions might have created. Having served their accidental apprenticeships in an environment in which the separation of personal experiences from the knowledge being gained was complete, it appeared to pose no difficulty when the students were presented with notions that, had they been made aware of their ingrained assumptions about the nature of teaching, were in direct opposition to those assumptions.

Trotman and Kerr (2001) concur with Ritchie and Wilson in that they recognized in their work with teacher-candidates in Australia the tendency for their students to use personal experiences as a filter through which the information and knowledge provided by a formal teacher preparation program must pass. In
order to counter this trend, these researchers consciously created a program “...designed to facilitate the integration of knowledge acquired through personal life history and experience, with knowledge derived from sociological and psychological studies of adolescence and schooling.” (p.157). In doing so they appear to have addressed the issue of challenging beginning teachers’ underlying assumptions as raised by Britzman and Ritchie and Wilson. They concede, however, that this is not an easy task as what is being required of their students, in some cases, is a restructuring of an identity that has been established and reinforced over a lifetime. Though they acknowledge the powerful influence of life history on teacher development they reject the notion that “biography determines pedagogy.” (p. 160) Neither do they accept a position in which biography is discounted and a “that was then—this is now” approach is undertaken in the preparation of teachers. As a result, their work focused on two ideas. Firstly, students needed to be made aware of their internal, and often unquestioned, beliefs and values concerning teaching which they had developed through their life-long contact, either directly or indirectly, with educational institutions and secondly, once aware, students needed the opportunity to consider how this newly established awareness affected their understandings and insights regarding teaching.

Among the assignments used to accomplish these twin aims, Trotman and Kerr required their students to complete journals. Though journals are often used
in teacher education programs it is the manner in which they are used that is the key to their effectiveness. It is not uncommon in one Faculty of Education in which I have taught to come across students who complain that if they have to write one more reflection on their experiences they are going to scream. That these students have come to feel this way suggests that the use of these assignments has not helped the students as the writing of them is viewed by many as just one more example of the “busy work” that must be completed before they can graduate. Trotman and Kerr may still have had students who shared such beliefs but they did much to avoid this outcome by having their students engage in a form of directed journaling. Students were asked to focus on any idea during their weekly themed instruction which struck a chord with them and to respond to it in their journals by describing the point which caught their attention, by exploring possible connections between this idea and their personal experiences, and by conjecturing what, if any, influence these connections might have on their future work as teachers. Thus, a solid link between personal experience and the theoretical content presented in the classroom was made possible. Unfortunately, as the researchers themselves admit, this strategy is time consuming and the final, and necessary, step of discussing these journals in an open forum tended to be short-changed. Despite this, Trotman and Kerr remained committed to the concept that such journals are valuable tools in assisting teacher candidates to bring life history and educational theory together in a meaningful way and to afford them the opportunity to begin to understand themselves as teachers.
Among the researchers whom Trotman and Kerr cite as being highly influential on their thinking about the effects of life history on teacher education are J. Gary Knowles and Diane Holt-Reynolds. They, too, assert that the early experiences of pre-service teachers hold powerful sway over the process of becoming a teacher. Furthermore, they accept that this interplay between personal experience and the acquisition of knowledge about the theories and practices of teaching is an ongoing phenomenon. For the purposes of this present investigation, however, their research into the pre-existing beliefs about and attitudes toward teaching as espoused by pre-service teachers and their potential effects on teacher education is my primary focus.

Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) place great emphasis on listening to what their students are saying about teaching. Through both formal and informal conversations with their students they have come to the conclusion that:

Students cannot be talked out [emphasis in the original] of what they know and believe about schools. …What they know and believe about teaching is constructed out of personal experience, not out of formal study. We cannot tell [emphasis in the original] them to discount experience and the processes by which they have come to understand the meanings of those experiences. The lessons they have learned from experience are not amendable via direct instruction to the contrary. Experiences with classrooms as students are far more powerful teachers that mere classroom talk about teachers. (p.103)

Despite this description of the futility of trying to eradicate these earlier influences from the present, Knowles and Holt-Reynolds do not say that one must accept biography as pedagogic destiny. Their focus in working with their students is to
assist them to acknowledge and come to understand their assumptions about
teaching resulting from their own experiences.

In listening to their students, Knowles and Holt-Reynolds have identified
some of the specific ways in which these novices utilize their life experiences in
their initial forays into the world of teaching. As the role of student is the one they
are most familiar with, many of the teacher-candidates evaluate the teaching
methods they are being exposed to against the standard of whether they feel it
would have worked for them when they were on the receiving end of classroom
instruction. In addition, some of the pre-service teachers have the opinion that
there is a direct link between teacher behaviour and student behaviour. Because
the actions of a certain teacher in their previous history elicited a particular
response from them, either positive or negative, they believe that recreating, or
avoiding, that teacher behaviour will provoke a similar response from their
students when they step into their own classrooms as teachers. There is a strong
tendency to view their own participation in and response to a particular classroom
scenario as universal and that all the students in that same environment had the
same experience as they did. Even though they consciously acknowledge that this
is unlikely, they persist in generalizing the experience and using it to inform their
view of what teaching should look like even when presented with educational
situations that vastly differ from their own as students. The power of this view
becomes evident during their field placements when pre-service teachers abandon
attempts to use teaching methods that they have not experienced themselves as
students and adopt classroom management practices that may have worked on them in the past but are ineffectual in their present situation. As Knowles and Holt-Reynolds report:

Once they leave the university classroom and proceed to student/practice teaching, preservice teachers continue to extend their use of mental scenarios to guide their practice. Their prior experiences are at the center of decision making…. It is these personal theories and beliefs, often primarily the result of previous engagement in the processes of learning, of being in classrooms, and of thinking about teaching and teachers, that form the bases for many practices in classrooms. (p.95)

To assist their students to avoid the possible negative effects of relying overmuch on their personal histories, Knowles and Holt-Reynolds require their students to participate in the writing of autobiographical assignments. They justify their use of these assignments by citing the merits, as they perceive them, of such writing. They feel that autobiographical writing has benefits for both the teacher educator and the pre-service student alike. The benefits they cite are: the way in which it may allow students to situate their contemporary selves in the context of previous experiences; the ability to reveal, either to the student or the teacher educator, the extent of a student’s learning as the meanings ascribed to the content, theory, and skills being learned are made clear; the window it opens for the teacher educator into his/her students’ perspectives on themselves; the improvement of the students’ writing—though this claim is not necessarily the sole purview of specifically autobiographical writing; the possibility that such writing could foster in the students an ongoing interest in research; the opportunity for
meaningful interaction among pre-service teachers and between pre-service teachers and their instructors; and the trusting relationships that can develop resulting in coherence and camaraderie among pre-service teachers. This is a rather lofty list of benefits and would likely only be attainable by particularly skilled teacher-educators. Though most of Knowles’ and Holt-Reynolds’ claims for the efficacy of autobiographical writing are desirable outcomes, it is the first one that seems most applicable to their aim of “facilitating the efforts of preservice teachers to make sense of their external experiences.” (p.105)

In Holt-Reynolds’ (1992) subsequent study of student teachers she defines the concept of lay theories as “…beliefs developed naturally over time without the influences of instruction…” that “…represent tacit knowledge lying dormant and unexamined by the student…” which evolve “…over long years of participation in and observation of classrooms…” and “…are based on untutored interpretations of personal lived experience.” (p. 326). As in her research with Knowles, she found that the lay theories, particularly concerning what constitutes “good” teaching, espoused by her participants led them to over generalize their experiences by applying them to their current situations and using them to predict the outcomes of student behaviour in response to teacher behaviour. She found evidence of these lay theories acting as filters through which the material being presented to the students was passed and which allowed only those ideas that were consistent with their internal beliefs to seep through. She suggests that teacher
education programs should “…reflect the assumption that preservice teachers’ personal history-based knowledge and beliefs are important for teacher educators to discover and for students of teaching to explore…” and that teacher education programs “…develop ways to invite …students to share their lay beliefs, ways to understand the implications of those beliefs, and ways to encourage and sustain critical conversations about those beliefs…”(p. 347). Her interpretation of the influence lay theories can have on pre-service teachers’ behaviours is not greatly dissimilar from that of the “accidental apprenticeship” proposed by Wilson and Ritchie (2000).

Sugrue (1996) accepts Holt-Reynolds definition of lay theories in his research and also comes to the conclusion that such theories have major significance for the preparation of students for teaching and for their future professional development. By means of multiple, in-depth interviews with fifteen entrants to a three-year, concurrent Bachelor of Education program in Ireland, he found that among the nine students who came to this program directly from their secondary schooling several made the decision to enter teaching based on the perceptions of significant people in their lives about their suitability for teaching. This is consistent with one of the motivations for becoming a teacher that Lortie (1975) identified. In addition, experiences working with children in quasi-teaching situations such as peer-tutoring or babysitting contributed to the decision by some students to enter teaching though these experiences, by their one-on-one nature,
tended to create a view of teaching as transmission and an assumption that all learners with whom they will come in contact will express a similar willingness to receive instruction. Among the six mature entrants—those that had participated in other paid occupations prior to undertaking studies in education—the motivations were similar. Assisting co-workers replaced peer-tutoring and babysitting, but the belief about their suitability for teaching resulting from the experience was the same as that held by the younger students. According to Sugrue:

Their apprenticeships of observation, general socialization and atypical teaching episodes which support and encourage their identification with teaching, implicitly suggest that they are ‘born’ teachers. Consequently, they are predisposed to the view that they have little to learn from teacher education. (p.163).

His analysis of the material gathered from these students leads him to conclude that not only should teacher education programs be modified to confront the lay theories of pre-service teachers but also encouragement should be given to the participation of:

…teacher educators and teacher mentors in an ongoing interrogation of their own biographies and the often invisible power structures and constraints within schools…(p.172)

Calderhead and Robson (1991) carried out research that was designed to identify the knowledge student teachers brought with them to their teacher education programs and how it affected what they learned and how they viewed themselves as teachers. These researchers came to similar conclusions about the need for changes in the preparation of student teachers as Holt-Reynolds and Sugrue did in their later studies. They determined that the students brought to the
task of teaching myriad views of what constituted teaching and the types of teachers they saw themselves becoming. For each participant, much of the image of self-as-teacher was founded on past experiences and was not significantly altered by a teacher education programme. In describing the images these students held of themselves, Calderhead and Robson noted “[s]ome images were episodic memories, relating to particular significant events or people. Others were more general and had been abstracted from a variety of experience.” (p.4). Among their conclusions is an acknowledgement that “[t]here is…considerable scope for the further investigation of the conceptions students have of learning to teach and how these influence the knowledge they acquire and its use in the analysis and practice of teaching.” (p.7). They further suggest that teacher education programs might need to be altered so that images of teaching held by student teachers can be made visible and challenged with the underlying aim of improving the professional development of these beginners.

In addition to his research with Holt-Reynolds, Knowles also worked with various other researchers (Coles & Knowles, 1993; Schmidt & Knowles, 1995; Sudzina & Knowles, 1993) in studies in which the influence of the life experiences of pre-service teachers appeared to be a factor either in their pre-service year or during their transition to professional teaching. The common thread in these studies is the apparent gap between the students’ images of themselves as teachers formed by their previous experiences in school and other learning situations and
the realities of the contemporary classroom in which they found themselves. In addition, these studies noted the difficulty, faced by both the pre-service teachers and their teacher-educators, of recognizing and understanding how these experiences coloured the beliefs about teaching held by the beginning teachers. Recommendations for teacher education reform included in these studies echo those of Calderhead and Robson as noted previously.

Despite Knowles rejection of biography as destiny in his earlier research with Holt-Reynolds, his later work with Sudzina and then with Schmidt comes perilously close to embracing that concept by appearing to suggest a direct causality between the life experiences of the participants and their subsequent inability to make the transition into the teaching profession after completing their initial teacher training. However, there are many instances of “against-all-odds” stories where people go on to excel in their chosen field despite having a personal history that would make such success seem an unlikely possibility. Jill Ker Conway’s account in *The Road from Coorain* of her journey from the outback of Australia, where she was born, to the graduate classroom of Harvard University, from which she earned her Ph.D., is just one such example. Most people with such personal narratives do not rise to positions such as president of a distinguished American college, as Conway did at Smith College, or become Vice President of the University of Toronto as she also did. Conversely, those for whom the cliché “the world is their oyster” would seem to apply occasionally find themselves faced with calamitous failure. The life histories of the vast majority of people occupy the
space between these two poles, and the effects, if any, of those narratives on subsequent life events are likely far more subtle than the findings of the Schmidt and Knowles and Sudzina and Knowles studies would seem to indicate.

Noting the preponderance of studies that have examined the failures of pre-service and beginning teachers, Hebert and Worthy (2001) concentrated their research on a success story. While faced with similar challenges as those who do not succeed, the participant in their study overcame them and completed a first year of teaching that was judged successful by all who had responsibility for her supervision and by the participant herself. Among the keys to this success identified by the researchers and the participant were a match between the participant’s expectations and the realities of teaching as well as her positive approach to life which allowed her to meet obstacles with optimism and overcome them. While the researchers point out that the school context in which she began her career, namely at a school in which she had completed a practicum placement, was not unusual and is often experienced by other beginning teachers, they do acknowledge that it was her ability to learn from previous setbacks and to apply this new knowledge to her situation that set her apart from other participants in other studies. In doing so they carefully avoid suggesting a direct link between experience and success preferring to allow the reader to consider such a connection if it seems appropriate. While they make no formal recommendations for teacher education, they suggest that more research into cases of success may provide inspiration for other student and beginning teachers.
Later work by Flores and Day (2006), in keeping with the researchers already cited, revealed that the formation of one’s identity as a teacher is strongly influenced by one’s past history in school as a student and the experiences one has during the initial teacher training period. They noted many similarities in their research findings to those identified in earlier studies. Echoes of the factors Lortie identified as influencing the decision to teach are found in the makeup of the group of beginning teachers participating in their study whose stated motivations for entering teacher education included: the influence of former teachers as well as relatives who were themselves teachers; the perceived stability of teaching as a career; the inability to gain admission to other professional training programs; and the desire to teach and work with children based on personal observation of teachers doing their job and “para-teaching” activities such as tutoring. Despite the twenty-one year interval between the publication dates of Lortie’s *Schoolteacher* and the results of this study by Flores and Day, little appears to have changed. What they refer to as “[t]he classic and widely cited gap between theory and practice…” (p. 224) evident in much of the research about beginning teachers continued to be a leitmotif in the stories told by their participants during interviews carried out during the course of this two-year study and in the reflective writing required of each new teacher.

A study of seventy-nine pre-service teachers in Australia by Manuel and Hughes (2006) used the responses from a questionnaire to uncover the nature of
these students’ reasons for undergoing teacher training. Once again, strong ties to Lortie’s original observations are apparent in that Manuel and Hughes found his interpersonal and continuation themes operating when the students were asked to identify the factors which influenced their decision to enter teaching. The students in this study also formed two identifiable subgroups—those for whom teaching was a primary career choice and those for whom it was a second or later option. Interestingly for the profession as a whole, in terms of its seeming feminization, is the finding that the percentage of males choosing teaching as a first career was lower than that of males entering teacher training after exploring other avenues. It would appear that, for some males, teaching is a “fall-back” position when other career paths are blocked.

Among those for whom teaching was a first choice, fulfilling a life-long dream—what Lortie interpreted as the service theme—was at the very top of the list of reasons given for the decision. The influences of family, belief in an innate ability to teach, and the lasting memories of particular teachers were the next most frequent reasons supplied. Manuel and Hughes were particularly interested in determining the degree to which a significant mentor/teacher was a factor in their participants’ decision to teach. In response to a direct question about this, nearly three quarters of all students—whether they chose teaching as a first career or not—agreed that such a person existed in their backgrounds. This tallies with the beliefs of Palmer (1998) who, in addition to his comments on the power of
mentoring cited by Manuel and Hughes in their article, states “…the imprint of good teachers remains long after the facts they gave us have faded…” (p. 22).

**Continuity and Discontinuity of Student Teachers’ Beliefs About Teaching**

In the discussion around the stability of and/or change in the views of teaching that pre-service teachers bring with them to the enterprise of becoming a teacher and the apparent lack of modification of those views effected by both programs designed to prepare teachers for the classroom and experiences in practice teaching, articles written by Tillema (1998) and Pajares (1992) raise important points that need to be kept in mind when reading research into this topic.

Tillema challenges the prevailing finding in much of the research that most student teachers leave their time spent in education studies without any significant alterations to their initial thinking about teaching even with intervention strategies in place that would be expected to accomplish such shifts in attitude. His study of 124 student teachers in their first year of a program in education would, at first glance, seem to add to the growing body of research literature that points to the intransigent nature of student teachers’ ideas about teaching. In fact, he admits, when the results of “…a teaching belief test designed to detect specific beliefs about … instruction and learning…” (p. 219) administered before and after a six week course on direct instruction as a teaching methodology were analyzed at the group level, little to no change in belief was apparent. It was only when the pre-
and post-test results at the individual level were considered that strong indications of changes in thinking were observed—though the changes were not always in the direction intended by the course on which the research was based nor did one individual change her/his thinking in the same way as another. These findings suggest that some thought is needed concerning the way in which data, such as that collected in this study and others investigating stability and change in beliefs, are analyzed. As well, Tillema asks that the definition of change be made more explicit. When a study says there was no change in belief does that mean this outcome was universal for all participants or just that individual changes were not looked for?

Pajares (1992) generally agrees with the findings of research into the influence of teachers’ beliefs on classroom behaviour and endorses the study of the nature of teacher belief, but calls to account just what researchers in this field mean when they write the word belief. He argues:

It will not be possible for researchers to come to grips with teachers’ beliefs … without first deciding what they wish belief [emphasis in the original] to mean. (p. 308).

As a result of his analysis of numerous studies in which teachers’ belief systems formed a research strand, he identified more than a dozen “fundamental assumptions” (p. 324) that he considered reasonable when such investigations are undertaken. Among them are: shifts in thinking in adulthood are rare even though such thinking may be based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge; there is a
direct relationship between the length of time a belief is held and the ease in changing that belief—the shorter the time the belief is held the easier it is to change; one’s beliefs strongly affect one’s behaviour; and one’s belief structures colour one’s thinking and information processing. Pajares suggests that researchers not detach educational beliefs from other belief structures embraced by participants but rather that they consider the connections among and between such systems.

Pajares is not alone in his plea for a definition of belief that would be consistent across all studies in the field. In an earlier paper, Clandinin and Connelly (1987) attempted to make sense of “…a bewildering array of terms…” (p. 487) in the research reported at the 1984 meeting of ISATT¹ and found in two different reviews of studies that were concerned with “…teacher theories and beliefs.” (p. 487). In the review undertaken by Clark and Peterson (1986), Clandinin and Connelly noted at least seven different labels while the Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) review netted an additional five including that of Clandinin and Connelly themselves, namely teachers’ personal practical knowledge. Despite the plethora of terms used, Clandinin and Connelly came to the conclusion that:

…there is more commonality in the patterns of inquiry into the personal than is apparent in the authors’ language and stated

¹ ISATT is the acronym for the International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching. It was founded in 1983 as the International Study Association on Teachers Thinking at Tilberg University, the Nederlands. (source: www.isatt.org)
intentions. People using different terms often appear in fact to mean the same thing. (p. 498)

They are concerned, however, that the “…differences in theoretical language tend to divide the field, making researchers sceptical of using and cross-referencing one another’s ideas.” (p. 498). Perhaps it is this resistance to a cross-pollination of ideas that drives the need to find ever more creative ways of describing the same underlying concept—belief. The more terms there are the harder researchers seem to try to develop yet another descriptor they believe will more clearly represent the idea. There would appear to be no end to this process!

Rust (1994) conducted research into the beliefs about teaching and learning held by beginning teachers both during their pre-service education program and as they entered the profession by examining the ways in which those beliefs were, or were not, modified through the experiences of these teachers. He and his colleagues used questionnaires to focus on the professed reasons given by the students participating in his study for entering teaching and their understandings of the nature of teaching, learning, schooling, and the purposes of education. In addition, student journals were exchanged monthly to provide insights into their thinking about teaching and periodic interviews were conducted to capture data not readily apparent from analyses of the questionnaires and journals. Both undergraduate students, those who proceeded to teacher education on completion of their baccalaureate degrees, and graduate students, those who completed a master’s program prior to undertaking teacher education, participated in the study.
One of the aims of Rust’s research was to investigate whether the difference in academic preparation of his subjects resulted in a difference, between the two groups, in the beliefs and attitudes concerning teaching. Though he initially found some variance between the complexities of their beliefs as they began their studies, both groups expressed nearly identical views of teaching that tilted strongly toward the idealistic. After completing their pre-service education, the beliefs held by both groups, though remaining determinedly idealistic, were more congruent in complexity of thinking. Rust cites this outcome as evidence that this teacher education program contributed to a change in his students’ thinking.

In his article, he describes in detail the first-year teaching experiences of two of the twenty-four subjects in his study. One continued on to a second year of teaching while the other left the profession after one year. According to Rust, the continuing teacher exhibited both change and stability in her beliefs about teaching. While her core beliefs about the importance of teaching, the teacher’s role as a facilitator of learning, and the students’ part as active participants in the construction of knowledge remained relatively stable, her thoughts on classroom management and discipline underwent a definite shift from a collegial, some would say idealistic, stance to a more authoritarian position. Though he notes that two stories and a set of twenty-four belief change questionnaires cannot encompass the experiences and beliefs of all newly qualified teachers, he nevertheless uses this information to suggest that:
…the espoused beliefs of beginning teachers are a patina developed during preservice education and laid over beliefs about human interactions and beings that are developed over a lifetime of learning, observing, and interacting both in and out of schools. This patina might be functional during the individual’s time in preservice education but can be quickly eroded or cast off during the new teacher’s encounters with the “real world” of schools. (p.215).

He calls for ways to make the “realities” of the classroom more visible to student teachers during their pre-service time. Rust’s study exemplifies the need, as described by Pajares, for researchers to be careful in defining what they mean by belief. Though he finds evidence for both change and stability in the beliefs about teaching espoused by his participants, it is difficult to see clearly what he has found as one is never quite sure as to what he means by a belief even though, in his abstract, he describes his article as a consideration of “…the relationship between teachers’ espoused belief and beliefs in action.” (p. 205)

Rust’s suggestion that classroom reality be made more readily visible to teacher education candidates is currently being addressed in the education program at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta (Butt, et al. 2008). As a prerequisite for admission to the Faculty of Education, students interested in entering the teaching profession, and who are in their second year at the university with thirty credit hours already completed with a minimum 2.5 Combined Grade Point Average, must complete the Orientation to Teaching course. While enrolled in the course, students complete sixty hours in a classroom-based practicum which allows them to “experience teachers’ working realities”. (p. 4273). This field experience is
complemented by a thirty-nine hour university-based seminar. According to Butt et al. (2008) the purposes of this course are:

to explore contemporary education, to help each student to assess the personal suitability of teaching as a career, to assist the Faculty of Education, in partnership with the teaching profession, to evaluate students’ potential for teaching and for admission to the B.Ed. program and to assist the student in beginning to make the transition from student to professional educator. (p. 4274).

The grading for this course is pass/fail and is determined jointly by the university-based seminar instructor and the classroom-based teacher associate. However, there are three levels within a passing grade. Students may pass and be Highly Recommended (HR) for admission to the Faculty or may pass and be Recommended (R) for admission to the Faculty or may pass and be Not Recommended (NR) for admission. The students who receive this NR grade may use the course as an elective credit in their undergraduate degree program. Only students who have received HR or R are considered for admission. They must, however, also meet the overall academic requirements for this combined baccalaureate degree program. Not all students who undertake this course complete it. Some, once they have the opportunity to understand teaching beyond the perspective they gained through Lortie’s apprenticeship of observation or the accidental apprenticeship identified by Ritchie and Wilson, choose to withdraw from the course often citing that teaching was far more complex and required far more of them than they expected it would when they signed up. These students are not seen as having failed the course but rather as having been able to make an
informed decision about the unsuitability of teaching as a career path. As not all students admitted to the Faculty of Education are completing or have completed their undergraduate studies at the University of Lethbridge, this preparatory course for admission can be substituted with a comparable course from other institutions. In some cases where prospective students from other institutions are able to prove their involvement in extensive volunteer activities related to education or have been Teacher Assistants in Alberta classrooms or have completed applied studies work in such a setting, the requirement for completing this exploratory course may be waived. In all cases, however, students who gain admission to the Faculty of Education come to the formal study of teaching with a wider understanding of the nature of teaching and have had the benefits both of working alongside practising teachers and of learning some of the theoretical frameworks which underscore such work. Assumptions they may have held prior to this course tend to be significantly altered by the experience.

Finan and Sandholtz (1999) also looked into the changing nature of the assumptions about teaching held by student teachers. The eleven students in the study who were all assigned to the same comprehensive high school for their practicum were asked to complete five autobiographical assignments over the course of their one-year teacher education programme. Not all of the assignments were strictly autobiographical in the common understanding of the word in that the last three assignments required the students to consider how their current stories differed, or matched, their previous ideas and beliefs about teaching. Specifically,
the final assignment encouraged the students to consider all of their writing, contained in previous histories, observation handbooks, and journals, and to write a new narrative based on the understandings they now had as a result of both their writing and the programme they were completing. Not all of the participants were able to rise to such a challenge. The researchers classified those who were able to show reflection in their narratives as engaged novices while those who did not evidence such a capacity as disengaged novices.

Among the eight students classified as engaged novices by the researchers, half had extensive subject matter backgrounds and at least two years of tertiary level teaching experience. Three of the four, over the course of their pre-service year, were able to see that instructional methods they had used at the college level were not always appropriate in the secondary school classroom and, correspondingly, made adjustments in their teaching as they “…quickly abandoned the style of teaching that they had cultivated in the college classroom and sought solutions beyond the instructional practices of their cooperating teachers.” (p. 80). Though the fourth member of this group persisted much longer in using a teaching style whose informality led to classroom management issues and presented material in a manner that placed it beyond the comprehension level of his students, he did eventually revise both his teaching methodology and his thinking about what constituted good teaching. The remaining four engaged novices experienced greater difficulties during their pre-service year but all managed, along with their peer group, to exhibit shifts in thinking from initial,
control-related foci to ones that centred on “…the relationships between content and pedagogy and how to transform subject matter for student understanding.” (p. 85). The growth, both pedagogical and personal, shown by this group of student teachers points to the teacher education program—specifically the direct classroom experiences gained during the practicum placements—as an agent of change in their belief systems. On the other side of the ledger is the apparent lack of change in their thinking shown by the disengaged novices who “…did not develop significantly new ideas about teaching…” and whose growth as teachers “…seemed to stop where they had begun.” (p. 84). Interestingly, the three disengaged novices all had fathers who were teachers and whom they considered as role models for their own teaching while only two of the engaged novices had a parent who taught school. Finan’s and Sandholtz’s findings are consistent with Tillema’s views on belief change. Changes in thinking by the participants both did and did not happen.

Nettle’s (1998) study involving 79 pre-service teachers in Australia adds to the argument that rather than no change in teacher beliefs occurring as a result of participating in a teacher education program both stability and change do occur. For this investigation he used descriptions of four dimensions of teaching and two orientations toward teaching that had been identified in earlier studies (see also: Dunkin, 1990, 1991; Dunkin & Precians, 1992; Dunkin, Precians, & Nettle, 1994). The dimensions of teaching were: encouraging activity and independence in
learning; motivating learning; establishing interpersonal relations conducive to learning; and structuring learning. The orientations toward teaching were a task orientation which focused on activity and structure and an affective orientation primarily concerned with motivation and interpersonal relations. By analyzing the responses to, what Nettle described as, a well-validated questionnaire which “...was developed to measure the relative strength of student beliefs about the importance of the four dimensions of teaching and the two orientations toward teaching...”(p. 195) administered before and after three weeks of practice teaching, he found that the overall ranking of the four dimensions remained the same while the importance assigned to each dimension by the participants changed. For example, structuring learning remained as the most important dimension on the students’ pre- and post-teaching questionnaires but the number of students rating it as the most important item increased. Similarly, interpersonal relations ranked at the bottom in both cases and were rated as less important by the students after completing their practice teaching. When the results for orientation toward teaching were considered, a majority of the students did not change their position. Most of those who were task oriented remained strongly committed to this stance, as did most of those who inclined to the affective orientation. For those whose teaching orientation changed, it was predominantly in the direction away from the affective aspects toward the task focused view. So again, both stability and change in beliefs, though in this study perhaps these may more properly be defined as attitudes, are in evidence.
Nearly ten years after Nettles' research, Arnon and Reichel (2007) studied two groups of students of education in Israel. These were:

student teachers—students of education at teachers’ colleges who are teaching in class under the supervision of the class teacher as a coach and with guidance of a pedagogical mentor from the college; and beginning teachers, that is, students who are currently teaching and are completing their academic degrees at a teachers’ college or at a regional academic college. (p. 442).

Each group was asked by means of a questionnaire to identify three characteristics of an ideal teacher, three characteristics that no teacher should exhibit, three personal qualities they possessed which they hoped would be part of their character as future teachers, and three qualities that had improved over the course of their studies or during their teaching experiences. The findings of this study are similar to those reported by Finan and Sandholtz as cited earlier. Student teachers, as defined in this study, valued affective aspects of teaching more highly than knowledge-based attributes while the beginning teachers, those with independent classroom experience, considered both the affective and the knowledge-based qualities of a teacher to be of approximately equal importance. Additionally, they found “…that the influence of teacher education is perceived as partial and limited…” (p. 460) on the improvement of the personal qualities of teaching identified by the student teachers. The beginning teachers also indicated that their “…attitudes towards the profession were almost uninfluenced by their teacher education.” (p. 460). Stability of teacher beliefs would seem to be evident in this group of education students. As a result of their work, Arnon and Reichel suggest
changes to teacher education to allow time for discussion of the origins of students’ images of the ideal teacher in order to assist students to understand how these influence the teachers they will become and how they can develop a more rounded view of the attributes of a good teacher.

Even with nearly a decade between Nettles and Arnon & Reichel, there does not appear to be much progress in the area of teacher education working as a change agent in prospective teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards teaching. This is a continuation of what has gone on before. In her meta-analysis of 40 studies published between 1987 and 1991, Kagan (1992) concluded that the outcomes of investigations concerned with change in student teachers’ beliefs as a result of pre-service education consistently pointed to the resistance to change of students’ pre-existing beliefs about teachers and teaching. Though Kagan’s choices of articles to review have been roundly criticized by Nettle (1998), and others whom Nettle identifies in his paper, as being biased because, in their opinions, she ignored studies which did show that student teachers’ beliefs were changeable, Kagan herself, perhaps in anticipation of her later critics, admitted that:

…the studies reviewed here do not constitute a truly random sample. Even given the same criteria for selection, another reviewer could have identified a somewhat different sample of studies. …The themes I extract from this sample of 40 studies tell only one of many stories that could have been constructed. In that sense, this is a somewhat subjective distillation, and what follows should not be regarded as definitive in terms of organization or interpretation.

I use the term, subjective [emphasis in the original], as a means of suggesting that there can never be a truly objective review of literature. The unique configuration of background knowledge,
values, and cognitive propensities that a particular reader brings to a text acts as a filter that affects comprehension. This is as true for academic scholars as it is for average readers. Thus, it is possible for two experts in the same field of research to disagree about the meaning or significance of a particular empirical study. (p. 131-132).

Therefore, despite the subsequent critique of Kagan’s work, I have chosen to examine a few of the articles she included in her review. Calderhead & Robson (1991) has been cited earlier in this chapter. Carol Weinstein’s (1990) research report is yet another of them.

Specifically, Weinstein examined the optimistic biases entrants to a teacher education program bring with them as a result of their long association with schools and schooling which also tends to contribute to a bias in favour of the more affective aspects of teaching, as these are the traits most observable to students. Most of the students in her study arrived in the program convinced of their abilities to become outstanding teachers who demonstrated highly developed interpersonal skills for working with children. These beliefs about their natural predisposition for teaching were identified by means of a questionnaire administered on the first and last days of the fall semester to all students enrolled in one section of a compulsory course that had to be completed before they were admitted to a formal teacher education program. When asked to rate how well they expected to do in the program when compared to their peers in the course, students could select one of seven categories ranging from much above average to much below average. In the spring fifteen students were chosen at random from two groups—those who had placed themselves in the above average and much above
average categories and those who had placed themselves in the average and below average groupings on the initial questionnaire. These students were invited to continue in the study by participating in interviews designed to examine how their thinking about themselves as teachers had changed as a result of taking the course. Twelve students agreed to continue. The three who declined the invitation had decided not to pursue entry to the teacher education program and were also members of the self-described average to below average groupings. In an aside, Weinstein speculates on the possibility of predicting who will stay in and who will leave a teacher education program based on the optimism ratings captured on the first day of class. When Weinstein completed her analysis of the transcripts of the taped interviews, which were conducted by a research assistant who was not known to the students, she found that although it was somewhat muted, the optimistic bias persisted and interpersonal relationships remained more important to these students than content—a pupil’s self-esteem was consistently rated as being more important than academic achievement. Based on the results of her study, Weinstein made some recommendations for changes to teacher education programs that would challenge prior beliefs of student teachers and assist them to arrive in their own classrooms with more realistic expectations of themselves and of their pupils. For example, she proposes that training be provided for the cooperating teachers with whom the teacher-candidates are placed in order for these teachers “… to become more aware of their own knowledge and skills, to learn to articulate what it is they do in the face of complex problems, simultaneous
demands, and unpredictable interruptions.” (Weinstein, 1990. p. 288). By doing so, Weinstein suggests that teacher-educators would face fewer difficulties caused by placing student teachers, to whom they have communicated the idea that “...teaching involves high-level, fast-paced decision making in a complex, demanding environment...”, with cooperating teachers who give these novices the notion that “...teaching is a matter of love and intuition...” (p. 288).

What is difficult to identify in Weinstein’s research report is the actual composition of the group of twelve students who proceeded to the interview phase. Though she made clear that the three students of the fifteen randomly chosen for interviews came from the group with low expectations of success, she does not explicitly comment on the group affiliations of the others. It is only when one reads the table presenting the self-ratings at the beginning of the semester does one become aware that there were only three students out of the thirty-eight enrolled in the course who placed themselves in the average or below average category. In fact, all three were in the average category. There were no students who rated themselves lower than this. Since the random sample of fifteen was based on these initial ratings and the three who did not participate further in the study were from the average or below average rankings, it seems fair to infer that the subjects of the interviews already had extremely high opinions of their ability to succeed as teachers. Weinstein does not comment on this detail. By not doing so, the reader might have reason to question her conclusions regarding the lack of
change in these students’ optimistic outlooks on their ability to teach. Is it reasonable to say that “…an initial field experience and a course that stressed the complexity of classrooms and the many roles of teachers…” (p. 285) had little to no effect on student teachers’ views of teaching when the students selected for in-depth study came from a homogeneous group? Finally, even Weinstein concedes that the “…course described in this paper did not explicitly focus on the beliefs that students brought with them…” (p. 286). If the students were not being asked to focus on their beliefs in the course and were not given assistance to identify them, to understand how these ideas might affect their thinking about teaching, and to develop new ways of seeing themselves as teachers, is the conclusion that teacher education has little effect on belief change warranted?

In an earlier, related study Weinstein (1988) considered the belief among pre-service teachers that teaching difficulties will happen to others, not them. Using 118 students enrolled in an elementary teacher education program at the University of Arizona, she identified several areas in which pre-service teachers were overly optimistic regarding their perceptions of their strengths when compared to those of the average first year teacher. These included their abilities “…to instruct students from different cultures, to maintain discipline, to establish and enforce rules, to relate to parents, and to deal with individual differences.” (p. 38). Though students completed a questionnaire based predominantly “…on Veennan’s (1984) list of the most frequently perceived problems of beginning
teachers.” (p. 34), they did not have to outline for the researcher what the term “average first year teacher” meant to them. So, when the questionnaire asking them to rate the level of difficulty an average first year teacher would have with each of the 33 items it contained began with the stem “How much of a problem do you think the average first year teacher [emphasis in the original] has…” (p. 36), it is not clear what each student envisioned while completing this questionnaire and while answering the comparative version which asked them to rate the difficulties they expected for themselves on the same 33 items. When analyzed, the responses to the two instruments, which were administered at these student teachers’ initial orientation session, led Weinstein to observe “…unrealistic optimism was very consistent across all items of the questionnaire.” (p. 38) and that the:

...existence of unrealistic optimism has severe implications for teacher education. If students believe that teaching is relatively easy and expect that they themselves will experience little difficulty, they will lack the motivation to become seriously engaged in teacher preparation (Book et al., 1983; Lanier & Little, 1986). Given the fact that optimistic biases bolster self-esteem and are reassuring in the face of uncertainty, it will not be simple to reduce the tendency to believe “it won’t happen to me.” (p.39).

Based on this study, Weinstein envisions an uphill struggle facing teacher education in effecting changes in pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teaching.

Joram and Gabriele (1998) addressed the issue of belief change by designing a study whose participants were students enrolled in an educational psychology course in which the instructor/researchers challenged their students’
prior beliefs about teaching and learning. Their work is premised on their views that “…these beliefs act as a gatekeeper to belief change throughout the teacher education program…” and that “…the set of beliefs that are constructed about their courses and program acts as a barrier to further learning in the university classroom.” (p. 177). To break through this obstacle, Joram and Gabriele first administered questionnaires, which the students filled out anonymously, in order to identify the beliefs their students brought with them about learning, teaching, and the part educational psychology plays in a teacher education program. The four student beliefs they chose as foci for their investigation were: field experiences are the most valuable source of professional knowledge; imitation of past teachers’ methods and styles is the best way to become a good teacher; all students are willing learners making teaching something that anyone can do; and learning will take care of itself once classroom management is under control.

During the course Joram, as the primary instructor, used driver education as an analogy to explain why field experiences are not always the best source of knowledge. For example, unexpected brake failure is not generally a field experience one encounters when learning to drive but having an understanding of what should be done as a result of in-class instruction would likely be useful if the situation were to arise later in one’s lifetime as a driver. As a consequence of such comparisons, students were helped to see that an awareness and understanding of the research underpinning student and teacher behaviours in the classroom are
important in becoming a teacher. To help students become cognizant of the limitations of imitation the instructor created a T-chart from the students’ responses to being asked what characteristics made “the best teacher they ever had” so effective. The replies were organized into two categories—one for affect and motivation and the other for knowledge and learning. The resulting graphic made the students aware not only of some of their personal beliefs about good teaching but also that these views were relatively one-dimensional in that the affective domain was over-represented in their recollections of good teaching qualities. Students could begin to see that imitating their own remembered teachers might not be the best way to teach. Lesson planning was embedded in classroom management so that the students might make the connection that good planning for learning often forestalls classroom management issues and that learning drives classroom management rather than the reverse. Throughout the course, their prior beliefs were addressed in ways which allowed the students the opportunity to confront them and to see the strengths and weaknesses of their thinking about teaching.

An analysis of the data gathered from anonymous questionnaires administered at the end of the course show that while the percentage of students who indicated changes in their beliefs about teaching and learning was not as great as that found when the students gave feedback about whether they felt their views had changed, it was still significant and seems to show that changes in student teachers’ beliefs can be accomplished when a course explicitly makes those beliefs
visible and provides ways for students to grapple with them as they acquire new knowledge. Studies by other researchers, some of whom have been cited previously in this chapter (Bramald et al., 1995; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Fajet et al, 2005; Harritos, 2004; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Loughran et al, 2001; Mahlios & Maxson, 1995; Maxon & Sindelar, 1998; Olson & Osborne, 1991; Rust, 1994; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000; Sugrue, 1996; Trotman & Kerr, 2001; Weinstein, 1988; Weinstein, 1990;), also suggest that students’ prior beliefs need to be revealed and challenged in the hope of eliminating them as a potential obstacle in the path of becoming a teacher.

Most recently Levin & He (2008), who use the term personal practical theories (PPTs) to encompass the notion of teacher beliefs, studied ninety-four prospective teachers with the stated aim of identifying the sources [emphasis in original] of novice teachers’ beliefs, which they suggest may also be a factor in whether teacher education programs can influence the stability of such beliefs. The results of their study hold out hope for teacher-educators depressed by the preponderance of research that repeatedly seems to indicate their work with pre-service teachers has little to no effect in changing their students’ underlying belief systems regarding teaching.

Levin and He initially identified ten categories for the sources of teachers’ beliefs as gleaned from their participants’ written descriptions of their PPTs. The students were explicitly directed to name the source of each PPT they reported. As
each student submitted between four and seven PPTs, the researchers were able to compile 472 unique PPTs over the three-semester duration of the study. The ten categories were then merged into three major sources: family background and personal K—12 education experiences; field experiences during teacher training; and teacher education coursework. Using these categories, Levin and He were able to show that teacher education strongly influences pre-service teachers’ beliefs about instruction and the nature of students while family background and personal K—12 education experiences affect their beliefs about the nature of classrooms and teachers i.e. the learning environment. Whatever the sources of their previously held beliefs regarding instruction and the nature of students may have been, something which is not reported on in this study, the students self-identified their teacher education program as the current source of their PPTs related to these areas. Given that fact, it seems reasonable to assume that some of these students may have had their beliefs changed as a result of their pre-service experiences. I suggest it is also fair to infer that beliefs whose sources can be found in family background and personal educational experiences may have remained unchanged. Thus, both stability and change in beliefs would appear to be evident in this study.

Earlier work by Tabachnik and Zeichner (1986) reported on the consistency and contradiction in teacher belief demonstrated by two of the four participants in their longitudinal study that encompassed these teachers’ pre-service and first years of teaching in elementary schools (see also: Zeichner, Tabachnik & Densmore, 1987). In a précis of their report, they noted:
One of the teachers sought to change her behavior to create a closer correspondence between belief and action, while the other teacher changed her beliefs [emphasis in the original] to justify behaviors that were inconsistent with her expressed beliefs. (p. 84).

One of the assumptions they make clear in their writing is “…classroom behavior expresses teacher beliefs.” (p. 85).

The teacher who underwent a change in her beliefs found herself employed in her first year in a school whose curriculum and organizational structure were designed to maximize its students’ performances on criterion referenced tests. Over the course of her pre-service year and during her practice teaching placement, she had developed an open, easy-going, student-centred approach to her teaching that valued the students’ creative thinking and problem solving. Driven by the necessity of staying in step with the other teachers of the same grade level, her highly controlling teaching behaviour was observed to be at variance with the beliefs about teaching that she expressed at the beginning of the year. By year’s end, her expressed beliefs about teaching more closely matched those the researchers inferred, based on their assumption, from her classroom behaviour. Her teaching style did not change over the course of the year so a change in her thinking was necessary to narrow the gap between thought and action.

For the second teacher, whose initial placement was in a school where she was expected to deliver a closely prescribed curriculum, the freedom of being the only teacher at the grade level and the loose organization of the administrative hierarchy allowed her to move from conforming absolutely to the syllabus using
the methods and materials contained therein to covering the required content using those which were consistent with her beliefs in a student-centred curriculum that included building relationships and acknowledging the personal lives of the students. As her confidence in herself as a teacher grew, her teaching behaviour changed so that her actions in class more fully expressed her espoused beliefs. This move indicated to the researchers the stable nature of her thinking about teaching.

Once again, both change and stability is apparent in the thinking of these two teachers. The difference in this outcome is partially attributable to the milieu in which they began their careers. This leads to a third strand evident in the research involving beginning teachers.

**Effects of the First Years of Teaching on Novice Teachers**

In a paper presented to a conference organized by the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education of the University of Texas at Austin, Fenstermacher (1980) theorized on a number of issues in teacher education research. The focus of the conference, as stated in the introduction to the volume containing the papers presented, was “…to delineate and prioritize crucial, researchable issues in teacher education.” (p. 1). Fenstermacher began his presentation with a warning to his audience that he would be “…treating hypotheses … as if they were already established.” (p. 35). He justified this by saying:
First, the hypotheses proposed are based on thoughts formed from a number of different kinds of experiences with educating teachers. Second, I find it boring, and presume others do, too, to read endless strings of “what if” statements. (p. 35).

Thus, he was not reporting on findings from any formal studies he had undertaken. This is of note as Fenstermacher’s views in this paper are often cited as part of the research background for other studies. His opinions, expressed in this paper, tend to be reported as findings. Among these was the effect of the workplace during a teacher’s period of induction which he defined as:

...that span of time from the start of student teaching to the point at which the teacher ceases to express surprise with the perceived expectations of the workplace and exhibits confidence in his or her ability to realize most instructional objectives, most of the time, with at least a modest degree of success. (p. 38).

Using this definition, given ongoing changes to curriculum and the ever-expanding role of the school into areas once thought strictly the ambit of parents and guardians or religious institutions such as churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples one might argue a teacher never really leaves induction behind. Cognizant of this interpretation, Fenstermacher clarified his definition in a footnote terming this period as comprising a “primary induction” in a teacher’s career. He proposed, and hoped would be later proven correct, that the institutional characteristics of schooling, which included not only its organization but ways in which authority was wielded and the language by which business was conducted, during the induction period had a major influence in the development of teachers’ thinking.
Veenman (1984) conducted a review of some of the research literature resulting from studies into the problems of beginning teachers published between 1960 and 1983. The 83 reports he considered represented an international perspective on the topic though those from the United States dominated his sample. Beginning teachers in Veenman’s study were those who were in their first, second or third years of teaching. Seventy of the studies under review were confined to the experiences of first-year teachers only. In his report, class discipline ranked as the number one, perceived problem for beginners though he is careful to explain when using prestructured questionnaires, as was the case in most of the studies, that:

...one must keep in mind that “class discipline” is not an unambiguous concept. What is called discipline or order by one teacher may be called disorder by another teacher and vice versa. ...Labels like classroom discipline and classroom management may be regarded as code words for a whole host of specific difficulties...(p. 153).

It is likely that ambiguity resided not only in this concept but also in others as ratings-based questionnaires require a struggle on the part of respondents to qualify their experiences—one person’s “agree” might be another’s “agree somewhat”. While the findings in the studies he reviewed were similar in the types of problems each identified, Veenman noted that, for the most part, they did not “…identify and describe the context so that we can understand how environments with varying supports and challenges affect the beginning teacher.” (p. 160). That being said, he did indicate that some progress was being made in this regard at the
time of the writing of his article. He pointed to the, then, new approaches to the process of becoming a teacher that were appearing under the rubric teacher development. One of these was what he labelled a teacher socialization framework which “…is focused on the interplay between individuals’ needs, capabilities, intentions, and institutional constraints.” (p. 162). One of the studies, not included in the 83 he reviewed, authored by Zeichner and Tabachnick (1983) is not only useful as an exemplar in the field of research about the change or stability of beliefs held by beginning teachers but also delineates the effect of school culture and organization on those same teachers. (see also: Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). Other studies, published since Veenman’s review, have answered his call for more research into this area.

In Australia, Connell (1985) created a number of composites of teachers from interviews with 128 teachers, ranging from newly qualified beginners to seasoned veterans near retirement, that were conducted in the late 1970s. One of these composites is that of Sheila Goffman who represents a beginning teacher two years past her qualifying year of studies in education. He cautions that his work is fixed in its time and asks his reader to consider what may, or may not, have changed in education in the intervening years between the publication of his work and the reader’s own time. Sheila was fortunate in being hired immediately on qualifying into a secondary school in which the English department was undergoing a renaissance directed by a newly appointed head. The focus on child-centred pedagogy matched her personal beliefs and in this supportive environment
she was able to develop a teaching style that did not require her to make any serious alterations to her teaching behaviours. This was reinforced by her assignment to mostly top-stream entry year classes as opposed to the more traditional timetable of academically challenged students. While her techniques worked well with the former, they were not particularly successful with the latter. How differently might her teaching have evolved had she not been in an environment that did not challenge her underlying concepts of what constituted good teaching? In creating this composite, Connell points to the effect initial placement has on the professional development of a novice teacher.

A longitudinal study conducted by Robert Bullough, which resulted in his 1989 book, *First Year Teacher: A Case Study*, considers the first, with some reference to the second, year of teaching of a young woman, Kerrie, who had been one of his students in a university program leading to secondary school teaching certification. She brought with her the life experiences of being a mother of two school-aged children, of being the daughter of a teaching mother who delayed her own entry into teaching until her children were in school just as Kerrie had done, and of being taught by teachers who transformed their enthusiasm for teaching into enthusiasm for learning on the part of their students. One of the reasons Bullough invited her to be the subject of his research was her possession of:

…several of the qualities and abilities frequently identified with public school teaching success: enthusiasm, a sense of humour, intelligence and the ability to communicate clearly and to vary instructional methods. In short, she was likely to do well. (p. 1).
She possessed other traits which Bullough saw as integral to the way in which she responded to the teaching milieu, namely: excellent organizational skills; an inclination not to worry about matters or situations that were beyond her control; a tendency not to complain; and an individualism which Kerrie herself characterized as being a loner. In her first teaching position, she was employed in a junior high school of 970 students who came from mostly working-class to middle-class families. In the school, her assigned classroom was one of three created by subdividing a large, open area with floor-to-ceiling moveable walls. A smaller open area remained which linked the classrooms allowing the teachers to see what was happening in one another’s classrooms. Access to the other two rooms was gained by walking through Kerrie’s classroom and the open area. As the rookie member of a team of three teachers assigned to the ability-grouped, grade-seven core program, Kerrie was given the lowest ranked group. The team leader, who was also expected to assist Kerrie during her first year of teaching and who was not receiving any remuneration for fulfilling either this role or that of team leader, was chosen by the principal based on her seniority, willingness to serve, and ability. The second criterion had particular emphasis in his choice. Though the principal expected his teachers to operate in a professional manner and contribute to the maintenance of an orderly school environment he did monitor them closely enough to notice when Kerrie accidentally missed an assigned supervision duty. She did not merit any closer scrutiny by him, however, as another first-year teacher in the school, who was experiencing severe classroom control problems,
and a veteran teacher, whose inadequate job performance required close supervision, occupied much of the principal’s time. Thus, Kerrie was mostly left alone to her own devices both by the teacher nominally responsible for overseeing her transition into teaching and by the principal whose supervision of her was limited to the two formal evaluations necessitated by district policy.

In chronicling some of the difficulties Kerrie faced during her first year, many of which generally matched Veenman’s (1984) list of problems of first year teachers, Bullough notes the contribution of the institutional context in which Kerrie found herself. When she first began to experience classroom management problems no one, not even her designated mentor, made her aware of school policies in this area. The message she internalized from her surroundings was that she was on her own. Other researchers (Pataniczek & Isaacson, 1981; Corcoran, 1981) have commented upon the isolation of beginning teachers and their reluctance, perhaps even inability, to seek assistance. Bullough suggests her predisposition to work things out on her own kept her from seeking help but also comments:

…the strength of the message that teachers, even beginning teachers, must make it on their own, along with the failure of teaming, the heavy work load at Rocky Mountain Junior High, and the high visibility of teaching mistakes (which were very public), all contributed to Kerrie’s tendency to withdraw into herself…” (p. 43).

The isolation from other teachers she experienced in her classroom extended elsewhere in the building. At the time of her hiring, two different professional associations were vying for prominence in representing teachers in matters of
working conditions. Staff belonged to one or the other of these rival organizations with some staff members declining membership in either. This political undercurrent created a divisive atmosphere rather than one of collegiality and it was the end of her first year of teaching before Kerrie was able to get to know a few other teachers well enough to recognize in them a shared passion about becoming a teaching professional.

On the positive side, the physical arrangement of her classroom allowed Kerrie to view the teaching of her erstwhile mentor and to use these observations as a source of knowledge for her own work. Even though she received minimal supervision from the principal the character traits Bullough identified as being likely to bolster her chances of future success as a teacher served Kerrie well in that she was able to interpret the principal’s detachment as confidence in her abilities. There were others in the school who were experiencing far more serious problems than she. In Kerrie’s case, the institutional context affected how she managed her classroom and how she solved problems she encountered. Left alone, she relied heavily on her common sense and drew on her reserve of self-confidence which was shaken, but not destroyed, by the difficulties she faced. She modified her teaching behaviours and beliefs in the area of classroom management finding a balance between the nurturing teacher she wanted to be and the authoritarian disciplinarian she had to become. As Bullough put it “…she discovered…that the road to a fun, warm, “cuddly” classroom sometimes went
directly through the police station.” (p. 42). Had Kerrie initially been at a different school or had she not had such a strong belief in, or passion for, teaching the outcome may have been quite different.

I have chosen to discuss at length only Bullough’s findings regarding the years of Kerrie’s career that coincide with the time frame I am considering in the careers of my participants and of my own teaching history. However, the research relationship between Kerrie and Bullough, true to his interest in pursuing a rare longitudinal study in teacher development, continued well after this time period. In his latest work, *Counternarratives: Studies of teacher education and becoming and being a teacher* (2008), Bullough reported on Kerrie’s progress after five then seven years of experience. Relevant to my current study are his comments on teacher development and the interplay of context and life history:

> Viewing teacher development in relationship to life history and context is crucial for understanding the richness and complexity of teaching expertise. …During the past decade, some writers (Bullough 1987; Bullough, Goldstein, and Holt, 1984) may have overemphasized context. Kerrie’s story, particularly her decision to discard much of her program and to resist contextual pressures to conform, nicely illustrates the problematic nature of such orientations. …Still, we ought not underestimate the power of context to both enable and limit teacher development and shape teacher vision. The trick is to find a productive balance: Both context and person matter. (p. 130).

The nature of the first-year of teaching experienced by beginning teachers is not only of interest to educational researchers but is also of major interest to the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), the self-regulatory and licensing body for teachers in the Province of Ontario, Canada. In March 2003, in the second year of
a 5-year long study being conducted by the OCT and entitled *Transition to Teaching*, surveys were sent to 3015 teachers who graduated in 2001 from teacher education programs offered by the ten faculties of education in Ontario in both English and French, and also by six New York State colleges near the Ontario-New York State border and by the University of Maine. Surveys were also sent to 3208 members of the 2002 teacher education graduating classes of these same institutions. These 6223 teachers, all members of the OCT and who completed either their first or second year of professional teaching in Ontario, formed a stratified random sample of the 16 092 graduates in those two years. As stated in this report, there was no follow up mailing or series of phone calls to ensure the participation of those to whom these questionnaires were sent. Consequently, the 2001 graduates returned 755 questionnaires and 957 arrived from the 2002 group. Based on the answers provided by these beginning teachers, OCT Human Resources Manager, Frank McIntyre, authored a report in whose introduction he wrote:

…the College found that teachers lack orientation programs, mentoring and classroom resources. Many are hired too late or, within weeks of starting, are shifted to a new class, a new grade or a new school. And they get the hardest assignments. Survival becomes their top priority.

…by the second year of teaching, about 18 per cent may be at risk of leaving the profession. These teachers express dissatisfaction with their teaching experience to date. Many express a loss of confidence in their teaching skills. They express dissatisfaction with their

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2 Though some of the teachers receiving questionnaires graduated from the American institutions referenced, all of the them were certified to teach in Ontario and thus were members of the OCT. Questionnaires were not sent to graduates of American programs who were not members of the OCT.
assignments, frustration with what they call the politics of the profession or concern about the lack of resources and support to them as new teachers. (OCT, 2003. p.1).

The results of this report, and those of the report from the first year of the Transition to Teaching study based on the responses received from 550 of the 2200 first-year teachers who were sent questionnaires in March, 2002, led the OCT to publish in 2003 the monograph New Teacher Induction: Growing into the Profession. In it the College calls for “…a province-wide framework for a mandatory induction program.” (p.5). Among the elements it considers essential for the two-year induction program it envisions are support and mentoring.

Support would require administrators in schools to:

…make every effort to give new teachers appropriate teaching and classroom assignments. This means, where possible, not assigning new teachers to portable classrooms, combined grades, special education assignments or grades involved with EQAO testing. Administrators can also offer support by not overloading the new teacher with extracurricular activities. (p. 13).

Calling mentoring “…the most powerful and cost-effective intervention in an induction program.” (p.10), the authors of this monograph write:

The College strongly recommends a mentoring program in which experienced teachers team up with new teachers.

The College sees the role of a mentor as non-evaluative and voluntary. The mentor is to be coach, information provider, role model and support. A mentor must have qualities that go beyond those of an exemplary teacher. The mentor should have:

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3 EQAO is the acronym for the Education Quality Accountability Office, an arm’s length agency of the Provincial Government of Ontario, which is responsible for administering province-wide standardized tests in reading, writing and mathematics at the grades 3 and 6 levels and mathematics at the grade 9 level. It also administers the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in Grade 10 on which a passing grade is required for graduation from secondary schools in Ontario.
• credibility within the school and board
• strong interpersonal skills
• commitment to the professional growth of new teachers
• excellent classroom practice
• commitment to ongoing professional learning. (p. 14).

In justifying the need for a formal induction program for newly qualified and newly employed teachers in Ontario, the OCT claims:

An effective induction program will help teachers make the transition from their pre-service education to the classroom. By supporting teachers in their new environment and helping them to enhance their knowledge and skills, we help them find satisfaction in teaching and more of them will stay in the profession. By helping them improve their teaching practice, we improve student learning. (p. 17).

By 2006, the fifth year of the Transition to Teaching study conducted by the OCT, the college had five cohorts of teachers represented in the research. These groups were comprised of education program graduates from 2001 through 2005 annually who were now completing their fifth through first years in the teaching profession respectively.\(^4\) In addition to those graduates from the Ontario faculties of education and the American institutions described previously, the OCT surveyed out-of-province and out-of-country educated teachers\(^5\) who were certified to teach in Ontario in 2005. A total of 4 130 responses to questionnaires

\(^4\) For the purposes of this OCT study, being certified to teach in Ontario is interpreted as being part of the teaching profession regardless of being employed either full-time or part-time as a teacher or not being currently employed in education.

\(^5\) In this case, out-of-province refers to graduates of education programs in Canadian universities located outside of Ontario. Out-of-country describes those who graduated from education programs outside of Canada other than the programs offered by the American institutions previously described.
were received by the college of which 1,289 were from those who graduated in the spring of 2005. This number represents an approximate 32 per cent return rate.

As a result of the changing employment patterns experienced by graduates from differing years due to the slowing rate of retirement by long-time practitioners and the continued high enrolment in faculties of education the OCT found, for the third year in a row, that approximately half of all newly certified graduates did not find regular teaching positions by the end of their first year in the profession. (OCT, 2006. p.5). The experiences of those who did are of interest to my current study. Thus I will focus on the parts of this report that concern those teachers who are currently employed in regular teaching positions.

The Ontario Ministry of Education answered the call for a formal induction strategy into the teaching profession, issued by the OCT in the 2003 *Transition to Teaching* report, with a provincially mandated program for all school boards receiving public funding called the New Teacher Induction Program. The 2005-2006 academic year marked the first year of provincial funding of this initiative. The responses from first-year teachers, who held full-time positions in schools, to the OCT survey led the authors to note “…many new teachers were met with no program, inconsistent implementation and less than satisfactory support.” (OCT 2006, p. 7). In addition, the responses of these same teachers resulted in the OCT concluding that mentoring, which the college strongly endorsed in earlier reports emanating from this longitudinal study, was “…somewhat more widespread than the formal induction program, with three out of five (61 per cent) new teachers in
regular positions saying they have an experienced teacher mentor. More than half (52 per cent) of those with mentors, however, give a negative rating to this experience.” (OCT 2006, p. 8). As in the 2003 OCT report cited previously, many of the regularly employed first-year teachers continued to be given timetables that: had them teaching special education classes or difficult classes the experienced teachers did not want; contained four or more different class preparations or subject areas in which they had an inadequate background or no qualifications; were assigned to them at the last minute leaving them no time to prepare; or that were combined elementary grade levels. (OCT 2006, p. 14). Regularly employed teachers in their second year reported similar difficulties with their teaching assignments though the OCT did note that “…some second-year teachers with elementary school jobs appear to be earning [emphasis added] their way out of the tough assignments often handed to new teachers.” (OCT 2006, p. 46).

The Transition to Teaching study by the Ontario College of Teachers is but one among many such projects that have called for induction programs which include mentoring as an anchor point for a sound beginning to a new teacher’s career. Among the recommendations resulting from a study of four first year teachers conducted by Olson & Osborne (1991) is the assignment of “buddy” teachers to novice teachers. In their opinion, these “buddies” can:

…help orient them [new teachers] to curricula and classroom concerns…and … encourage novices to discuss their concerns about teaching in order to increase self-awareness, build emotional security, and to develop an attitude of lifelong learning. (p. 342).
This is but one type of mentoring—a concept that has been lionized by numerous writers and researchers in education and beyond (Dahle, 1998; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Gray & Gray, 1985; Jacobi, 1991; Krupp, 1985; Levinson et al. 1978; Little, 1990; Pence, 1995). The need for and the perceived benefits of mentoring are hardy notions as evidenced by Gehrke & Kay (1984) who admitted that not every teacher needs a mentor but still believed that “…mentor-protege relationships …ought to be fostered.” (p. 24) while Mager (1992) wrote: "…no approach to providing support and guidance and shaping the experience of new teachers seems as well suited as mentoring." (p. 25). Neal (1992) also asserted that “Mentoring is the essence of formative support for new teachers.” (p. 38) and Moir & Gless (2001) claimed “…the new teacher mentor [is] the most important feature of any high quality induction program.” (p. 112). After reviewing the literature surrounding the concept of mentoring, Semeniuk (1999) came to the conclusion that, despite its popularity, mentoring remains an ill-defined idea that does not take into account gender differences or the particular nature of a school as a workplace and may not be the panacea for the difficulties faced by novice teachers. Her call for a more reflective consideration of the concept and practice of mentoring seems lost in the rush to implement the recommendations in the OCT’s 2003 monograph and Sullivan’s (2004) slim volume How to Mentor in the Midst of Change in which she writes:

...in a high-tech society, we need a high-touch [emphasis in the original] approach to developing mastery and meaning in teachers
and administrators. The unique and changing needs of educators may demand innovation, but the old concept of mentor as wise counsellor fits as a general idea. This book delineates guidelines and ideas for those adults in mentoring roles in this 21st century. (p. 5).

If, as the authors cited previously assert, mentoring should be a cornerstone of effective induction programs then, as Wang, Odell, and Schwille (2008) summarize in their critical review of selected literature pertaining to the role of mentoring in induction, mentoring:

…may require mentor teachers to acquire necessary visions, foci, and skills that are consistent with the kind of teaching and learning that beginning teachers are expected to learn in induction. (p. 145)

They also note that:

…mentor beliefs of teaching and mentoring can exert both a positive and negative impact on beginning teachers’ learning depending on whether mentors’ beliefs are consistent with the kinds of teaching that beginning teachers are expected to learn.

Thus, mentoring is a skill that needs to be taught to those who would mentor and the mere act of pairing a beginning teacher with a seasoned veteran with no consideration as to how the relationship may or may not be one of support does not contribute to the effectiveness of induction. It is this lack of consideration of what the act of mentoring looks like in practice and its possible negative effects that is among the criticisms offered by Semeniuk (1999).

The need to prepare mentors for their role in the induction of beginning teachers has been recognized by the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Hanson and Moir (2007) report on how mentors are
prepared for their roles in the New Teacher Center Teacher Induction Model which “…provides for matching new teachers with carefully selected experienced teachers trained to work with adult learners.” (p. 59). They go on to describe the process saying:

Mentors are released full time from classroom duties with the expectation they will serve a three-year term. Mentors have a caseload of 13-15 first and second-year teachers whom they work with in their classrooms, during the school day, for at least one-and-a-half hours a week. …Our induction model recognizes that becoming a skilled mentor is a developmental process grounded in ongoing collaborative work with peers. …Time is allocated to strengthen the mentor community of practice, to revisit mentoring concepts and strategies, to practice and deepen skills, to model and analyze best mentoring practices or the use of formative assessment protocols and to problem-solve issues of practice. (p. 59-60).

At least in this program, fewer things are left to chance in the mentoring relationship. At present in Ontario, despite the mandatory implementation of new teacher induction programs within all publicly funded school boards, there does not appear to be such an approach to preparing experienced teachers for mentorship roles within the classroom or beyond. Indeed, the finding by the OCT in 2006 that more than half of the respondents to their questionnaire reported a negative mentoring experience would seem to indicate that successful mentoring as part of the induction process remains a haphazard occurrence.

The endorsement of mentoring as a method for preventing the premature departure by some beginning from the teaching profession is not limited to Ontario. Scherff (2008) lists it among the recommendations she makes as a result of her study of two novice teachers in two states in the south-east of the USA who
chose to leave teaching very early in their professional careers. Though her two participants appeared to possess all the qualities necessary for success, a combination of difficult working conditions and lack of support contributed to their “disavowal” of teaching. In particular, one reported isolation, which is common among many teachers in almost every career stage, as being a major factor in her decision to leave. As she put it, “‘When a teacher must rely on only her students to push her through, she doesn’t make it.’” (p. 1329). Having a peer group such as the participants in Section 11 had, was also not enough to give her the support and collegiality that she had expected to receive from her colleagues upon joining her first school staff. Consequently, Scherff added her own voice to the chorus singing out for induction programs grounded by mentoring.

**Summary**

The main ideas resulting from the research literature I have considered are: the personal histories, or life histories, of pre-service and beginning teachers seem to have an effect on the nature of the experiences these novices have both in their training program and in their initial years of teaching though there appears to have been only sporadic attempts to address this point directly and this finding is often peripheral to the original aims of many studies; there is no unanimity among researchers concerning the part played by pre-service programs and initial placements in perpetuating or changing teachers’ beliefs about teaching—there is even some dispute about what belief means and what constitutes a change in belief; the institutional context in which new teachers find themselves seems to be
a major factor in shaping their classroom behaviours; and both the degree and the nature of the effects of pre-service programs and initial placements on beginning teachers are open to further research and consideration. It is my intention in this thesis to examine some of the points summarized in this paragraph.
Chapter 3

Constructing a Research Study

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

As a result of my own participation in the Section 11 Project, I had the occasion to meet nearly all of the original co-researchers. At the time of my involvement, most of them were experienced classroom teachers though some had chosen to apply their skills in other venues. In attending the symposia conducted during the fourth and fifth years of the study, and as I became better acquainted with the other members of this group, I found some people more articulate than others in expressing themselves and recounting their experiences. While they all were at ease in the collaborative research model being used and all had developed skills in reflective thinking, some were, like any random group of people, more capable than others in these respects. My participants have been selected from this subgroup. I admit to a bias in my selection in that I invited only women to participate in my study. I did not wish to introduce the possibility of gender becoming a factor in my research or in any conclusions I make as a result. By selecting only women I have controlled one of the potential variables in the research.

Originally I sent out three letters of invitation (see Appendix A) with the expectation that I might have to issue further invitations should my initial ones be met with polite refusals or, after examining data from those who responded and gave me consent to view the material they had provided to the original study,
some respondents proved to be unsuitable for my study. Though I was generally familiar with all of the original co-researchers I did not have access to their specific data to guide me in choosing those who should receive letters of invitation. I based my choices on what I personally witnessed in the symposia I attended and on the transcripts of those symposia. These written accounts were available to all who had been present which made such information non-confidential and public to those who participated. I received acceptances and signed consents from each of the first three women I contacted. Once I had the written consent to do so, I retrieved the files for these three women from the original study and read them in order to decide whether further recruitment of participants would be required. Based on the data contained in each woman’s file, I felt that all three would be suitable candidates for the study.

In the spring of 2003, I conducted individual, audiotaped interviews with each of them as a follow-up to their Section 11 participation. The interview questions I used may be found in Appendix B. The purposes of the interviews were to gather current information about their careers in education, to establish each woman’s definition of success so I might refine, if necessary, the definition I had developed for use in this thesis, and to have each woman reflect on her participation in the Section 11 Project and the effect, if any, her involvement in this research had on her career both in the years I was including in my study and in the time since. Only two of the three women had been continuously employed in schools since their graduation from the Faculty of Education. The third woman
had chosen to apply her training outside an institutional educational setting. In order to limit the scope of this thesis to its stated aims, I chose to concentrate on the women who were currently working in school systems and had done so, with the exception of maternity leaves, since they acquired their first teaching positions after graduation. Consequently, the third woman’s interview tape was never transcribed and was erased. I then returned her file to the original database and have not used any of the information it contained in this thesis. Again, to limit this study to one of manageable proportions, I made the decision to work with two participants rather than my original intention of three. As a result, I did not seek to recruit any other participant in the Section 11 Project for my study. Of the two women with whom I chose to work, one had proceeded through elementary, secondary, and university education without a break and then had begun her career in teaching while the other came to teaching after working in other fields following her undergraduate and post-graduate university studies. I specifically chose Antoinette and Anne, pseudonyms of their own choosing, not only for their skill in self-reflection but also for this difference in their entry paths to education. Additionally, one had worked exclusively in the secondary school panel—grade nine through graduation— while the other had done the same in the elementary school panel—kindergarten through grade eight. This provided a range of experiences that covered and extended beyond, the compulsory schooling period in Ontario. In choosing these two women for my study there is, in my opinion,
sufficient representation of the types of situations that many beginning teachers face.

In writing this thesis, I have not made use of any material provided by other co-researchers in the Section 11 Project and from whom I did not have, and did not seek, consent to do so. Though material concerning people other than Antoinette and Anne was present in some of the transcripts of the symposia, I have not made use of that information in my research.

**Arriving at a Research Methodology**

Tell me something about yourself. How many interviews have begun with this seemingly innocuous invitation? Often it is intended as a way of reducing the tension inherent in the process of being interviewed by strangers, a brief period of getting to know one another. If the interviewee notes the lack of reciprocity on the part of the interviewer, it is frequently lost in the midst of the internal debate over which details should be included and which excluded in responding. How should my story be told? What will my story say about me? This power of story to communicate more than just factual events is noted by Lieblich et al (1998) who write:

One of the clearest channels of learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality. … The story is one’s identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell. (p. 7).
Before proceeding, however, an exploration of what is meant when the word story is used in the context of educational research is required. Carter (1993) notes this problem when she poses a number of questions she feels require answers if:

…story is to become more than a loose metaphor for everything from a paradigm or world view to a technique for bringing home a point in a lecture on a Thursday afternoon. (p.5).

Much like the term belief, as noted in the previous chapter, story would appear to have a fluid definition that is dependent on the researcher using the concept. Usually when someone says “Let me tell you a story.” there is an expectation on the part of the listener that what follows will have some rational sequence—a beginning, middle and end—and some purpose whether it is to entertain or enlighten though most good stories manage to accomplish both. In her article, Carter arrives at a definition of story that most people would find familiar from their days in school. She adds to it by noting:

…story is a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and nuances in human affairs. …This richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be demonstrated or evoked through story.

From this perspective, story is a distinctive mode of explanation characterized by an intrinsic multiplicity of meanings. …The knowledge represented in story cannot…be reduced to abstract rules, logical propositions, or the covering laws of scientific explanation. …Story accommodates ambiguity and dilemma as central figures or themes. (p.6).

The ability of a story to go beyond a simple statement of facts makes it an attractive vehicle for educational research in general and for my research in particular. The act of teaching is intensely dependant on human interactions. How
many teachers have walked into a classroom with a beautifully designed lesson plan, arrived at after hours of careful consideration, only to have to jettison it when faced with the fact that on this day, with these students, it was not going to work? Indeed, the teacher who holds fast to the unworkable lesson plan and tries to override the human dynamics in play in the classroom is inviting disaster.

Teachers and the work they do are not easily studied using quantitative methods that are rooted in the scientific method, though many such examples exist. The potential of using stories to explore issues related to teaching and teachers led me into the field of narrative research.

Like story, narrative is a term that is frequently used as though there exists a universally accepted definition for the concept. Polkinghorne (1995) defines narrative as:

…the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes. …In this discussion..., I am using the term narrative [emphasis in the original] to refer specifically to texts that are thematically organized by plots. (p. 5).

He notes, however, many of the other ways in which the word narrative is employed in qualitative research. Among them are:

…any prosaic discourse, that is, any text that consists of complete sentences linked into a coherent and integrated statement. …any data that are in the form of natural discourse or speech...the data form of field notes or original interview data and their written transcriptions…the form of the collected body of data…gathered for analysis. (p. 6).
In addition to these uses, he points to a more limited definition, used by some qualitative researchers, which makes narrative synonymous with story. This leads him to provide his definition of story. He writes:

…I will use *story* [emphasis in the original], in its general sense, to signify narratives that combine a succession of incidents into a unified episode. ...A storied narrative is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing environmental contexts. ...*story* [emphasis in the original] refers not only to fictional accounts but also to narratives describing “ideal” life events such as biographies, autobiographies, histories, case studies, and reports of remembered episodes that have occurred. (p. 7).

In defining story, he comes back to narrative. There appears to be little distinction, for him, between the two terms. In my work I will also use narrative and story interchangeably.

Beyond the difficulties engendered by the multiple meanings of the word story when it is applied in an educational research setting, Carter (1993), though a supporter of the use of teachers’ stories, readily acknowledges some of the potential weaknesses in methods that rely them. In her view, when teachers’ stories, which she notes now often include teachers’ biographies, and teachers’ voices are given extreme emphasis, researchers in the field of narrative-based research are at risk of losing sight of the fact that:

Stories, including those told by teachers, are *constructions* [emphasis in the original] that give meaning to events and convey a particular sense of experience. They are not videotapes of either reality, thought, or motivation. Thus, we cannot escape the problems of veracity and fallibility in our work by making special claims for teachers’ constructions of their practice. (p. 8).
She also points out that teachers’ stories focused on the personal and in which “…teaching events are framed within a context of a teacher’s life history.” (p. 7) are those frequently told to a researcher for research purposes and may differ significantly from the stories teachers tell one another. This leads to another issue within narrative-based research. Does the story told necessarily have to be true?

Phillips (1997) addresses this issue of truth by arguing that it is possible for a narrative to meet all the requirements of a story, such as a definite beginning and end with a coherently ordered progression from one to the other, without it ever being true. He views this as a major problem in narrative-based research as, in their desire to construct coherent narratives in their reports, he feels researchers may find their work driven by the need to satisfy the criteria for creating a good story rather than by the truth. He draws a distinction between narratives that he classifies as scientific explanations and those he feels are endemic in educational research. He claims that the latter are not subject to the same constraints as the former. While he sees the former as being constrained by very specific, verifiable fields of investigation, he argues, “In so-called narrative research…the constraints are imposed by the needs of story and plot [emphases in the original].” (p.106). Though he accepts that scientific explanations—narratives from “…any discipline that is (or aspires to be) a science, or wishes to tell the truth, or to offer true explanations…”(p. 106)—are subject to selective data reporting in a way similar to the narrative researcher’s selection of events to be included in order to make a
convincing narrative, he maintains that, for the most part, such selectivity in a scientific explanation has more veracity than the same process in narrative research. In his words:

…accounts presented in narrative form might have to meet the canons of the narrative genre, but they also [emphasis in the original] have to satisfy the scientific ones as well…”(p. 106).

The work of Phillips and Carter, whose article Phillips cites as not going far enough in a discussion of the need for truth in narratives, is a useful touchstone for narrative-based researchers—though Phillips seems to think that most such academics are oblivious to the potential weaknesses in their method—in that it reminds such practitioners to be vigilant regarding presenting narratives at face-value without considering the motivation of the narrator. A story well told needs to be considered both for what it contains as well as for what it leaves out.

There are many research methodologies in which story and/or narrative play a central role. As well, their use is not confined to the realm of education. Narrative research can also be found in other domains that include, but are not limited to, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In deciding which approach to apply to my study, I examined a number different narrative-based research perspectives, in relation to the type of data available to me, in order to determine their suitability for my work.

**Narrative Methodologies**

Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1997) work in the area of social science portraiture is closely related to ethnographic research methods. She distinguishes between
them by noting, “[e]thnographers listen to [emphasis in the original] a story while portraitists listen for [emphasis in the original] a story.” (p. 13). Certainly, in working with the material available to me, I was not so much listening to stories told by Antoinette and Anne as I was listening for their stories so that I might record them in the narrative forms found in Chapters Four and Five. In working with the data that had been collected from these women, it became increasingly apparent to me that there was no possibility of my being able to stand completely outside the process of examining the data, creating a narrative, and analysing the result. I also had been part of the Section 11 Project in its later years and had been a co-researcher with Antoinette and Anne. In addition, the questions I was seeking to answer, particularly those informed by the aim of assessing the role of biography as an predictor of success, were grounded not only in my experience with Angela, as outlined in Chapter One, but also in my own personal history and beginnings as a teacher. Lawrence-Lightfoot comments on this relationship between the researcher and the research when using portraiture:

The identity, character, and history of the researcher are obviously critical to the manner of listening, selecting, interpreting, and composing the story. Portraiture admits the central and creative role of the self [emphasis in the original] of the portraitist. …With portraiture, the person of the researcher—even when vigorously controlled—is more evident and more visible than in any other research form. She is seen not only in defining the focus and field of the inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative. (p. 13).
This attribute of portraiture appeared to make it a methodology that would be highly suited to my study. The more I looked into this possibility, however, the less applicable it seemed to be given the data sources for my research.

In portraiture, an important aspect in the collection of data is that of context. Lawrence-Lightfoot stresses three dimensions of context—the internal context or physical setting, the personal context or researcher’s perspective, and the historical context or institutional culture and history. As I am working from material that has been collected without the opportunity for me to “…capture all the specifics of the physical setting…” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 45) in which my participants studied and worked, I am unable to provide the internal context required by this method. Neither was I present in the university classrooms of my participants nor in the classrooms they inhabited during their practicum rounds and the early years of their careers. As a result, I cannot do as Lawrence-Lightfoot asks and sketch myself into the context. Though the narratives I have created contain some insertions of my perspective on what I have read in the data on a participant, it is not truly the personal context envisioned by Lawrence-Lightfoot when she writes of this. Finally, without having been personally present to collect the data, my ability to “…sketch the institutional culture and history—the origins and evolution of the organization and the values that shape its structure and purpose.” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997. p. 52) is severely compromised. Consequently, the applicability of this very attractive research methodology to my work was limited. To say that I used this methodology in its entirety, as described
by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, would be incorrect. The strongest connection
between my work and portraiture is in the crafting of the Antoinette’s and Anne’s
narratives. In using portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) asserts:

This process of creating the narrative requires a difficult (sometimes
paradoxical) vigilance to empirical description and aesthetic expression. It is a careful deliberative process and
a highly creative one. The data must be scrutinized carefully,
searching for the story line that emerges from the material. However,
there is never a single story—many could be told. So the portraitist is
active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story,
strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in
defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative. (p. 12).

This is certainly a clear description of how I approached the task of taking the
voluminous amount of material available to me for each of my participants and
producing a coherent account of a three or four-year period in their lives. I may
not have been able to collect the data in a way that would be true to the nature of
portraiture but I was able to view it in many of the same ways that a portraitist
might employ. It is interesting to note that within Lawrence-Lightfoot’s
description of the process of creating a narrative she identifies the need, as a
researcher, to be cognizant of one’s responsibility to ensure that the desire to write
a good narrative does not outweigh the need that it also be a good piece of
research. This is exactly the distinction that Phillips (1997) fears may not be
drawn by all authors of narrative-based research.

Having decided that portraiture overall, regardless of its merits, was not the
ideal methodology for the type of study I was conducting, I next considered
narrative inquiry for use in my work. According to Schwandt (2001) narrative inquiry is:

…a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (e.g., life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies) and reporting that kind of research. (p. 171).

As I have generated the narratives of my participants from the types of sources Schwandt names, narrative inquiry seemed the most appropriate method to use for my study. It is, however, a method that is not without its detractors.

Doecke, Brown and Loughran (2000) illustrate the tension among differing schools of research when they attempt, in writing their article, to:

…eschew the stance of academics reporting the findings of our research and …try to achieve something different from the “knowledge” effect of traditional academic writing. Our discussion assumes the form of a narrative combining several voices…(p. 336).

They continue, “…the very form our discussion has assumed…shows that we have been trying to move beyond the boundaries of traditional academic writing.” (p. 346). Despite using narrative not only to gather data but also to represent that data, which in the opinion of Conle (2001) is the litmus test for determining whether research falls into the realm of narrative inquiry and which Polkinghorne (1995) classifies as narrative analysis, they show their discomfort with “…this alternative to academic writing…” (p. 346) by writing that the “…alternative, however, must be theorized, if it is actually to form an alternative.” (p. 346). Like Phillips, narrative inquiry is fine with them only if it can exhibit a more formalist approach.
In both anticipation of and in answer to such criticism, Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) provides a thoughtful consideration of some of the background issues that can colour discussions of research conducted using this method. She identifies three key points: the reliance of narrative research on the acceptance of an alternative way of knowing that does not focus on categorization; the collaborative nature of narrative research; and the need to redraw the distinctions between what is private and what is public and to come to a new understanding of subjectivity.

Addressing the first point, she characterizes the work of narrative researchers as often consisting of small-scale studies that do not produce results that can be generalized to represent the group being studied and do not demonstrate tangible benefits in that they can be used to provide a blueprint for implementing changes in education. Consequently, she feels, such work invites criticism from some academics who view the purpose of any educational research as providing the theory to justify or to challenge current practices. Such criticisms, she writes, come about because:

…the purpose of narrative research is not to develop knowledge that can be used to change practice…, nor to work out…solutions to problems in the field…but to gain increased understanding of the multitude of meanings that are created by practitioners and researchers working together….

This research for a different kind of knowledge…is a significant reconceptualization of the purpose of educational research. …it amounts to a relinquishing of the power traditionally claimed by educational researchers to give advice and influence decision-making on the basis of warranted knowledge which only they possess. (p. 78).
Certainly, my study qualifies as a small-scale endeavour and is unlikely to be a major influence in and of itself on the way in which teacher-candidates are selected and educated. However, the cumulative effect of numerous small-scale studies, such as mine, on the overall understanding of the directions necessary to promote continuous improvement in teacher education has the potential to be enormous. Change may not occur at once as the result of one small research project but the need for change may be recognized when it forms part of a larger body of research findings produced by many such studies.

One of the hallmarks of narrative inquiry is the collaborative nature of the work. This, in itself, invites criticism from some quarters. Just as some secondary school students view cooperative/collaborative learning as being antithetical to personal academic achievement, which is the standard by which many are judged when trying to move into some form of post-secondary education, some academics express similar reservations about collaborative research. In a competitive, institutional context in which the battle cry “Publish or Perish” still rings out in the march toward tenure, Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) notes, in writing about the second of her key points, “Too much collaborative work is regarded as problematic on an academic curriculum vitae…” (p.79). This may, however, be the least strenuous objection to narrative-based research as she describes the difficulties inherent in achieving true collaboration given the, often, unequal status of teachers and university researchers. In addition, she lists other objections to a method that relies on collaboration namely the tendency of researchers to choose participants whose
backgrounds closely resemble their own and the very real possibility of a significant number of the participants exercising their prerogatives by requesting drastic editing of either the material they have previously provided as data or the researcher’s report based on such data. The first of these concerns causes some to question the lack of representation of those teachers who differ from the researcher in background and philosophical viewpoint while the second can be a logistical nightmare which might cause the complete collapse of the study resulting in months, if not years, of wasted time and effort for all involved in the project.

From the beginning, the Section 11 Project exemplified the idea of collaboration in research. The very term, co-researchers, used to describe the students who participated, underscored the non-hierarchical approach. The numerous meetings, or symposia, created strong bonds among all the participants, both students and professors alike. The potential criticism that the participants were chosen to ensure collaboration and thus reflected the primary investigator’s worldview was effectively obviated by the fact that the group resulted from the vagaries of the university timetable for that year. Section 11 was just that—the eleventh section of the junior-intermediate English methods course for that academic year. The random assemblage came first; collaboration came later. As a result, when the time came for me to choose some of the Section 11 participants for my research, I was selecting from a group of people who already had an understanding of, and willingness to participate in, collaborative research. Thus, it may be true that their backgrounds and philosophical viewpoints do not differ
significantly from mine but it is not the result of any particular bias on my part. Additionally, these were people who had already demonstrated an eagerness to work collaboratively and who were unlikely to give rise to the second concern by requesting drastic editing of, or by withdrawing, materials they had already supplied in the original study.

In her third key point—the need to redraw the distinctions between what is private and what is public and to come to a new understanding of subjectivity—Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) points out the necessity of making accommodations for a new way of considering what constitutes private and public in data collection and reporting. In an academic culture which previously required all researchers to sublimate the personal in their reports by avoiding the use of I and by writing in the passive voice and which used the degree to which results could be replicated in independent studies as the standard for judging the a study’s value, research that requires none of these constraints has taken time to gain the same degree of acceptance as that conducted using more traditional methods.

In North America we live in a culture in which the distinction between the private and the public is becoming increasingly blurred. This is most evident in the popularity of such television shows as the eponymously named Dr. Phil show whose guests willingly discuss previously private matters in front of millions of viewers of this syndicated program in exchange for pop-psychology advice from the host. While current pop-culture, in the form of reality television, has taken the publicizing of the private to the extreme in the pursuit of entertainment—though
fine print legal disclaimers in the credits for Dr. Phil claim public education as part of the show’s purpose—the inclusion of heretofore personal stories of both investigator and participant in the published reports of narrative-based research cannot be considered in the same light, though some would do so. Paraphrasing William Pinar, Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) avers:

...the materials of one’s personal life are essential to an understanding of one’s work, and particularly so when one’s life and work are concerned with education. (p.81).

This contrasts sharply with some phenomenological research in which the practitioner, as described by Van Manen (1990):

...does not want to trouble the reader with purely private, autobiographical facticities of one’s life. The revealing of private sentiments or private happenings are matters to be shared among friends perhaps, or between lovers, or in the gossip columns of life (p. 54).

Elbaz-Luwisch goes on to note the potential for the lives of so-called ordinary people, and the stories they create to make meaning of their lives, to provide as great a contribution to knowledge as those whom society recognizes as extraordinary. The memoirs of former world leaders, for example, which include varying amounts of what may be considered strictly personal information, are not discounted as sources for historical research as a result of such inclusions. In fact, they often provide new insight as to why a particular event unfolded on the world stage as it did based on having access to such personal information. Similarly, the stories that are part of the data in my research are equally valid as possible sources for understanding why events in the classrooms of the storytellers occurred as they
did. As noted earlier in this chapter, Phillips (1997) has expressed concerns regarding the veracity of such stories. Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) addresses this issue when she writes:

…it is essential that the narrative be true to the sense of meaning which the teller puts into the story, not imposing on it external criteria of meaningfulness. (p. 81).

This degree of truth may not satisfy the concerns of Phillips and others—who wish to subject the narratives gathered from participants for analysis and the narratives fashioned by the investigator in writing a final report to scrutiny using standards derived from the scientific method—but it is consistent with her understanding of the purpose of narrative research.

The seemingly catchall nature of the term narrative inquiry, as defined by Schwandt, requires a more precise description of my use of the method in this study. Polkinghorne (1995) takes great care in his article to distinguish between what he considers to be two distinct forms of narrative inquiry—analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. In the former the researcher’s primary purpose is to examine narratives for themes that hold throughout the collected data while in the latter researchers use combined common elements in collected descriptions of events to form a plot and create a unified story. According to him, it is the direction taken by the researcher—from stories to common elements and vice versa—that determines which type of narrative inquiry is being used. In my study I am using an analysis of narratives approach to narrative inquiry, as defined by Polkinghorne.
Narrative inquiry became the method most suited to my study given the nature of the data I was using and the way in which it had been collected for the original Section 11 Project. Similar to Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1997) three contexts in portraiture, in their article *Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry* Clandinin, Pushor and Murray Orr (2007) cite three commonplaces of narrative inquiry as developed by Clandinin and Connelly—temporality, sociality and place. These can be traced to earlier work by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) on narrative thinking. According to these two researchers, when thinking narratively there is a recognition that: events are situated in time and that they have a past, present and an implied future; people are in a constant process of personal change and their narratives need to be considered in this light; actions are open to interpretation and do not necessarily follow a cause-effect pathway; there is no one, true interpretation for any event; and context, whether temporal, spatial or relational, is ever present.

At no point during their involvement in the original Section 11 Project were either Anne or Antoinette asked to write their own stories about these years. The primary data source for each of my participant’s narratives was the journal of experience each woman was asked to maintain during her pre-service year and beginning years of teaching. It is in these journals that the most immediate responses to the events that unfolded in their teaching lives were found. The secondary source was the collection of transcripts of numerous one-on-one interviews with Antoinette and Anne which were conducted by the original
graduate assistant who worked with the primary investigator on the Section 11 Project. In many instances, Antoinette’s and Anne’s answers to his questions provided useful data that had the advantage of temporal distance in that events that could almost be considered traumatic at the time of their occurrence could now be discussed in a less emotionally charged state. A disadvantage, however, was that this sometimes allowed Antoinette and Anne to minimize the importance of these events in their teaching. Finally, when there appeared to be gaps in the data, I turned to other sources such as their pre-service teaching reports, in-service administrative evaluations, and other material written by them relevant to the Section 11 Project.

For each participant, I read every piece of material contained in her file and combed through the transcripts of the numerous symposia that were held during the time period encompassed by my study. In many instances, a single memorable event in her pre-service year or early career years was described from different perspectives by the woman living it. As noted previously, her journal often recorded the immediate, emotional reaction while her response to being asked by the graduate student interviewing her to recall such an event was often more reflective. Her retelling of it to her peers during open discussions held at the symposia contained yet another reaction to the same experience. From these differing perspectives, and keeping in mind the work by Clandidin and Connelly on narrative thinking, I attempted to capture not only the details of the event but also its significance to the woman relating the story. These threads, created by
combining the different sources, became the material I used to weave the narratives found in Chapters Four and Five.

To avoid a situation in which I had, unintentionally, constructed a story that would contain the answers I expected to the questions I posed rather than a straightforward narrative of my participants’ early years in teaching, once I completed each of these chapters I sent a copy to the person whose story I was telling. I invited her to read it and to tell me whether what I had written was a fair and accurate description of the years in question as she remembered them. While there is a distinct beginning, middle and end to these stories this organization is of my own creation as I imposed such a chronology based on the dates contained in the data available to me. Though she found the reading of her story, as I presented it, difficult from a personal point of view, as it brought to mind some of the more painful aspects of the early years of her career in teaching, Antoinette agreed that it did accurately reflect her memories of the time and did not ask for any changes to be made. Anne, on the other hand, requested two minor changes to her story. The first was to make the description of one of the jobs she held prior to entering teaching more precise so that it would correctly outline what she had done while the second was to amend the description of one of the students in her classes as it related to his special education needs. She also agreed that the story I had created told the tale of her initiation into teaching accurately even though on reading it she found that much of what had caused her difficulties at the time seemed trivial in the light of her, now, years of experience.
In addition to being aware of the possibility that I might unintentionally craft narratives in such a way as to contain the answers I wanted, I was mindful of the critics of the research method I was using who have suggested that, at times, the need to tell a good story gets in the way conducting good research. Some of the entries in the reflection journals Antoinette and Anne wrote during those early years were hard for me to read as their complete honesty about what they were feeling during some of the more trying times left me near to tears. I constantly had to reinforce the line between responsible use of this material and its exploitation in the name of compelling prose. Consequently, one of the questions that I asked them to consider when they read what I had written about them, beyond verifying the facts and the “truth” of the narrative, was whether they felt I had crossed that line at any time. Did they feel “used” or did the writing allow other readers to get a true sense of what it felt like to be in those situations? Both women agreed that I had stayed within the boundaries I set for myself but had managed to convey what they remember feeling at the time.

These narratives, and my own narrative in Chapter Six, meet Elbaz-Luwisch’s definition of truth in narrative inquiry. No one in the original study deliberately fabricated stories. In fact, the degree of honesty about their situations and their reactions to them exhibited by the members of Section 11 in general and thus by my two participants in particular is, quite frankly, astonishing. This openness and honesty carries with it a heavy responsibility. It implies an
obligation on the part of the investigator to both respect and protect the participant whose story is told.

Current ethical protocols in force in the realm of human-subject research require the identity of the participants to be protected but this becomes a fine balancing act when a method such as narrative inquiry is used. It may be relatively easy, for instance, to protect the identity of subjects participating in a study designed to test the efficacy of a new drug as their personal, non-medical information is unlikely to be included as part of any report emanating from such an investigation. However, when personal experiences, the narratives shaped by them, and the interpretations of those narratives are the focus of the study then it becomes much more difficult to maintain the degree of anonymity required. Some details of a participant’s story may be crucial to its “sense of meaning” as identified by Elbaz-Luwisch but they may also be so specific as to allow identification of the narrator. If this information is omitted in the interest of protecting the identity of the subject is the meaning of the resulting narrative compromised? Some participants may need to be protected from themselves as was the case with some of the Section 11 co-researchers. These teachers expressed frustration at having to be known by pseudonyms in any reports issuing from the study. They were justifiably proud of their participation and of all the materials they had produced during their involvement. They proclaimed themselves unafraid of being identified in the future through their stories and wished to “stand by their work”. One of the issues that needs to be considered when participants wish to
waive their right to anonymity, however, is the presence of other characters in their narratives who may subsequently become identifiable, if the participants identities are known, and who have not had the same option to claim or reject anonymity. Additionally, once a report has been published the opportunity for a participant who has stepped from behind the curtain into public view to say “I wish I hadn’t said that!” has passed. What may have seemed inconsequential at the time of utterance may become a major problem at some time in his/her future. (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000).

As the primary investigator has a responsibility to cause no harm to the participants at the time of the study, this duty also includes a moral responsibility to prevent, as far as is possible, any future harm to them resulting from publication. To meet both my moral and ethical obligations in this role, my participants are identified by pseudonyms of their own choosing. Details in their stories which would tend to identify them, such as references to specific schools or individuals, either have been altered by substituting fictional school names and pseudonyms or have been omitted entirely when such omissions did not compromise the integrity of the investigation. While my participants are free to reveal their identities to others who may know of their involvement in this study, I have proceeded with due care to protect their anonymity in such a way as to maintain the definition of truth in narrative research as noted previously.
Connelly and Clandinin (2000) also raise an important question inherent in narrative inquiry and relevant to my own work: Who owns the stories told and created in a published work using this research method? While the informed consent granted to me by my participants to use the data supplied by them and gathered about them in the original Section 11 study implies a partial waiving of their ownership rights, the provision, required by the ethical protocols accepted for this project, that they be allowed to read, prior to publication, what has been written about them and to be able to request changes should they object to my interpretation of their stories points to their continued ownership. Though in giving consent they agreed to not only my analysis of their original data for use in my thesis but also to my future use of these analyses in journal articles and conference papers, their ability to influence what is written about them prior to the final acceptance of my thesis would, again, indicate their continued ownership of their stories. My role, as researcher, is to interpret not to appropriate these stories. While this is my thesis, their stories remain just that—their stories. I may “own” the thesis but I am not entitled to make their stories my own.

Though I created the narratives about Antoinette and Anne that I am using in this thesis, this does not allow me to claim such narratives for myself. Furthermore, the act of fashioning these narratives may have influenced the way in which I have remembered and told my own story but the distinction between what are their stories and what is mine has not been blurred. The meaning of certain events in my life can only be completely understood by me. I can explain to
someone else what I felt about a certain experience but he or she can never truly understand. Similarly, Antoinette’s and Anne’s descriptions of their experiences—found in their journals and interview transcripts—cannot be completely appreciated by me, or any one else, in the exactly the same way as they understand them. At best, when the telling of a story elicits a “Me, too.” reaction a certain degree of empathy, which is not the same as understanding, can be attained. The narratives I present may not be the same as those that might have been constructed by Antoinette and Anne who lived the experiences but each woman has accepted my work as a valid way of telling her story. In a sense, they have loaned their stories to me for use in my thesis.

Connelly and Clandinen (2000) categorically state: “Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical.” (p. 121). Graham (1991) makes the connection between teacher education and autobiography by stating:

…the writing of autobiography…works in the first instance to reclaim hidden or forgotten aspects of an individual’s past in order to prepare that individual for the classroom, and in the second instance to clarify practicing teachers’ understanding of the amalgam of experience and knowledge that goes into the way in which they operate in the classroom. (p. 13).

These two attributes of autobiographical writing are in play in the material provided by Antoinette and Anne from which I fashioned their narratives. By recalling their pasts they had the opportunity to examine events in light of the futures they were anticipating in teaching. In addition, they were able to
acknowledge, to some extent, the genesis of certain behaviours related to their classroom experiences.

Certainly I can claim a degree of autobiographical writing in the telling of my own early years in teaching. Thus, the use of narrative inquiry as the main research method in my study appears to be justified by the opinion of Connelly and Clandinen noted previously. However, by including my own story in this thesis I am not doing so only as a means to render visible any biases which may affect my interpretation of the narratives of my participants, as I comment in Chapter Six. I am putting my story beside that of my participants for equal consideration in the search for answers to my research questions. I am, therefore, in this narrative both the observer and the observed. It is this dual nature of my participation that introduces an element of autoethnography into my study. According to Schwandt (2001): “The aim in composing an autoethnographic account is to keep both the subject (knower) and object (that which is being examined) in simultaneous view.” (p. 13). It is also his opinion that narrative inquiry and autoethnography are closely related.

Connelly and Clandinen (2000) write: “…narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories.” (p. 40). That is where I began—with the experiences as described by my participants and with my own. My initial interactions with the women who would later become the participants in this study found me in the middle of their stories of becoming teachers. They had negotiated the treacherous waters of first-year teaching and were halfway through
their second year in the profession. The anecdotes they related to the other co-researchers during the symposia caused me to recall this period of my own life in teaching. The memories evoked were not just those of factual detail but also those that could be called emotional memories. I remembered what I did as well as what I felt in certain situations. Sometimes it was a joyful recollection while at other times I was left wishing I could forget some aspects of my early years of teaching with their attendant feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. While writing my own narrative was a relatively straightforward task—I had, after all, been present when it happened—constructing those of my participants was far more difficult. What should be included and what should be left out? Based on their reactions to what I had written, I would appear to have struck a reasonable balance between these two poles. With their approval of my stories about them, and with my own story in place, I felt I was ready to begin the task of looking for the answers to my research questions.

**Examining the Narratives**

I began by carefully rereading each narrative to get an overall sense of what we three had in common and what was unique. As the author, I had become quite familiar with these three stories and this led to a tendency to forget specific details—a case of familiarity breeds, if not contempt, at least indifference. It was important that I try to stand outside the narratives as far as possible while at the same time recognizing that such supposed objectivity—the holy grail of the scientific method—would not be entirely possible. There had also been a significant
time lapse between my writing of the narratives and my readiness to examine them in the light of my research questions. As a result, it was necessary to remind myself what they actually contained as opposed to what I thought they contained. In some instances I remembered material that had been present in Antoinette’s and Anne’s files but had, for various reasons including that of not using material for the sake of narrative impact, not found its way into the final product. Antoinette and Anne had approved these tellings of their stories so, without returning to them for further approval, it was not possible to alter what I had already written. I chose to work with the narratives I had created which, unsurprisingly, were informed by the overall aims of my thesis.

Having re-familiarized myself with the narratives, I used each research question as a focus for subsequent readings. The first two of my three questions—Can life experience predict success? and Do certain traits ensure success?—seemed to call out for a simple yes or no answer while my third question—What are the effects of initial placement on beginning teachers?—was not so simply satisfied and required a more descriptive response. As I was using an analysis of narratives approach to narrative inquiry, as defined by Polkinghorne (1995), I considered each question separately and looked for common elements across the three narratives related to the question being asked. The results of these focused readings may be found in Chapter 7 in the forms of discussion which explain the reasoning behind the answers I arrived at for my research questions.
Chapter 4

Antoinette’s Story

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
Psalms 121

Antoinette was twenty-three when she entered the Faculty of Education at
the University of Toronto. The daughter of immigrant parents she graduated with
distinction from the University of Toronto where she earned an honours Bachelor
of Arts degree with combined majors in English and Italian. She brought to her
education studies experiences teaching Italian to elementary school students in a
continuing education program offered by the local Roman Catholic school board
and teaching English as a Second Language to junior, intermediate, and senior
students\(^1\) for an educational travel company. In addition, she spent two summers
as a teacher’s assistant at the elementary school level. Her first two practice
teaching placements were in separate schools\(^2\)—both elementary and secondary—
with the last two occurring in public schools\(^3\). Upon graduation from the Faculty
of Education, she accepted a position with a large, urban separate school board by
which, at the time of this writing, she is still employed. Though she completed a
pre-service program which focused on grades four through ten—the

\(^1\) Ontario curriculum is organized into four divisions: primary, junior, intermediate, and senior. Primary,
junior and the first two years of the intermediate divisions are taught in elementary schools—kindergarten
through grade eight—while the remaining grades—nine through twelve—are taught in secondary schools.
\(^2\) In Ontario there are two publicly funded school systems operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of
Education (MoE). One is non-denominational while the other is Roman Catholic. Both systems accept
students from all faiths and follow the curriculum mandated by the MoE but students enrolled in schools
operated by Roman Catholic District School Boards also receive instruction in the Roman Catholic faith.
The term separate school refers to schools, both elementary and secondary, within these school boards.
\(^3\) Public school is the term used to describe a non-denominational, elementary school.
junior/intermediate divisions—she entered the teaching profession by accepting a position in a secondary school. She had experience teaching in this milieu during her first practice teaching placement. Labour disputes occurring in the elementary panel at the time meant that the university was unable to place her in a school that more closely matched her teacher preparation. She was placed in a separate, secondary school where she expected to teach only grades nine and ten—intermediate level grades—which matched her teacher preparation but the teacher to whom she had been assigned had only one class in this division. As a result, she taught grade ten, eleven, and OAC level English—a mostly senior division timetable. To her surprise, Antoinette found that the experience, though daunting at first, was not unpleasant and it opened her mind to the possibility of teaching at this level. Her remaining three practica were completed in various elementary schools where she taught grades four, five, seven and eight. As is the norm in the elementary panel, she not only taught English, her specialty, but also various other subjects such as Mathematics, Religion, Geography, Guidance, Science, and Health. In keeping with Lortie’s (1975) vocation theme, Antoinette spoke of her sense of teaching as a calling. In a journal entry written at the end of the summer, on the eve of entering a classroom of her own for the first time she wrote:

There was never a time when I said, “hey, I’m going to teach”. It was more like something I always knew. …

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4 OAC is the acronym for Ontario Academic Credit. At the time Antoinette began her career the completion of various OAC courses was an entrance requirement for university and many students undertook them in a fifth year of secondary school. With the reorganization of secondary education into a four-year program, these courses no longer exist.
...I wanted to do something with my life [emphasis added] that would enable me to feel like I was doing something “worthy”. I honestly feel that more than most other professions teaching would be fulfilling for me. It’s hard to phrase but I guess in many ways I sought out a career that would be dynamic, challenging, fulfilling and people oriented. Teaching always stared back at me and now here I am.

I have added the emphasis to this excerpt because in the original text Antoinette had first written the word career then crossed it out and wrote the word life. This is an important insight into her thinking about teaching because it seems to provide evidence that, for her, life and teaching are inextricable.

Antoinette’s overall beliefs about teaching as she completed her Bachelor of Education are best summarized in the following excerpt from her reflection journal. In response to being asked to look back over her pre-service year she wrote:

I realize, more than ever, what a challenge lies before me. To motivate, individualize, encourage, help each child I meet according to his/her needs and talents! If not before I certainly do know now that “good” teachers (the kind you remember years and years later AFFECTIONATELY! [emphasis in the original]) are very special & gifted people. This year has also proved to me the inefficiencies of our educational system and its (sic) shown me that those special people are still doing wonders within that system. It kills me however, to watch the hurt some teachers inflict—almost unknowingly. Believing as I do that “children are the world’s greatest resource” puts all that much more importance on the profession I’ve chosen. There is no where (sic) in the world I’d rather be headed in September than towards my own classroom—my fear is—can I live up to my own expectations?

It could be argued that these sentiments are merely evidence of the idealistic nature of many novice teachers but in Antoinette’s case they are more than that.
Some of her practice teaching placements did much to temper her idealism with a heavy dose of reality but her basic philosophy remained unchanged. In post-pratica interviews she remained solidly committed to her belief in children as the focus of teaching and expressed dismay at situations which she felt did not place the child first.

The chronicle of Antoinette’s pre-service classroom placements shows a growing awareness, as voiced in the previous journal extract, of the complexities involved in the act of teaching. In her first placement her associate teacher\(^5\), cognizant of her lack of direct preparation for teaching in the senior grades, was particularly encouraging and supportive. Antoinette thrived in this environment and with all the positive feedback she received from this teacher returned to the university full of enthusiasm and confidence. As she had never considered doing so before and had begun this first student teaching placement full of doubts about her ability to do so, she found that teaching in the senior division was tremendously rewarding. Consequently, Antoinette found herself reassessing her original decision to teach in the junior and intermediate divisions.

This period of reassessment was to last throughout the remainder of her pre-service year. Her comments, taken from the transcript of an interview after her second practicum session during which she taught grade eight in a separate, elementary school, provide evidence of this ongoing process. She allowed that she

\(^{5}\) Associate teachers are practicing teachers in whose classrooms pre-service teachers gain practical teaching experience. These teachers observe the teacher-candidate and provide, to varying degrees, constructive criticism and support. Though not members of the education faculty at the university, they are responsible for assigning a pass/fail grade for the student’s practicum based on their observations.
had begun her second placement with “…some reservations, because I had had a high school placement beforehand, and I taught an OAC writing course. And, so, I fell in love.” but now, after its conclusion, she enthused that “…they were two great weeks. …I loved the kids; they were great kids.” This caused the interviewer to suggest that her experiences to date had created a dilemma for her as to her future. She agreed and signaled her intent to continue exploring her options by saying, “Yeah. Keep the I [intermediate division] in there and see what happens. We’ll have to see what my junior placement brings me.” At the time this interview took place, Antoinette was nearing the completion of the first semester of the two-semester-long Bachelor of Education program.

Despite Antoinette’s misgivings about the grade levels she was being prepared for in her course of studies, as a result of her unanticipated and positive experience in the senior division, the comments from her associate teachers on her formal appraisals of practice teaching are similar. Both spoke of her firmness and fairness in her dealings with students and of her ability to bring out the best in them. Particularly telling are the comments, “There is a quiet courage which should hold her in good stead.” written by her secondary school associate, and “She rarely raises her voice but commands respect.” penned by her elementary school associate. Based on these two remarks, a picture of someone who is confident about her ability to teach is beginning to emerge. Antoinette, however, was not as sure of herself as first two reports indicate.
Her initial self-doubt stemmed from teaching in a division she was not prepared for but it was overcome by the consistent, encouraging and positive constructive criticism she received from her supervising teacher. She described the experience in an interview after the placement:

I would teach a class and he would know that I had spent a long time preparing and everything, and he would come up to me and say “Antoinette [pseudonym substituted], go have a cup of coffee. You did really well. I’m really proud. You should be proud of yourself.” He said, “Go rest for a little while and then come back.” It was just like the whole two weeks was just so confident. He would do everything and anything to accommodate my needs, to make me feel like what I was doing was exactly right and even in our sitting down conferences after a lesson when we would sit down, he’d always begin by saying “Antoinette [pseudonym substituted], let me tell you everything you’re doing is fine. What I’m telling you is just fine for me.”

With such support Antoinette rapidly gained confidence in this new environment.

This constant reaffirmation of her strengths, however, was not as forthcoming from her associate in her second placement which allowed some self-doubt to creep back in. As she described it at the time:

Being in the classroom, the associate was really exceptionally thoughtful and helpful, and really supportive. But, in comparison to my first placement, I was really worried and I was going home at night, and I was saying, you know, geez Mom, after my last placement my associate would sit me down and he’d say, let’s look at this about your, what you did in your lesson today. What do you think went well, what do you think didn’t go well? And that wasn’t happening with my second associate, and at first I was thinking geez, she’s going to tell me I totally bombed. And, so you know, there was just no hope.

However, given her “quiet courage” as noted by her first associate, Antoinette did not allow herself to be overwhelmed by such feelings and drew from within
herself to make up for the stark differences in style exhibited by her associates. She told herself, as recorded in the same interview, “…you’ve got to give yourself a little bit more confidence, it could be that you know, you’re just, everything’s going fine, and that she doesn’t really need to point anything out.” As the formal appraisal of her time with this associate indicates, her periods of doubt remained unseen by others.

During this second placement, Antoinette was awakened to some of the challenges facing the classroom teacher beyond those of maintaining good order and discipline while still delivering effective instruction. Though she had not volunteered the information and only responded when asked to identify any negative experience during what she had been describing as a generally positive, though different from her first, practicum, she admitted that she felt “more queasy…with the TR’s, that they’d have coming into the class.” In clarifying what she meant by this, Antoinette’s belief in the worth of every student is unequivocally evident. Indeed, the transcript of the interview shows her frustration, tinged with quiet anger, as she explains that she was not upset by the students per se, but rather by what they experienced in being put into a grade eight classroom with so-called “normal” pupils merely for the purposes of socialization. She described her attempts to learn from her associate and from the resource

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6 TR was the acronym for Trainable Retarded, a designation that has since been abandoned with the implementation of The Education Act on Special Education. Under this act the educational needs of students with behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical, or multiple exceptionalities are addressed. Students who, in the past, would have been classified as TR are now entitled to modifications to their educational programs based on their official status as students possessing a Mild Intellectual Disability.
teacher in the school what purpose existed behind the placement of these students in a regular classroom where they were not expected to cover the curriculum and where they were not engaged in classroom activities. She expressed deep concern that these students were being teased, surreptitiously, by the regular students and that the whole process was “not working”. As she considered the experience and contemplated her future in the classroom she said:

…geez, as a first-year teacher I could end up with a situation like that and what do you do, like how do you make sure these kids are interacting? …I talked to a lot of people about it and you didn’t get a lot of satisfying answers….The three kids I was with, all three, they were great kids you know on their own and talking. I thought that they were terrorized almost, you know?

Thus, the “queasy” feeling she admitted to having was not generated by having to work with these students but by being in a situation where their presence was the result of an ill-conceived program that met a systemic demand rather than the students’ needs. It was Antoinette’s first brush with the political undercurrents that move below the surface of much of what is done in the classroom.

In Antoinette’s third practice teaching assignment she taught in the junior division. In terms of her ongoing inner debate over whether she should teach at the elementary or secondary school level, this experience was one that she, as noted earlier, hoped would help her make up her mind. Her associate teacher’s appraisal of her performance in this grade four/five split class is uniformly positive and echoes comments made by Antoinette’s previous associates. This is interesting as each appraisal is separate and copies are not available to subsequent associates.
Thus, the identification of the same positive traits by three different, independent observers testifies to their strength in Antoinette’s personality both inside and outside of the classroom. Her ability to respond not only to the intellectual but also the emotional needs of the students is again highlighted in this report. Whatever doubts she may have had about teaching students at this level, they were not evident to her associate. The post-placement interview, however, presents the reader of its transcript with an Antoinette that, until now, has not been seen. The two previous interviews showed an enthusiastic and confident young woman. She had been challenged in different ways but had come away from the experiences with optimism for the future though she was beginning to see that the classroom could be about more than just working with students. The Antoinette who emerges in this interview is almost tentative. The overall mood I perceived when I read the transcript is quite somber. Antoinette, herself, is not quite able to put her finger on the reasons for the way she felt about her junior division experience.

Throughout the interview, Antoinette keeps referring to there being something “missing” in this experience. In her personal life, she was involved in the planning of her wedding, which was to take place at the end of the school year. It was a highly stressful time for her. The interviewer, who was the graduate assistant to the Section 11 Project’s principal investigator, tried in various ways to assist Antoinette in identifying this “missing” element. Antoinette herself began the interview by saying:
…there was something missing at the placement and I’ve really been thinking about it so much. I have no idea if it was public to separate; if I could say that much about the separate board. I don’t know if it was the age level; it was my first junior placement and my only one. There was just something missing. I don’t know what it was.

In this case, Antoinette’s reference to “public to separate” caused some confusion for the interviewer as, in fact, this was her first placement in a non-denominational elementary school. It was quickly established, however, that she meant public school in the manner that it is commonly understood in Ontario.

The placement had not begun well. The principal spent nearly two hours lecturing the student teachers assigned to his school on his personal philosophies regarding education in general and social injustices in education in particular. He advised them, as related by Antoinette, to avoid imposing their “…middle class values on the kids in the school because they are from different countries and different places and you have to learn to relate and you have to come down to their level.”. As a first-generation Canadian whose parents had struggled to learn a new language and establish themselves in their chosen country, Antoinette was offended by the assumptions he was making about her and her colleagues. As she suggested “Maybe that set the whole tone which was kind of off or something.” She also noted that there seemed little evidence of programs in the school designed to address the issues he identified.
In addition to this inauspicious introduction to the school, the associate teacher to whom Antoinette had been assigned was ill and a supply teacher\(^7\) was teaching her class. At the time Antoinette was enrolled the Faculty of Education there were four, two-week student teaching sessions—two in each semester. Her associate, in this third of her four placements, did not return until the fourth day of the ten-day session. Antoinette was feeling the pressure as time slipped by and she remained an onlooker. In the meantime, based on the materials provided by the regular teacher that the supply teacher was using, she formed an opinion of the absent teacher that reflected her own beliefs, reinforced by what she had been learning in her university classes, concerning what should be happening in a junior division classroom. As she explained to the interviewer:

…and I thought, she must be a first year teacher or archaic or something and I really felt when I went home that Monday night like, what am I getting myself into?, that type of thing. And this teacher must be an ogre or something, just from the materials….I just saw the materials and a supply teacher trying to struggle through them which was really like the pits sort of thing. And I just thought this is horrendous, I can’t believe that this is what these kids are getting.

It is interesting to note that, in her imaginings, Antoinette included “first year teacher” and “archaic” as descriptors for this unknown teacher whom she felt was doing an exceptionally poor job in planning the educational experiences for this class. The former implies lack of experience while the latter suggests being out of

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\(^7\) A supply teacher is a certified teacher who is not a member of the school’s faculty. Also known as an occasional teacher or substitute teacher, s/he continues classroom instruction until the regular teacher’s return from absence. It is often the situation that a different supply teacher will be used each day depending on availability.
touch with current pedagogy as reasons for what Antoinette considered sub-standard planning rather than what was, more probably, an instance of the regular classroom teacher, who has no control over who takes over her/his class when ill, trying to provide “teacher proof” materials until her/his return. It is yet another instance of Antoinette coming into contact with one of the sad realities in teaching.

When the regular teacher returned, though Antoinette felt sympathy for her believing as she did that the teacher had come in before having fully recovered because “…she had this dead weight [Antoinette] around her neck so she came to rescue me.”, the negative opinion of the teacher and her classroom practices persisted regardless of what the teacher was doing. As Antoinette described it:

…because I had projected this negative image from Monday on to her at the Wednesday and everything she did that Wednesday morning to me just wasn’t right, the way she articulated her words and the way she handled herself at the front of the class, I had projected so much negative on to it.

Fortunately, for Antoinette, her associate and the pupils, this attitude changed. After going home that night and “…yelling at my fiancé and my mother, ‘You guys never ask me what my days are like, you just go on talking as if everything is normal!’” she returned to the classroom in a better frame of mind. She felt that, what she called, her “snap” helped her become more receptive to what was going on around her. Her associate offered her free rein to try out new ideas and strategies with her full support. As Antoinette told the interviewer:

It was a good placement. That’s what I can’t understand. It was wonderful. I got a wonderful review and she was a wonderful
woman and the kids were all great but there was something missing. So I guess it was something personal more than anything about it.

Though the placement had ended well, the sense of it somehow not being “right” remained.

Having listened to Antoinette effectively say, “It wasn’t the placement it was me.,” the interviewer offered her the opportunity to agree with him that she was experiencing a certain amount of ennui as a result of this being the third time out in the field and, perhaps, she was also experiencing the realities of classroom teaching for the first time. He told her that many of the other co-researchers in the study had expressed similar feelings of “the bloom being off the rose.” She insisted this was not the case as she had been eager to get back into the field after six weeks on campus and that, as far as experiencing challenging situations, she had faced numerous ones in her previous placements so it was not a case of not being prepared for surprises. When he asked her to try to put into words what she meant about “there being something missing” she described an instance in which she felt that she was losing perspective in the classroom and had to tell herself to step back a bit from the situation. She felt “something growing inside of me in a response to a child”. When asked to elaborate, she responded:

Like a sarcasm or an antagonism and I just knew it was welling in me and I had to really struggle to say it has nothing to do with what you’re doing with this class or with this kid. Which is why I said it might have been personal. I mean, it’s a lot of stress situation, planning for the wedding, and trying to live day-by-day and getting things done and whatever else.
It is in this answer that Antoinette’s innate ability to be self-reflective is evident. Rather than unleashing what would likely be a very unfair, and possible damaging, response to a child’s action, she was able to restrain it and to try to work out *in media res* what was actually happening. It also brings into the discussion her awareness that what happens outside the classroom in her own life can have an effect on who she is and what she is doing inside the classroom. It is a very sophisticated understanding for someone so relatively young and new to the profession.

By way of trying to validate, for Antoinette, the phenomenon of her personal life spilling over into her professional life, the interviewer explained that a doctor of his acquaintance, who specialized in working with teachers under stress, had pointed out that it was not the stress of the job that caused teacher “burn-out” but situations where “…you no longer emotionally and personally can handle the demands of the job because you brought something into it.” Her associate also must have noticed Antoinette struggling with the competing demands of her personal and professional life because she advised her “Well, you’ve got to realize that you can only put in X numbers of hours and then you’ve got to take over your own life.” Antoinette, however, is not sure what to do with this advice. Though she acknowledged that it was a relief to hear her associate tell her this as it confirmed for her some of what she was already thinking, her own comments indicate that what she feels she needs to do as a result of this counseling may be at odds with who she is. She talks about developing a way of detaching...
from her personal life while in the classroom—“take those problems and put them in a paper bag at the front of the class when you walk in and pick it up as you leave”—without changing herself. At this point in her journey, she does not know how she can accomplish this.

As both Antoinette and the interviewer cast about to try to find the source of her discontent, what seems clear, in the transcript, is that the uncertainty about teaching in the junior/intermediate divisions she was harbouring was becoming a more pressing issue for her. References by Antoinette to her first practicum in the senior division are sprinkled throughout the interview. In trying to sum up her feeling about teaching she claims that her current sense of there being something “missing” might have:

…had to do…with the age group. I think I’ve really sort of pointed out to myself that if anything I’d like to go up the ladder maybe intermediate or…I just think to myself how lucky I was to get that first shot…And I ended up doing OAC and a grade 11 and a grade 10 and just loved it. And I thought, gee, getting that perspective now, is just incredible to think that I might not have had it.

Indeed, it is during this exchange with the interviewer that a sense of excitement about teaching seems evident. Perhaps this is the “missing” element in this placement. Though she had been less keen teaching a grade eight class in her last school assignment than she had been teaching in the senior division her first time out, she was still excited about what she was doing. At one point, when the interviewer suggested that it “…was not a sin to have some days that are totally mediocre.” she responded that sometimes…”you just don’t have that enthusiasm
and that spark.” When Antoinette outlined her definition of success in her interview with me in 2003 she described feeling successful in her second semester of teaching after a particularly challenging and, to her mind, unsuccessful first semester, because a change in the classes she taught brought her “…different students, a little bit of energy and I think that I began to feel that I was doing okay when I started to connect with the students.” Energy. Enthusiasm. Spark. These are things Antoinette needed to feel successful. None was apparent in this third placement. Her final appraisal indicates that she had done well but Antoinette still felt that something was “missing.”

Antoinette’s final practicum took place in a grade eight classroom in a different public school from her last one. Again her appraisal, written by her associate, is positive but it lacks the ringing endorsements that appeared in all her earlier reports. Her reflection on this last round of practice teaching provides, perhaps, an explanation for the missing kudos:

Going into the last practice-teaching session (the “practice” is beginning to sound ridiculous) I was at an all time emotional low. My greatest challenge ended up being getting myself motivated and geared up to give these students a good learning experience. In the end, I wasn’t surprised to notice that this was the only evaluation NOT to mention my sense of humour. When that goes I know it’s bad.

There is no excitement here. She describes her associate’s teaching style as “very cut and dry” though she added, “he was a very nice guy”. She talks of feeling “used” and being “dumped on” as her associate turned over full time responsibility for the classes over to her on the second day of her placement and provided her no
breaks from that point on. The school’s philosophy of streaming students by ability did not mesh with her beliefs about teaching and the fact that her “…associate was quick to point out that he had the two ‘lowest’ classes” caused her to comment “Boy, did the kids in these two classes know it too! Attitude problems, underachievers, poor study habits (for the majority) and so on.” The experience was not positive for her. She “…came away asking myself: ‘Do I want to teach like that? (Yes, students were receiving instruction & covering curriculum BUT enjoying learning?!??*) Will I last in this profession knowing now what it takes to be a damn good teacher? I don’t know!’ So, why or when or what now?” Like the previous placement, not being able to feel excited about what she was doing led to her doing what she needed to do to get through the experience and move on.

Antoinette’s pre-service year came to an end. She graduated from the university with her Bachelor of Education with a focus on the junior/intermediate divisions. She got married. She also spent the summer immediately following graduation taking an Additional Qualification\(^8\) course to gain the credential necessary to teach in the senior division. By the end of the summer, Antoinette was qualified to teach English from grades four through OAC. She had made the decision to take the extra qualifying course over the summer during her junior division placement. She had been told by officials with the separate school board

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\(^8\) Additional Qualification Courses, known as AQ’s, are education courses undertaken upon completion of a Bachelor of Education degree to upgrade existing qualifications in a specific area or to add qualifications in a new area. They are administered by the Faculties of Education on behalf of the Ministry of Education.
with which she wished to obtain a position that she would be free to apply to secondary schools on the basis of her plans to complete her senior division course. Though she was prepared, if necessary, to teach at the elementary school level with the fond hope that it would be in the intermediate division, she really had her heart set on working with students in the higher grades. The dilemma about which level she really wanted to teach was resolved and at the end of the summer she was anticipating her entrance into the profession with excitement mixed with hope that she would be equal to the challenge. In a journal entry written on the morning of her first day as a first-year teacher, she wrote:

Along with all the other paraphanalia (sic) I take with me as I begin my journey into my career, my faith and my conviction of the validity of education will lead me through and make of me the educator I am to become.

She would need to draw deeply on both of these personal beliefs in order to make it through an extremely difficult first semester which was filled with anxiety and doubts about her suitability for teaching.

Two of the three classes assigned to Antoinette that first semester were sections of English as a Second Language (ESL). Normally students in these classes are grouped by their level of fluency and ability to function in the English language. The first level—taught as part of the first year of secondary school—usually has students who are newly arrived to Canada and have minimal, if not non-existent, conversational and written skills in English. Antoinette, however, had been told that the classes she would be teaching would be for students who,
despite having been in the country for over five years, were still experiencing language difficulties and needed to be taught basic language skills. Though not quite what she expected, she thought “I can handle it.” It did not take long for the reality of what she had been assigned to sink in.

It quickly became apparent to her that, for the students in one of these classes, a lack of language skills was the least of their problems. In her journal she noted, “So, I’ve been in this class for three days now, and finally today I figure it out. This is a BEHAVIOURAL [emphasis in the original] class.” Antoinette was faced with students whose capacity to conduct themselves appropriately in a classroom setting was severely limited. At the beginning of the second week of classes the anxiety this situation created for Antoinette led her to question her decision to become a teacher. Her student-centred approach to teaching and her belief in the rightness of this form of pedagogy was challenged by the dynamics at play within this class of twelve boys and one girl. In spite of the behaviour of her students, she remained committed to her belief in the worth of each student. Just one week into the semester she exhibited this commitment in a journal entry:

Who am I kidding? I enjoy my day until lunch, then I need all my inner strength to face that third and last class. Individually they are probably loveable, but all together they are just about unbearable. It takes constant repetition and patience (when it doesn’t run out that is and I somehow notice my voice has risen to almost yelling) to keep them on task and at their desks. It’s not that I blame them, it’s not a matter of directing blame. I just find myself thinking constantly about this class, the members it’s made up of…is it the system? our world?
I find it nervewrecking (sic) because I don’t know what they’re going to do next and worse will I be able to handle it?
In the same entry, she continues:

Strength, I pray every morning, anxiety, uncertainty…I’m in this situation will I cope? Who do I turn to? My husband must be sick of me already. Things aren’t looking any better. I’m thinking of alternatives: part-time/?supply/?start a family?

It has taken just a week for this woman, whose pre-service year gave every indication that her ability to develop a rapport with students that met both their emotional and intellectual needs was among her many strengths, to worry that her husband of only three months is growing tired of hearing about her difficulties and for her to consider ways to extricate herself from this predicament. After a particularly bad class—in which a fight broke out that resulted in the students being sent to the office for discipline—the vice-principal counseled her, as she cried from frustration, that she wasn’t alone; that there were support systems in place; that she should “dialogue” with the students; and that her mental health came first. She did not find this particularly helpful but decided to take a wait-and-see attitude concerning both the future of this class and of her ability to survive it. Meanwhile, well-meaning colleagues, who could see her struggling to cope, told her that she was “too sensitive” and “shouldn’t take things personally” and that she “care[d] too much”. This type of commiseration did little to make Antoinette feel better about her situation. If anything, the advice was diametrically opposed to the person Antoinette knew herself to be. In response, she wrote in her journal:

So? What am I supposed to do? Become callous and uncaring in order to survive?
I know I’m an idealist, and I realize that I rec’d a double dose of harsh reality. So I figure it’ll take awhile before the two (idealism-realism) align with each other. I’ll survive…., but will I enjoy it after all this?

Help for her situation did arrive. Recognizing that these ESL classes, as a result of computer timetabling, were mostly made up of students with behavioural exceptionalities and who were directly enrolled in classes taught by teachers within the Special Education department and that Antoinette could not continue without some intervention, some of the students who were causing the most severe disturbances had their timetables modified and were removed from the class. Again, Antoinette’s belief in students and her willingness to take responsibility for not being able to reach them comes to the fore as she writes:

I’ve been miserable, haven’t slept at night, raked myself over coals and now…I feel bad actually sorry that these guys have to be shifted. I must be stupid as well as too sensitive.

It is this continued willingness to place the blame at her own feet rather than rage at the unfairness of her situation that contributes to her anxiety. Added to the stress caused by the timetable she was given, was that caused by the additional responsibilities she wasshouldering outside the classroom. She was already involved as one of the staff advisors to the student yearbook committee—a huge job that is frequently avoided by experienced teachers and shunted onto the backs of young teachers who are, perhaps, afraid to say no—and was a member of the school’s Creative Discipline Committee when she was given responsibility for preparing the examination for two different English courses. As well, one of her
Students was on home instruction requiring her to do extra preparation over and above that of her regular classes. Her journal is full of references to how tired, physically, she is. By the middle of September she is already anticipating the Christmas break and hoping that she will be able to survive until then. Like many beginning teachers she is reticent about asking for help and believes that to do so would be “sticking her neck out”. She contemplates contacting the graduate assistant associated with the Section 11 Project and/or another co-researcher in the project both of whom have been supportive and helpful in the past but does not want to be seen “as a complainer”. Describing the anxiety she feels she states “…the tension I feel on a Friday at 1:30 I know is NOT [emphasis in the original] normal. Where do I go?” Eventually she did contact members of the Section 11 Project who had been in her classes at the Faculty of Education. They provided her with “comfort and affirmation” causing her to write, “With people who care so much, how can one go wrong?” She came away from the conversation having taken their advice—to take things one day at a time, to watch out for herself as well as for others and to accept her limitations—as much to heart as she was able. She is surprised to find that this is the same advice her husband has been giving her. Somehow, coming as it did from others who were involved in the same profession as she was, and more importantly, perhaps, at the same stage of their

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9 Students on home instruction, who do not attend school for varying reasons, are taught in their own homes by qualified teachers hired by the school board to do so. The regular classroom teacher is often responsible for providing the lesson plans and materials for these students especially when the home instruction teacher does not hold qualifications in the subject area. Some home instruction of long duration—usually a full semester—is carried out using materials from the Independent Learning Centre, an arm’s length agency of the Ministry of Education.
careers, it seemed to carry more weight. Certainly, she is more willing to try to follow their suggestions rather than those of her colleagues who, essentially, told her to develop a thicker skin.

September eventually gave way to October. Thanksgiving came and went and still Antoinette’s anxiety mounted as the students’ behaviour in her ESL classes—and her own self-discipline—came perilously close to spinning completely out of control. Faced with some students who “didn’t want to learn” and others who were frustrated by the ongoing chaos in the classroom, she had to abandon the co-operative learning strategies that she had been trying to use and which were congruent with her basic beliefs concerning pedagogy. In an effort to gain some degree of order in the classroom, her lessons became teacher-directed. Just after Thanksgiving of her first year of teaching, she wrote what is, in my opinion, the saddest comment on teaching that I have ever read: “I feel abused.” Not even Angela’s comment, made to me one day during the first year of her truncated career, that she had never loved a job nor hated a job as much as she did teaching encapsulates the despair contained in these three words penned by Antoinette. In the same journal entry that contained this crie du coeur she wrote:

I realized something very sad today, I’ve virtually lost my sense of humour. Every morning I somehow find some inkling of strength (from my faith, someone’s actions or words, my own searching) and everyday it just gets crushed.

This personal inventory continues in her next entry:

I’m tired, but surviving. In talking to my husband last night I revealed something which really hurt me. I’m surviving because I’m
“hardening” you know becoming “tough” and I don’t like it. That is, I don’t like who I’m becoming…it’s very disquieting.

Though she may feel that she, at a personality level, is changing there is little evidence in subsequent entries in her journal that this is the case. She remains concerned with the welfare of her students and her self-perceived inadequacies in meeting their needs. When, in yet another conversation with the Resource Department Head—the person in charge of the department within the school that is responsible for providing self-contained special education classes and in class support for students requiring modifications to the curriculum—Antoinette is assured that “everyone teaching the same bunch of kids is in the same boat” she responds in her journal “Does this make me feel better? Is it comforting? NO!! because I don’t have to live their lives but my own!” She is trying to work out a way of remaining true to her self—living her life—while at the same time surviving the stresses of trying to remain true to her beliefs about students and teaching.

Beside being constantly surrounded by the love and support of her husband and her family—both immediate and extended—as November begins and the possibility of her being able to “make it” to Christmas becomes more likely to occur than not, Antoinette finds support in some surprising places. She knows she has her family’s support and that of her colleagues from the Section 11 Project, with whom she has been in more frequent contact as the semester has progressed,
but a chance encounter with another staff member gives her reason to continue on.

As she described it in her journal:

Bright and early, standing by the photocopier and an older staff member comes up to me and starts talking. By the end of it all I’m convinced he has just “witnessed” to me. Essentially, he simply shared one little life experience, something that really made a difference to him personally. He told me about it, to tell me “I’m with you, we’ve all been through it, hang in there.” Needless to say he made my day.

More than the subsequent reassurances the same day by other staff members that “if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere”, this brief exchange did much to lift her spirits. The class continues to be difficult and Antoinette struggles almost daily with the gap between what she wants to be able to do for her students and what she is actually able to accomplish. At the end of November, she is confronted by one of her students who asks her:

I can’t understand why you would ever have wanted to become a teacher, Miss. I mean, what’s in it for you? Taking care of us nut-cases.

Antoinette is astounded and it takes a while for her to answer him. Her reply indicates that, despite all that has happened to her to date, she still has the same core belief about what she is doing that was evident on the eve of her career.

I said, I believed in what I was doing and that “youth” was the world’s greatest resource and that I don’t “teach” but help people learn. I think I lost a few with my explanation, but it felt pretty good just saying it.

Antoinette need not worry that she has turned into some person other than herself if she is able to stand up and recite her credo to the very people who have, most
likely not purposefully, done so much to cause her to question her ability to connect with her students. It is around this time that her journal entries also change in tone to some degree. She talks about “letting loose” with her students which results in them seeing an Antoinette they not seen before. She describes this as

…the real learning experience because now I know (first-hand) that somedays (sic) the kids just can’t “tune in”. They must have so many other things on their minds (who cares that they’re insignificant to others) that school’s the least of their worries. Well, every day adds a bit of knowledge to the old bank!

The next day she tries this tactic again and finds that she really “enjoyed my day today!” though she also noted that three of the most difficult students were also absent. She continues to worry about what she is doing in the classroom and whether she is being effective but by the end of the month is able to write:

I think I’ve come to grips with one startlingly clear reality,…I try hard, I work hard, I’m giving it my best…therefore it’s highly unlikely that I’ll do anything so atrociously negative that it’ll do serious damage to a student. So, not only will I survive, but they’ll survive having had me this year!

Neither has she completely lost her sense of humour. In response to her vice-principal’s inquiry concerning the state of affairs in her classroom, she joked “Well, only one student went out the window today and there were no fist fights, so I guess things are O.K.” He noted that it was good to see her laughing about her situation and that it indicated that she is surviving. Thinking about this, she is surprised to realize that this is true.

Antoinette’s journal for this first semester ends at the beginning of December as she looks forward to participating in a Section 11 symposium that
weekend. Though she hadn’t intended to attend at first, a call from the graduate assistant by whom she had been interviewed during her pre-service year convinces her to make room in her life for this meeting. In anticipation of seeing everyone involved in the project again, her last journal entry ends with, “it’ll be great!”

It is the beginning of the second semester, when the journal is returned to her, that her story resumes. In her first entry for the semester, she writes:

[the graduate assistant] has had this journal for so long that I’ve almost lost touch. So much has happened in between that I can’t begin to relate.
...Suffice it to say that those two months held incredible change and tremendous learning opportunities. And as always I often rose to the challenge and succeeded (somewhat) and often fell flat on my face.

Though those last two months with her ESL classes are swept aside by this statement it is, however, an accurate description of the entire semester. With the advantage of not being immersed in the situation and having had time to consider what had occurred during this time, Antoinette, perhaps unwittingly, summarizes what that first semester was for her. Her perception of her success is still muted but she is able to recognize that she did, indeed, meet the challenges presented to her.

At the beginning of semester two, an Antoinette who has not been visible—except in rare glimpses during the first semester—re-emerges. Back is the woman whose teaching reports painted a portrait of a confident and competent teacher sure in her trust of herself and her abilities. She begins the second half of her first-year journal with:
Semester II is off to a GREAT start compared to Semester I. So, one thing is certain (and good news) stress levels are down….Like always however, one this hasn’t changed–TIME. I never have enough of it, to do as much as I’d like. Furthermore, I still deeply want to leave lots of time for home and family and I have been doing so. I hope this makes me a better teacher and not a more distant non-concerned one. I suppose if & when the latter occurs it’ll be time to Δ [change] professions or stay home full time. My rule of thumb— I’ve got to live with myself in both situations.

This second semester journal also contains less frequent entries, on average one a week. As she tries to follow her own “rule of thumb” she remains concerned that she is not doing enough:

Something’s wrong and I can’t pinpoint it. (I must be sure to talk to [her husband] about it.) I should be enjoying what I’m doing. So why do I still have so many worries and apprehensions? Constantly thinking of improving, changing & modifying curriculum. Yet always thinking how much time can I devote to this? I want my life to be my own. Go home and worry as little about “school work” as possible. Yet—I can’t do this completely because of the questioning voice…Am I doing enough? Maybe I’m guilty because I do have most (not ALL) of my evenings and weekends free because I come in early, work through my prep (and sometimes my lunch) and stay after school for at least another hour almost every day. Should I feel like I’m not doing enough? I am…but could I do more? I don’t know.

She is struggling to find a balance between the personal and the professional and is coming up against the reality that, in teaching as in many other people-oriented professions, it is nearly impossible to keep the two spheres completely separate from one another. Just before March break\textsuperscript{10}, after complaining in an earlier journal entry that she does “resent not having my home life fully my own” she

\textsuperscript{10} March break is a weeklong period when no classes are held and the schools are closed throughout the province of Ontario. Both publicly funded school systems in the province are shut down during this time.
expresses joy at the thought of a period where she will be “…NOT doing much school stuff and just absorbing myself in husband, home and rest of family.” Attached to this entry is a photocopy of an Easter card that had been signed by the students in her grade eleven ESL class. As her birthday also fell during March break that year, some of the students took the opportunity to wish her Happy Birthday. Most touching are wishes written by two of these students:

“You’ve bee (sic) a wonderfull (sic) teacher. Thank you and Happy Birthday” and “To my beautiful teacher with love!” If Antoinette was still worried about her ability to reach students this card should have done much to dispel some of that worry. Subsequent entries seem to indicate, despite the warm affection that at least one of her classes had for her as evidenced by the card, that this was not the case. Even well meant comments by students caused her to question what she was doing:

Last Thursday a student told me you could really tell I’d been to university by the way I explained things. She said it was a compliment & that she liked it. I was left concerned. Am I overdoing it? Going over their heads? Have I mis estimated (sic) the situation? I don’t know! What else is new! Anyway, I think this year is pretty much a write-off. Next year will tell the telling tale!

She remains hard on herself but snippets gleaned this second semester journal, whose entries appear to have been made only when something was bothering Antoinette or when she had had a negative experience at school, show a young teacher who is, possibly, overextended both in her personal and professional life. At school, in addition to her classroom duties, she is involved with the play, the
annual walk-a-thon, the organization of parent’s night, and is still staff advisor to the student yearbook committee. Outside of school, in addition to her ongoing obligations to her husband and her parents, she is taking an AQ in Religious Education at OISE/UT, has a sister who has undergone major, and successful, heart surgery and has two family weddings coming up at the end of the year. Even she is moved to comment, “Wow, its (sic) amazing I get anything done.” It is little wonder, then, that many of her journal entries continue to mention how tired she is!

Early in May she penned an entry in which she lists three incidents that left “a rather foul aftertaste” in her mouth. It concludes with this observation:

The conclusion? No right-no wrong, just a lot of politics, of accepting that some things we have no control over and a lot of “apple polishing” at all levels. (Which I refuse to do & which I get nailed for, naturally!)

Whatever has happened throughout this year, Antoinette is coming to the end of it with her integrity intact. Though she has worried constantly over becoming someone she does not want to know and not being the teacher she feels she ought to be she seems to have avoided the former and, despite her misgivings, become the latter. Her final entry, written at the beginning of May with the end of the school year in sight, again has her anticipating a Section 11 symposium:

Everything is in gear for Symposium III. I am excited. I just wish I could slow down a little bit. It’s just rush here, go there, do this, finish that…on & on &on.
One side of me enjoys all the comotion (sic), another side longs for a little peace and rest. Things will never balance…I may as well resign
myself to that fact. Maybe with time, I’ll approach all the havoc with a different outlook and that will make all the difference.

Throughout Antoinette’s first-year journal there are references not only to the support provided by her family and husband—both of whom encouraged her and, when she seemed uncertain about continuing on, made it clear that they would stand beside her whatever her decision might be—but also to Antoinette’s reliance on her deeply held religious beliefs to see her through the most difficult times. It was important to her that she was working in a Catholic secondary school. In my 2003 interview with her, this strong commitment was still in place. She said that she had been looking, perhaps, to transfer to another separate school board. For her, working in a non-Catholic setting remained “non-negotiable” because “I believe adamantly that it would have to be within that system, just part of who I am and how that makes me feel complete in what I’m doing”. Time and again during her first year Antoinette drew sustenance from her faith. It gave her the strength to go on, trusting as she did that God would not test her beyond her limits, and it allowed her to find moments of joy in the midst of her despair. On the same day that she wrote of feeling abused she also wrote:

I pray for enlightenment. I strongly believe a lot of this is tied up with doing God’s will so I must either a) accept this challenge and strive to do & be the best I possibly can do & be (accepting my limitations) or b) face the fact that to receive the piece (sic) of mind & soul I desire some change must be made. Of course, what possible change is still not clear. Whether a) or b) I feel I must figure out with God’s help, much soul searching and the support of my loved ones eventually the answers. Please God, just don’t let me burn out in the process!
Antoinette managed to do both a) and b). In the penultimate journal entry there is evidence that she has made some changes and continues to be the concerned, compassionate teacher she wishes to be:

Home life is great…despite the workload, so I no longer complain. I do what I can and “try” to forget the rest. I hope I’ve made some difference in life so far…home, school, students, people.

She is finding the balance that she has sought all year and has met the challenges she has faced. Far from walking away from teaching as she was contemplating on her third day of her career as the shock of her timetable hit her, she looks forward, in the last entry for this, her first, year of teaching to the coming year. Though she is frustrated by not knowing specifically which courses she will be assigned for her second year she is already anticipating September—“As funny as it may sound, I’d like to get started.”

Antoinette’s second year of teaching began with optimism despite arriving in September to find that her assigned courses had been changed over the summer without her knowledge. Rather than focusing on this negative start she rejoiced in the fact that she would be in a classroom of her own for all her courses in both semesters. No more nomadic wandering from classroom to classroom. On the first day of the fall semester—she would not meet her students until the next day—she is full of sympathy for the new teachers who are just starting out and is committed to doing a better job of taking care of herself this year:

I felt so deeply for all the new teachers. I feel so old (for lack of a better word) next to them. I did do the one thing I said I would do after what happened to me…I offered them all (i.e. those within
Eng.) my help if they needed it. Three have already taken up (no four) my offer. I’ve also learned how to say NO. Two teachers have already approached (THE FIRST DAY) me asking me to join their activities. I just had to say no for fear of again being overburdened. Actually between yearbook, chaplaincy and two dept. I probably already am.

The need to keep her journal is not as pressing this year as last. Her next entry does not occur until Thanksgiving and in it she describes herself as “better adjusted and really quite content”. Though she would like to write more often, finding time to do so is not always easy. The endless anxiety that marked her first year is becoming a memory. This does not mean, however, that she is satisfied with all that is going on. She is concerned with the “bigger picture” but recognizes that she is not in a position to change the world by herself. Her idealism, so evident in her first year, has not disappeared. It has, however, been tempered and there is a shift in her thinking about how best she can work within the system. The first hints that she is looking for a way to be an agent of change are contained in the following excerpt:

I confessed to him [her husband]…I love being with the kids I teach, however this isn’t strong enough (yet?!?) to counter-balance my “dislike” (for lack of a better word) for the politics & shabby curriculum & course guidelines etc….within the system.
To this I added that, being in a positive situation at least allowed me to look at things in perspective Eg. Maybe its (sic) the school or even board I’m in and not “teaching”. Or maybe it’s the imperfections of the system which I must adapt to. There is alot (sic) in the “imperfections” which calls forth leaders to initiate drastic change. Maybe that’s where I should be focusing my future endeavours.
Meanwhile, the semester progresses for Antoinette. Her journal reflects her maturing as a teacher. During the last week of classes before the Christmas break she takes the time to compare herself to the person she was a year earlier.

Things seem to have come full circle. I mean its (sic) like I really feel the difference from last year at this time, but it’s still all familiar. There’s alot (sic) going on—both in school life & home life—which is always keeping me busy. I love it though, because its (sic) powered with positive emotions. I suppose my attitude has changed a lot, I’m still faced with alot (sic) of the same problems as last year (overwork due to yearbook; divided between home & school, overloaded with marking, special needs kids, etc....) but they seem more manageable.

At the end of the semester she is able to write “I suppose that deep down the thing that makes it all just right is the feeling of knowing that, for now, I’m where I want to be”. A simple gift, richly deserved.

In the second half of her second year of teaching, Antoinette managed only sporadically to keep her journal. This time the stress she experienced came mostly from her life outside the school. During the March break, which she had been looking forward to as a time to do some things just for herself, her husband lost his job, her mother became seriously ill, and her brother announced the impending breakup of his marriage. In addition to these stressors, she was also taking a course at the university, had been handed sole responsibility for the supervising the student yearbook committee when the other teacher who was involved bowed out, had agreed to organize a major field trip to the Stratford Festival and had taken on the task of writing a school policy on plagiarism when she found, after referring one of her senior students to the vice-principal for the offence, that no such policy
existed and, thus, no consequences for the student would result. It is little wonder that she again complains of feeling tired in numerous entries. Throughout it all, however, there is a cautiously optimistic tone in her writing even though she remains concerned about her effectiveness as a teacher. In March she expresses what many teachers wonder more than once during their careers when she writes “I wish I knew if I was doing a good job teaching. Am I mediocre? Fabulous? OK? I feel like I’m always going into it blind.” but in April is able to say “I feel good about my classes, the kids and what we’re doing. I hope each (or at least most) of my students feel (sic) the same way.” There is a confidence evident that both she and her students are going to turn out just fine.

Antoinette began her journey into teaching as a young woman whom her instructors saw as confident and vivacious and who possessed sensitivity for the welfare of the students she would teach. That person never really went away though, in her first semester of teaching, she came dangerously close to disappearing. She survived her trial by fire with the support of her family, her faith, a particular member of the Section 11 Project, and one or two colleagues at work who took the time to reassure her that she was going to make it through these tough times. Beginning with her second semester and continuing on into her second year of teaching, Antoinette became more than just a survivor. She continued to set high standards for herself but was more accepting of herself when circumstances prevented her from meeting them. By the end of her second year, Antoinette who had contemplated, however briefly, leaving the profession after
only three days in the classroom, was poised to become the successful teacher she had always envisioned herself to be.
Chapter 5

Anne’s Story

Nonetheless, growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence.

John Dewey, *Experience and Education*

Anne was thirty-seven when she entered the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto. After completing an honours Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Western Ontario she continued on into graduate school. During her graduate studies Anne worked as a teaching assistant in courses on testing and measurement and held a summer position with a large insurance company as a personnel consultant. Upon receiving her Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology, she worked as a psychology intern in a psychiatric hospital where she was responsible for outpatient and Crisis Service counseling. This short-term assignment was followed by a fourteen-month long appointment as a family consultant with the local police service. In this capacity, she served as both a social worker and crisis counselor providing marriage, family, and juvenile counseling to members of the public either by being sent out by the police dispatcher or by following up police calls involving domestic violence, child issues and other areas where her expertise was required. She also worked occasionally with police officers who needed her services. Other experiences prior to beginning her education studies included a nine-month contract with the provincial Department of Energy, Mines and Resources as a coordinator of a project involving energy conservation and a semester-long contract with a large
urban/rural school board as a psychometrist. In this position she spent one day a week administering, and interpreting, psychometric tests given to students who were referred to her for assessments to determine their needs for educational programs as defined in The Education Act on Special Education. Although she was not employed outside the home in the two years prior to her arrival at the Faculty of Education Anne was actively involved in her suburban community volunteering with Big Sisters and a local family counseling centre where she used her skills to provide appropriate counseling and training in these venues. She also acquired additional training in marital and family therapy during this time. Anne was a married mother of two young children—ages seven and nine—when she began her initial teacher education program.

Anne’s experiences, though varied, were not specifically acquired with the aim of entering the teaching profession. Teaching, for a large portion of her life, remained at the bottom of her list of potential careers. As she wrote in her reflection journal at the beginning of her pre-service year:

Thinking back to my childhood, I can never recall wanting to become a teacher. I can remember swearing I would never become one. …However, as all children that age, I was picking out teacher characteristics that I felt helped or hindered the learning process.

Lortie’s (1975) vocation theme cannot be applied to Anne. Though she made the decision to enter teaching later in life, her motivations to do so are more consistent with the factors Lortie identified as being common to those who made the decision to become a teacher in childhood. In addition, there is a negative experience
factor—one speculated by Lortie as an influence on the decision to teach—which may have been at work in her decision. Anne recalled, in this same journal entry, some of her feelings about school and identified some of reasons for her decision to teach:

On looking back, my major recollection of public school primary grades was frustration and boredom. I recall one teacher, especially, who felt that handwriting was more important than what the handwriting said. At that point, I remember hating to go to school. In grade 5 I had a great teacher, but my grade 8 teacher probably had most impact on the decision I have made to become a teacher. …Another factor that may have influenced my decision to be a teacher was the fact that my mother had been a teacher before my parents were married. Being quite honest, I looked at our family [herself, husband and children] & felt that my teaching would fit into our lifestyle as well.

From this excerpt, it would appear that an identification with a specific teacher in her own schooling, the continuity of a family occupation—both factors associated, by Lortie, with those who made an early decision to teach—as well as a negative schooling experience and the time compatibility of teaching have all contributed to Anne’s decision. Despite having disliked school at one point in her life, Anne described herself as generally liking school, enjoying intellectual exercises and the process of learning which she feels teachers do as they teach.

All of Anne’s practice teaching placements were in elementary schools in the junior/intermediate divisions that matched her teacher preparation courses at the Faculty of Education. Her first one saw her teaching in both the junior and intermediate curriculum divisions in a school located in an affluent
neighbourhood. At this school, which operated on a rotary system\(^1\), she taught grade eight Mathematics, Language Arts (English) and History as well as grade six Science. Her first Appraisal of Practice Teaching notes growth and improvement in many areas. What is consistent throughout is her “sincere interest in the students’ needs”. This trait is one that Anne herself identified in her preservice journal when she wrote “I find being with kids interesting & I know I relate to them very well.” She was sure of herself in this regard. She found, however, that the classroom was not quite what she envisioned.

Like many teacher candidates do in their first experience in front of a class, Anne found that her expectations of how much can be accomplished in one lesson were not congruent with the reality of the students’ abilities to meet those expectations. Her associate teacher helped her greatly in this area by pointing out the flaws in her planning and advising her rethink her approach. Anne readily accepted his comments and admitted in her post-practicum interview with the graduate assistant for Section 11 that “…if I actually tried to teach that I would have had a class full of kids climbing the walls.” This ability to adjust and accept constructive criticism was one of the strengths exhibited by Anne. Also evident in this interview is the maturity Anne brought to the enterprise of teaching. The interviewer noted that in comparison to comments made by other teacher-candidates, whom he described as having difficulty in “…getting down to talk

\(^{1}\) In a rotary system, the students circulate from teacher to teacher receiving instruction in different subject areas rather than one teacher providing instruction in all subject areas in a contained classroom.
about what really happened…” because, in general, “…everybody feels wonderful and wants to talk emotionally about it…”, her reflections on her first time in the field were “…much more specific.” Though frustrated by the inevitable classroom interruptions which caused her to say “…I felt the whole two weeks was nothing but interruptions and special events and this and that.” and by her associate’s deliberately paced introduction to teaching, captured in the comment “…I was phased in very slowly…by the end of Monday I wanted to get up and get my hands on something…””, she came away from the experience in a positive frame of mind convinced that she had “…certainly made the right choice about what I want to do.” What she found surprising, however, was how awkward she felt getting up in front of a group of grade eight students when she had always been comfortable standing up in front of groups and talking, without notes, even when she was less prepared than she was for teaching a lesson. She attributed some of this to the fact that she felt the measured approach in allowing her to teach utilized by her associate had caused her to be “…more nervous because I had a lot of time to think about what I was going to do…”. Despite this, she acknowledged that the amount of time she had to observe not only her associate but also other members of the school’s teaching staff had helped her to “…learn a lot of new things.” Besides confirming her decision to enter teaching, this first placement also confirmed for Anne her ability to relate to students. As she told the interviewer, “…getting up in front of a group of kids that’s going to ease out, I’m not worried about that and I had a very good relationship with the kids.”
Anne’s comfort level at the front of the classroom improved markedly during her second placement in a grade seven classroom in another elementary school, again operating on a rotary timetable, where she taught English and Science. This is apparent from the difference in the comments made in her appraisal by her second associate as compared to those made by her first associate. Most of the suggestions for improvement contained in her first report appear to have been taken to heart by Anne. Whereas in her first report it was suggested “An increased use of positive reinforcement would promote student self-esteem.” in her second report her associate wrote “Positive reinforcement techniques and realistic expectations seem to be a natural part of her personality.” Her voice, which she was encouraged to vary in order to promote student participation and maintain their interest, was now deemed to be “…a good speaking voice which is effective in classroom situations.” Though the language used in her first report is quite guarded, correctly reflecting the distance she had come in two weeks and the distance she still had to travel in her journey to becoming a teacher, the language used in this second report expresses confidence in her ability to complete that journey. One might assume that the difference in the two reports had more to do with the associates than with any changes in Anne’s performance, but in the follow-up interview at the completion of this field placement she noted, “…the associate wasn’t any better, any worse, he was different.” The associate was not the only one who was different this time out. As Anne described it:
...I felt so much better about the way I taught. I felt like, the first time I was so uncomfortable and very hampered by nervousness. This time I got it together. I didn’t have to have notes in my hand or be within two feet of where my notes were. As a matter of fact I didn’t always use notes.

She also had the advantage of being able to adjust a lesson throughout the day. There were five grade seven Science classes rotating into the classroom. What she felt had not gone well during the first presentation of the lesson was adjusted so that by the time the third class come through she felt she was “…doing pretty good…” and by the fifth she had “…got it.” Boredom on the teacher’s part—which can be a problem when presenting the same lesson to multiple classes often making it hard to remember that though it is the third or fourth or fifth time the teacher has seen the material it is the students’ first time—was not a problem for Anne. She felt she was not really presenting the same lesson each time as she learned from each class and made minor changes that increased the effectiveness of her instruction in the next one. Though she had good student-teacher rapport and no difficulties with classroom management during her first placement, she felt much better about these aspects of her teaching in this second session because:

…what I’d been doing last time was worrying so much about what I was saying that I was getting something across and yeah, I was getting a bit of feedback from the kids but it was minimal. …this time I was much more aware of the kids as individuals and as a class and a lot less worried about the content or, and the content came, but I could pick up, like if they started to get restless, I could actually stop there and go into something where they were physically going to be doing something or wrap up what I was doing very quickly and go on, which is I think a skill a teacher has to have.
Anne also had the opportunity, during this placement, to take full control of the classes as a result of the two-day absence of her associate due to illness. The supply teacher called in to replace him—a teacher-candidate cannot be used as a substitute for a regular classroom teacher—let Anne do the work with minimal input from her and Anne felt that “…it was really good because the kids were focused on me.” On her associate’s return the following Monday, Anne felt resentment not only because the associate was more directive in what she should do but also because the students “…treated me differently and I felt differently.” Reflecting on it at the time, she was surprised that she was jealous of the relationship he had with his students just when she was starting to think of them as “her” students. This incident points out one of the pitfalls in the teacher-candidate/associate teacher relationship. While the aspiring teacher is permitted to instruct the class and can develop, to some degree, a good relationship with the students, they remain the associate’s students. They know the teacher-candidate will leave and that their “own” teacher is there for the long haul. No matter how well the student-teacher performs, many of the pupils identify with the label student and hold the view that s/he is not yet a “real” teacher. In Anne’s situation, in the absence of their regular teacher, she was the teacher they knew, in comparison to the supply teacher, so their loyalty transferred to her. As soon as Anne’s associate returned, they recognized the established hierarchy that relegated her to a lesser role in the classroom. In addition, as pointed out to Anne by the interviewer, it is often hard for a teacher not to make sure that the students are
always aware of who is really in charge and to feel a bit of the same jealousy when they seem to be responding to the teacher-candidate as well as, if not better, than to the associate. The social dynamics at work in a classroom are not limited to interactions between students alone. Although she experienced this minor setback in her relationship with the students, Anne also had the joy of living one of those moments that many teachers speak of as their reason for teaching, the moment when it is apparent that a student suddenly understands the concept being taught. Anne had developed the tactic of using several students as “bell weather” indicators of the effectiveness of her instruction. In response to being asked to describe a moment when she might have said “Yeah, this is what’s it’s all about, this really is it” she talked about one of the brighter students she had been monitoring for reactions to her teaching:

…I was looking at him and he was going like this, you know, half getting it but not quite? And all of a sudden just when I was looking at him …it was just like somebody had taken a pin…and his head went up and he was really excited. And that was, I think, the best experience.

A student’s “ah-hah” reaction to instruction is a much talked about occurrence but it is usually not experienced on a frequent basis. Anne was fortunate to have had one happen so early in her career.

During her third practice teaching placement Anne kept a daily journal. Its first entry contains her thoughts as she anticipates her first junior division placement which was to begin the next day where she would spend her time observing both the teacher and the students and getting to know a bit about this
elementary school’s culture. Unlike her first placement, this school was located in a more socially disadvantaged area of the city. In her writing she expresses, for the first time, the anxiety she feels now and that which she felt in her previous two placements.

This will be my first junior placement. I expect it to be fun. I have a nine-year old daughter, so I feel I am tuned into children of this age group. All of the positives aside, I am somewhat apprehensive. I have no doubts as to my ability to build rapport, but I do have doubts as to my ability to teach. I am experiencing again the feelings of the child dropped into a lake and left to swim that I felt before my first two assignments.

I have told myself that the last two assignments went well (moreso (sic) my second). That helps—but it doesn’t alleviate the anxiety I have. I’m also wondering about juggling the teaching and the needs of my family: always more stressful during practice teaching time.

The question of what associate I will get is foremost in my mind. So far, I have had two men. They appeared to me to be fairly structured in their approaches to teaching: people who demanded and got good work from their students. They were both good teachers, and I learned a lot from them, even though I felt anxious when they were observing me teach. The best two days of teaching I have had were, in fact, with a substitute. I was in control of the class, and was perceived by the substitute, the kids, and myself as a teacher, and not a student teacher. Hopefully, I will feel more comfortable this time.

This excerpt contains some important points. Foremost among them is Anne’s self-perception as a teacher. She is keenly aware of her status as a student. As the substitute teacher who stood in for her associate in her previous placement, during the two days of his illness, had no authority to evaluate her performance, Anne felt like a teacher and not like a student. Donning the mantle of teaching is one of the harder tasks a beginning teacher must accomplish. The anxiety she is feeling has little, if anything, to do with the socio-economic status of the students in this
school as opposed to that of the students in her earlier placements. Anne has had
two successful practice teaching experiences with reports that show her a capable
teacher who, most importantly, is able to learn and improve her practice as time
progresses. She has not yet, however, learned to see herself as a teacher. This is
also the first time that Anne has mentioned any difficulty balancing school life and
home life. A large amount of Anne’s time was committed to attending school full-
time—an amount made larger by the commute she was making from a town
outside of Toronto to attend classes. This was time that had to be taken away from
that spent on herself and her family which included her husband and their children.
While it is true she would have faced this same dilemma had she been employed
outside the home, Anne’s year-long program of education studies carried no
guarantee of a teaching position at its conclusion and, rather than contributing to
the family’s welfare in the present, it required all members to make sacrifices and
to accept her temporary absences from their lives.

The written report for this practicum, in which she taught all subjects
except French to a class of twenty-one grade five students, identifies many of the
strengths noted in earlier appraisals. Anne is lauded for her organizational skills,
her use of varied teaching methods and her ability to apply classroom management
strategies which had consequences for inappropriate behaviour that were effective
yet respectful of the individual student. Her associate is particularly impressed by
Anne’s overall rapport with students. She noted:
Anne’s [pseudonym substituted] calm approach to teaching was a good one to use with my very enthusiastic but highly excitable group. She showed concern for all the children and genuinely cared how they fared. …I feel her excellent rapport with children is an important asset. She should make a very good addition to a school staff.

There are no suggestions for future improvement as was the case in her first assignment. That is not to say that Anne’s performance was found exceptionally wanting in her first field experience but rather shows the growth that has occurred between early October and early February when this third practicum occurred.

When screening applicants, who had recently qualified as teachers, for positions within my own school it is exactly the difference I would look for. Areas that were identified as needing work early in the pre-service year but which were highlighted as strengths later in the year told a story about the person presenting the reports. To me it said that here was a person who knew how to take suggestions and incorporate them into her/his practice—in short, a person who was going to continue to learn and grow as a teacher and who cared about the craft of teaching.

Entries in Anne’s daily journal of practice also show her continued acquisition of the skills necessary for teaching and her increasing awareness of students’ needs. Her associate, realizing many of her students had no opportunities to read at home, had set aside time each day for the students to read novels of their own choosing. Each student would then be required to make an oral presentation on the book s/he had read. Though Anne agreed with this policy she quickly
noticed that some students had difficulty settling in to read, leading to some classroom management problems, while others started eagerly. As the week progressed, most of the students began to find the seventy minutes—for both reading and journal writing—set aside by the associate too long and reading became a chore rather than an enjoyable activity. Anne decided that grade five students were not too old to be read to and began to do so. As she noted in her journal, “The class love being read to. In fact, D, my problem child, signed that book out at our visit to the school library today.” Anne’s planning also underwent a sea change during this placement. She moved from “formal” lesson plans to using a detailed daily planner. This change in approach freed her from her dependence on notes and was more suited to her emerging teaching style. Despite her doubts about her ability to teach expressed at the beginning of this journal, by the middle of the first week Anne described herself as “…feeling happy and confident in my teaching.” and by the end of the journal summarized her two-week session with this group of students as “…a very good teaching experience.” This assessment was echoed in her post-practicum interview by comments such as “It was the best session I think I’ve had.” and “It was the most comfortable. I probably did my best teaching that I’ve done.”

Anne’s last practice teaching session saw her back in the intermediate division teaching Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. In Anne’s words:

The last teaching assignment was the worst I have had. I enjoyed and got along well with the associate, and I enjoyed the students, but I felt I struggled in my lessons in many cases. I would set expectations
that were unrealistic for this group of kids, and then I was frustrated when they weren’t met. I found myself reteaching lessons because noone (sic) seemed to catch on. I spent much of my time on class control, even in a few cases resorting to yelling (something that just doesn’t work for me).

…Overall, I was fairly dissatisfied with my performance during this session. I have reassessed some things, and come to the conclusion that I would be best to teach a junior class, until I get a few years in. Then I may feel like switching to the intermediate level. I like the kids of the intermediate age, but I found their lack of motivation frustrating, and I wasn’t able to present lessons that increased their desire to learn.

This self-assessment is reflected in her associate’s appraisal of her time in his classroom. Her rapport with students, a strength noted by all of her previous associates, is not specifically mentioned even in the section of the report set aside for this teaching quality where he wrote “Mrs. [name deleted]...appeared enthusiastic and eager to assist wherever possible.” Not was enthusiastic but appeared enthusiastic. The comment that comes closest to describing her rapport with students appears in the section headed Classroom Management where her associate noted: “After familiarity was established with the students, a mutual respect was developed between teacher and students.” This final report of her pre-service year is rather lukewarm in its endorsement of Anne as a teacher. In describing her overall competence in the subject areas she taught he wrote, “She researches topics fairly well and draws on other strengths to compensate for weak areas.” These strengths are never identified. In his summary of her performance it is almost a case of damning with faint praise with the comment “Mrs. [name deleted] is a sincere, concerned, caring individual with many qualities
characteristic of a good teacher. She is very aware of her specific weaknesses and makes every effort to compensate and improve.” It is hardly the type of report that inspires confidence in Anne’s ability to teach. In reflecting on her pre-service year, Anne described some of the difficulties she had with being both a student and a teacher:

I found it interesting that I was able to become a student again so easily. Many of the skills I needed were there—only slightly rusty. I did find myself getting too comfortable in the student role, sometimes, and maybe becoming less mature. This is hard to explain, but somehow when I used the skills that made me a good student, I resurrected (sic) some of the feelings and attitudes that I had at that age. …I felt somewhat frightened going into my practice teaching, and yet I relate well to children of all ages. Before I began, I felt intimidated more by the being a student part of the year than the being a teacher part. Later, I felt more comfortable in being the student than the teacher. …I do have high personal expectations, and any frustrations that I felt this year were mainly the result of this.

Anne completed her pre-service year and began her first year as a professional teacher teaching half-time—afternoons only—in a grade five classroom.

Anne’s journal from her first year of teaching paints a picture of a mature woman who, as a beginning teacher, is struggling to find a balance in her classroom between what she wants to do and what circumstances require her to do. She characterizes her decision to teach part-time during this first year as “…my way of providing myself with a quasi-apprenticeship…. I have had time for reflection, professional development, & adequate program development this year.” She compares her situation to those of other members of the Section 11 group with whom she sympathizes as she believes many of the problems they are describing
are the result of “…unfair & unrealistic demands …made on perfectly adequate people—i.e. that 1 unfeeling person made unrealistic demands of another.” She counts herself fortunate to have started her career:

…in a non-judgmental environment with a supportive & caring principal. He allowed me to feel safe enough to try a variety of different things. Support was there (not just in words, but actions, too) when I needed it, & he also knew when I didn’t need help.

Anne appears to have the ideal situation in that she is working in an environment that she is partly responsible for creating, by teaching part-time, and which, in the areas not under her control such as colleagues and administration, is supportive and sensitive to her needs as a beginning teacher. Despite this, however, Anne’s first year of teaching is not without its times of trial.

As many novices do, Anne began teaching her large class—twenty-seven students—using a methodology that fitted with her philosophy of teaching which was strongly child-centred. Though there was nothing wrong with her method and her application of it, the students were unaccustomed to the level of independence they were being given and, as a result, classroom management started to be an issue. In addition, Anne was one of five teachers with responsibility for this particular group of students. After two weeks of teaching, Anne noted in her journal that for the other teachers of this group maintaining a quiet classroom is paramount. She, however, feels that “…quiet is good some times, but there must be a time to converse.” Two weeks later, at the end of her first month in the profession, she admits, “I have compromised. In order to keep consistency from
one teacher to another I am much more strict.” She is not ready to abandon her approach to teaching Language Arts completely though she acknowledges that it was perhaps unwise to have begun the school year with a structure with which the students had so little familiarity. She talks of adding more structure into her lessons by increasing the time spent using a teacher-directed approach and lessening the student-centred activities. As she takes stock of this first month in the classroom, she identifies her relationship with her students and her flexibility as her major strengths and her difficulties with consistency and the routines of classroom administration as her major flaws. By mid-October, though she is not experiencing any extreme difficulties in the classroom, she is not completely satisfied with her own performance. She finds herself “…wishing that I knew more than I do.” She has made changes to her approach and expresses hope that the next unit will produce better final results than the last one she taught where the students’ end products “…were either quite good or quite bad.” and in which “…the better students do well with less structure, but the poor ones bomb out.”

Anne’s informal self-appraisal is echoed in her first formal appraisal by her principal in mid-November. In it he notes many of the positive routines she has in place to maintain classroom management in the Language Arts and Physical Education classes that he observed. He also comments upon Anne’s attempts to “…make her Language Arts lessons interesting.” Planning, however, is in flux. Her daybook is classified as “adequate” but rather than considering this a negative indicator of her classroom abilities, her principal acknowledges her novice status
and recognizes that she is still trying to find a method of planning that works for her and her students. His suggestions for future work are supportive, positive and, most importantly, achievable. He compliments Anne on her keen interest in growing as a professional and congratulates her on making a good start to her career.

Anne’s response to this first evaluation is contained in her journal. She counts herself, and her colleagues, lucky because the …”principal, although a new one, is excellent. I have found him easy to talk to & he can offer good sound advice without being judgemental (sic).” Noting that she had not gone out of her way to plan “…super duper lessons to bowl him over.” she appreciated his ability to identify not only the things that she already felt were not going as well as they could but also some things she was doing that could be improved upon but of which she was unaware. She feels that the report indicated that she “did OK.” but hopes “…by next evaluation I’ll have the class running more the way I want it.”

Even though she was a first-year teacher herself, Anne began compiling what she called a “Help List” for new teachers. Her motivation for doing so came from her own experiences and her not knowing “…simple things my colleagues took for granted like ‘What the hell is a register’ and ‘how can I hand it in on the last day of the month’ and ‘How do you do a book order’” Soon after this journal entry Anne finds herself in the midst of her first round of preparing formal report cards. She is somewhat overwhelmed as she imagines herself as “…a juggler with 10 things of different shapes & weights to juggle.” In her journal, a hastily drawn
cartoon of herself illustrates this with reports being just one of the balls in the air along with parent interviews, book orders, getting other teachers’ marks, marking, and continued curriculum planning. She bemoans her lack of experience and newness to the procedures by writing:

It wouldn’t be so bad if I knew exactly what to do. For example, I am late sending home interview times slips. That was because I didn’t know they existed! We got a note from the office & I guess it got put in the circular file.

She is looking forward to the upcoming Section 11 symposium because she is “…feeling the need to talk about practical matters—like how do you tell parents gently that their child is not the genius they thought.” In addition she wonders, “Will 3 months of teaching have changed us?”

At the symposium, Anne filled out a questionnaire about her current classroom practices. Although she knows the differences among the various teaching methodologies to which she is asked to assign the percentage of time she utilizes them in her classroom practice, she admits that she is unsure that she actually uses them distinct from one another. She explains that creative writing is both individualized work and small group work as the students each have a unique piece of writing they are working on but are constantly bouncing ideas of others. Despite her uncertainties about her actual classroom practices and her recent journal entries that reflect her frustration at not knowing information that others no longer have to think about in order to perform their duties, Anne affirms her satisfaction at being a member of the teaching profession because:
All the problems I have (& there are lots) can be surmounted. I have a lot of work to do on curriculum. …Although there are these problems & others, I still feel that the class & I will look back on this year as a good year—we have a good relationship.

The next, and only, entry Anne made in her first-year journal occurred in mid-May. It was in this entry, penned days after attending the latest Section 11 symposium which she characterized as “the best yet” that she wrote about her self-created apprenticeship period and her fortune at beginning her career in a caring and supporting environment as compared to many of her peers in the Section 11 Project.

During this latest meeting she had been asked to identify three highlights in her first year of teaching under the categories Child, Colleague, and Self. Her description of the shy girl in her class—who had only just learned that her already poor eyesight would be rapidly followed by blindness—and the progress this child made in her creative writing from a “stilted, limited, & impoverished” style to having her work submitted by Anne as the class entry in the school’s Literary Guild captures not only of the pride the child felt at this achievement but also the joy Anne experienced at being able to help the girl make the journey. She again praises her principal for being “A good model of how to ease someone into a job, nonstressfully.” Finally, she expresses surprise in herself at discovering talents she thought long lost when she played piano accompaniment for the junior choir. In addition to the highlights, Anne was asked to comment on what aspects of the teaching profession and her part in it had been confirmed by her first year of
teaching and what surprises the experience had brought her. The doubt about her ability to teach that she expressed immediately before her third practice teaching session, and first junior division placement, appears to have been erased as she wrote “I like working with kids & I can teach.” in response to the former request and “I’m more versatile & flexible than I imagined I was.” to the latter.

During the months between her last two journal entries, Anne underwent her second formal evaluation by her principal. Unlike the first one, she made no references to it in her journal. Given the nature of the report, there really seems to have been no need. Almost all of the suggestions made by the principal in his first report have been incorporated in Anne’s classroom practices and his assessment reflects her growth as a professional during the intervening time. As Anne herself wrote in her final journal entry, “I feel that, while I have a long way to go in my professional development, I have made good progress this year.”

Anne continued her self-directed induction into the teaching profession by continuing to teach part-time during her second year. Rather than teaching only a half-time schedule she increased her workload to a .7 teaching position in the same elementary school as the previous year. Again she was teaching in the Junior division and was responsible for teaching Language Arts, Physical Education, Science and Mathematics to a grade five class. Mathematics was a late addition to her teaching load and, as she had not taught it in the previous year, it required more preparation than her other subject responsibilities. Having taught these subjects in her first year, she had materials to use as templates for the current year.
Unlike the previous year where the other two teachers working with her seemed minimally interested in assisting her as she found her feet in the profession, Anne was paired with a teacher whom she described, at the Section 11 symposium held in September of that year, as someone who was “…willing to share ideas, help with administration [and] who really cares for kids.”

During her second year, Anne did not keep a journal. She wrote of her early teaching career experiences in a paper she prepared for the Section 11 Project as part of a series of pieces by the co-researchers that were ultimately intended for future publication. At the time, Anne was a fourth-year teacher. In her second year, she was part of a pilot project initiated by her board aimed at studying the effects of full-time integration of special needs children in the regular classroom. Anne described her anticipated confidence in her ability to contribute to this project and her subsequent meeting with reality by writing:

    I began my teaching career with a slightly smug feeling about special education. Hadn’t I, after all, had experience with children in need in my previous career? I had done some family counseling, as well as raising two children of my own. I certainly had a fair amount of experience with psychometric tests and testing theory. …The reality of coping with a special needs child, who is acting out along with 29 or 30 other children who have all the needs that children do have was somewhat overwhelming. This was especially evident as I struggled to deal with the sheer amount of work that is required of the teacher.

The work involved not only included the reams of paperwork but numerous meetings with overburdened resource personnel whose schedules often meant that Anne would be drawn out of her class to discuss the progress of her integrated
students. Her other students soon became used to a routine of pulling out their books for silent reading while Anne conferred with the resource person in the hallway. Despite the additional workload, the joy Anne described at witnessing the growth exhibited by the two boys who were integrated into her class further strengthened her belief in the value of such placements.

Perhaps Anne did not keep a journal during this second year of easing herself into the profession because she met the challenges she faced. In January, she reported at the Section 11 symposium that she was quite content and involved in many school activities. In addition, the teacher with whom she was partnered had become a friend and the support she provided Anne contributed to her positive outlook on teaching. From the transcript of a videotape, in which Anne was one of several Section 11 co-researchers discussing their current situation as their second year of teaching draws to a close within a month, she spoke warmly of her students. As she related it, “The kids are an incredible bunch of people. The learning strategies teacher who’s been teaching for 28 years says she’s never met such a caring nice bunch of kid in one group.” Anne seems to have had a good year and to have grown as a professional teacher. This growth was recognized when she applied, and was accepted, for a full-time position at a school which was to open the following September.

Anne’s classroom assignment in this first year of full-time was in stark contrast to those of previous years. Unlike her first two years, where teaching part-time had allowed her more time accomplish the work needed to plan and prepare
lessons, time for doing so this year was at a premium. She outlined, in her first journal entry written on the Friday before the Thanksgiving holiday weekend in October, a daily schedule that found her “…in school by 7:45 a.m., home at 5:30 p.m. (working 1/2 my lunch) & with a minimum of 3 hrs. to do in the evenings.”

She was also teaching at a different grade level than previously. Her grade three/four split class had its own challenges including students newly arrived to Canada who, along with their parents, spoke limited English, a student with Tourette’s syndrome who was academically weak and needed a large amount of remedial assistance and a wheelchair bound student with severe muscular dystrophy who required ESL support. Her classroom was located on the second floor.

Being a new school, accessibility to her classroom was not an issue and Anne had worked out a floor plan in her room that allowed the student to move around to the activity centres she used. Students in the class were happy, in the beginning, to help him by either wheeling him to the centres or bringing him the materials he needed to do his work. There was no teacher’s aid to assist, however, with the logistics of taking this student to the washroom or getting him to and from the classroom using the elevator. Anne relied again on some of the students in the class to do this and felt, by doing so, that it went a long way toward helping the student to fit in with the class. One alarming feature of the student’s placement in her class, however, was the lack of an emergency plan for evacuating the student in case of fire. This caused a situation that Anne felt made her unpopular
with her colleagues—whom she acknowledged were as busy as she—when she demanded some procedure be laid out for safely removing the student from the building in case of fire. Eventually Anne herself had to write out the emergency plan.

The problem with emergency procedures, however, was not the only issue that caused Anne considerable stress during this first month of her first year of fulltime professional teaching. Her reliance on students to take the student up and down in the elevator resulted in one of them being injured when he got his foot stuck in the elevator. When she arrived on the scene, after being summoned by one of the three students who had been helping with this task, the injured student’s foot was “a mess”. This caused Anne to write, in this same first journal entry:

I felt so guilty. I had not known 3 were going on at a time—I should have monitored it more closely. Lots of hindsight! Today I took him down for french (I may ask the part-time aid from the class down the hall to do this when she can—she’s offered to help). The problem is it means leaving the grade 3’s unattended—they’re very good, but they are only kids & I imagine problems will arise if I have to continue to be away for 4-5 min. twice a day. …The problem is everyone is so busy & so stressed that I would feel mean to impose on them—they have their problems & this is mine.

Anne continued in this entry to take sole responsibility for the accident and questioned her own common sense in letting eight- and nine-year old students do something that an adult should have been doing.

The entire incident, about which she was already experiencing deep guilt that was not lessened by the disabled boy’s mother coming to the school to
apologize for the trouble he had caused, caused Anne to write, again in the same entry:

Right now I feel that my choice to go back to school 3 years ago was not a wise one—this is the part where I feel sorry for myself. I usually handle stress fairly well, but today, I almost broke down in tears when the little boy in the wheelchair’s mother came into (sic) apologize for the trouble—she felt so bad. …The guilt I felt today would be enough to chase most caring people out of the classroom forever.

The Tuesday after the long weekend, however, found Anne in a temporarily upbeat frame of mind. The break allowed her to “…relax & get things in perspective”. In addition, her vice-principal presented her with a plan for the disabled student that would see classroom aids in the school taking him to French, Physical Education, recesses and lunch. Though relieved, Anne still felt “…that if I had thought ahead, made a list of monitors, & given the kids I chose as monitors instructions, I could have prevented the accident.” It does not seem to have occurred to her that every logistical problem associated with this student, for which she has had to find an *ad hoc* solution, should have been anticipated by the school administration and planned for accordingly.

As well as handling the daily challenges presented to her by the makeup of her class, Anne had an experience with a parent who used her position as president of the school’s PTA\(^2\) in an unethical manner. She arrived unannounced at Anne’s

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\(^2\) PTA is the acronym for Parent-Teacher Association. Every elementary school in Ontario had such a group of parents who volunteered to assist with fundraising activities and met to discuss issues pertinent to the school in which their children were enrolled. As a group, however, they had no legal standing regarding school policies and procedures. In 1997, the Ontario Legislature enacted legislation establishing School Councils in every publicly funded school. These groups advise principals and, where appropriate, school
classroom door at the beginning of the school day and asked if she might observe Anne’s class. Anne let her in and she stayed in the class for half of the morning session and explained to Anne that she was observing other classes as well. At the first opportunity available to her, Anne went to her principal to ask if there had been any complaints about her teaching that might have occasioned this visit by the president of the PTA as Anne felt “…she was evaluating me & my program.” Anne’s principal had not been made aware by this parent that she would be visiting classrooms. The woman was often present in the school as she was a parent volunteer helper in her daughter’s class. In reality, the parent’s visit to Anne’s classroom was the result of her looking to have her daughter moved out of her present class, with whose teacher the parent was displeased, and into one she believed would be better. Anne’s principal refused the request, when it came. The other teacher was upset both with Anne and with the parent. At the beginning of the journal article in which Anne described this incident, which occurred shortly after Thanksgiving, she wrote: “Today was another bad day. I like the kids, I like teaching—it’s the other crap that gets me down.” The next day Anne received a written apology from the parent for making Anne “…feel uncomfortable” and that she had “…wanted to use you [Anne] as a benchmark.” Anne’s journal response shows her frustration with this other side of teaching:

boards on issues affecting the education programs and the operation of individual schools and have considerable influence on school policies and procedures.
Well, she hit it there—I was USED. …If I only had known what she wanted, I would have refused to let her in before she ok’d it with [my principal]. I guess I’m just naïve & DUMB. I honestly felt I had nothing to hide. That was why I agreed. …Anyway, I will be much less trusting in future.
I like teaching, I like the kids & staff, but I don’t know whether I like the politics enough to really make it as a teacher. The workload is heavy, but I can handle that, class management really isn’t a problem at all for me, I even enjoy making up units & anecdotal evaluation…It’s just the other stuff you have to put up with & handle that gets me down.
You know—I hardly ever smile anymore.

In her subsequent journal articles for this week in October, Anne appears to have had little to smile about.

At a meeting held to discuss Anne’s wheelchair bound student Anne finally asked for help in the classroom after learning that the boys who had been taking him to the washroom had been doing more than just opening doors for him. They had been draining and washing the bottle the student used for urination. Anne was aghast. She took the boys aside and explained that they were to stop doing this immediately. Anne had been unable to approach her principal with this request prior to the meeting as he was out of the school that morning. In asking without consulting, Anne felt that she had “…ended up putting him on the spot…” She noted, however, that upon learning of her request, “he really supported me & he will try for a part-time aid—even though some of the others at the meeting weren’t really too sure I needed one.” Anne was advised at the meeting to require the student to do more for himself and she has been trying to do so already but it is not just her who has to wait while the student completes a task such as wheeling
himself to the elevator but also her entire class. Meanwhile, her student with Tourette’s syndrome has been acting out with other teachers who take the class for French and Physical Education. Change was not something this student handled easily and his mother explained that in the previous year he had become very upset when his teacher went on maternity leave. Anne concluded that his current behaviour “…looks like he is reacting to my absence to punish me for leaving or something.” During this same period, another student was added to Anne’s class. The student had behavioural problems that only added to an already difficult class.

Anne’s principal decided to put in a request to the board for a full-time assistant in Anne’s classroom. He asked for as much documentation to support the request as possible from the people involved in the disabled student’s daily life at school. Anne did so but felt that her reasons for making the request “…do seem very weak in black & white.” This despite the injury to one of her students earlier in the year and her discovery of the inappropriate degree of involvement her student helpers had had in assisting the student in the washroom. She continued in her journal:

I am having some qualms about having an aide in the classroom. …Some of my reservations are personal. In a way, illogical as it seems, I feel I’ve failed because I can’t cope well. I guess my ego says I should be good at everything. Usually I cope quite well, but not on this. …One of the suggestions to help me was to get a parent volunteer to help—boy did I say “no” to that quickly. I’d rather do it myself than risk what happened earlier in the week!

Anne resumed her journal two weeks later at the beginning of November. Two part-time aids assigned to other classes have been covering as best they can
Anne’s need to have an adult assist her in getting her wheelchair bound student up and down in the elevator to French class, to recess, and to lunch. In the classroom, the novelty of having a disabled student in the class has worn off for many of the students who now resent giving him the assistance he needs. A false fire alarm caused Anne and a colleague to have to carry the student down the stairs. It took so much time that Anne wrote, “If there had been a fire we would have been 3 crispy people.” Before this event, Anne had expressed some optimism and described her problems in the previous month as being partly a case of her “…taking myself too seriously. I guess I’m getting my sence (sic) of humour back.” Her upbeat mood did not last long as yet another high needs student was added to this grade three/four split. The new student was on medication for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and was functioning at a low, academic level. Anne’s principal introduced the new student to her by saying that the student would be seeing the Special Education resource teacher frequently.

A call to the parent of one of her students who had recently failed a major test resulted in Anne having to explain carefully to the very upset parent why her son was not receiving assistance from the Special Education services in the school. Anne’s frustration was again evident in her journal entry as was her compassion that had been such an integral part of her pre-service reports:

…I tried to explain he is a low priority…but she was upset. I agree & yet my hands are tied. He is on my list for AR [Academic Resource] help. I talked to [the AR teacher] today & said bump [name deleted] (ESL) for [name deleted]—[name deleted] will catch up—he’s bright enough.
The mom was hurting—you could tell. She cares for her child & is frightened he’ll miss his year (so am I). It’s just I have so many high need kids I just can’t humanly give them all the help they need. I found today very stressful. I’m one of those people who need breaks every so often, & by the end of the day I was exhausted.

Anne’s journal entries for this third year of teaching did not continue beyond the end of November. In her last entry she wrote of learning that, because her student with muscular dystrophy had been identified as only having a physical exceptionality, it was possible an aide would not be assigned to her class to assist her with him. His academic ability was not considered to be at a level low enough to justify a formal identification of an academic exceptionality as well. Anne expressed disappointment at this possibility and wondered how she would cope if the decision concerning an aide were not in her favour. She ended her final entry by writing, “I look back on the last 2 years & realize how lucky I was to have those 2 years as a way to “break in” to what probably is the real world of teaching.” Though her journal ended at this point, Anne shed further light onto her state of mind in her unpublished paper for Section 11 in which she wrote:

About this time I began to doubt my worth as a teacher. I felt that I was too busy with behaviour problems, or worrying about how to get [name deleted] down to French to have much energy to devote to teaching the rest of the children. I felt that I was not coping well. I found myself complaining a lot. I was having trouble sleeping, and the worst situation for me was that I was feeling sorry for myself. …I felt a failure because I could not cope with the stresses. I honestly felt that my decision to go back to teacher training was a mistake, and I gave myself a time limit: I would resign at Christmas.

After two successful, and seemingly rewarding years in teaching, Anne came near to leaving the profession. Fortunately, her principal was successful in
his bid to get an assistant in Anne’s classroom. This made a major difference in Anne’s outlook. She did not act on her Christmas deadline. As Anne described it in later in her paper, “Once I got the help of an assistant I found myself getting back on track.” She was still faced with the challenges presented by other special needs children in her class but these became surmountable as the stresses caused by trying to cope without adequate support lessened. Looking back on this experience as a fourth-year teacher Anne continued in her paper:

Integrating special children into the class of a beginning teacher may not be advisable. I was unprepared. I didn’t always know where to look for help. I was lucky to be in a school with a caring principal and vice principal who saw the problems I was having and moved as quickly as the system allows to help. I have very little doubt that if I had not received that help, I would not have remained in the profession.

Fortunately for Anne, for the special needs students she championed in her first years of teaching and continues to do so as of this writing, and for the teaching profession in general, she chose to stay.
Chapter 6

My Story

Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be.

Parker J. Palmer, The Courage to Teach

Teaching, in my family, was, at least on the maternal side, the “family business”. My grandfather was the headmaster of the local village school in Grimoldby, Lincolnshire and his sister, Grace, taught French and Spanish at Holywell Country School in Wales. My mother was expected to follow in their footsteps and caused great consternation to all when she announced that she wished, instead, to enter nursing. Regrettably, she accomplished neither. The Depression saw her dropping out of school at the age of fourteen so that her younger twin sisters might have the opportunity to attend grammar school. School fees being what they were, there was not enough money for them all to do so. Her older brother, Ron, had been sent away to stay with relatives for his education as his father did not want him as a pupil in his own school. Ron and my great-aunt, Grace, formed a lifelong bond that eventually allowed him to turn the educational tables on her when she was in her eighties and asked him to teach her German. It was Grace, as well, who rescued my mother from the fate of facing a future with limited education by tutoring her privately. Under Grace’s—according to my mother—not so gentle guidance, three years of missed schooling were caught up in six months allowing my mother to earn her school-leaving certificate which, in Canada, was deemed to be the equivalent of first-year university. Again world
events, in this case World War II, precluded my mother from being able to pursue further study.

My father was not as fortunate in gaining a formal education. His father, a master cobbler, forced his son to leave school at the age of fourteen because further education had not done anything to improve the lot of his older siblings as they sought work during the Depression. My father went to work as a junior office clerk at the local colliery, a job he held until he joined the RAF in 1941 where he spent the next five years receiving an education of a different kind. After the war my parents married and emigrated to Canada where my mother followed the traditional 1950s path of the stay-at-home mother. Grace’s impact on her life was never forgotten and throughout my childhood I was regaled with stories of this woman whose pre-eminence as a teacher seemed legendary. Through night school courses, my father was able to become an office manager/bookkeeper for a small firm of painting contractors. Though it did not matter to him what career path I or my siblings chose, it did matter greatly that we all receive a good education. When I expressed an interest in teaching, his support was unwavering as he saw it as a way of being “set for life”. In his view, recessions and other economic downturns causing job losses may come and go but the world was always going to need teachers.

The community in which I grew up was small. It was made even smaller by being a member of the Anglophone minority in a city that was divided culturally
and linguistically, if not completely geographically, along French/English, Roman Catholic/Protestant lines. It was also post-war Canada which is a way of saying that the overall atmosphere was conservative and that there were certain expectations regarding the behaviours of members of the various professions. In an era when the local hotels had segregated entrances—labeled “Men’s Beverage Room” and “Ladies and Escorts”—to separate areas that served alcohol, it would not do for the local school teachers, especially the female ones, to be seen entering such places. Consequently, my home became a kind of “safe house” where some of the young men and women who were my teachers could relax and be themselves without fear of losing their jobs for engaging in behaviour—such as drinking alcohol—that could be interpreted as not exhibiting the moral standards they were expected to “inculcate by precept and example” in their pupils. Thus, I grew up surrounded by teachers and by stories of teachers. After answering the inevitable question asked of a child, “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, by saying “An artist.” and having my response met with laughter, when I was asked again at a later date I responded, “A teacher”. No one laughed. After all, it was what most of the people asking the question were and it certainly fitted the family mythology and philosophy. It also fulfilled Lortie’s (1975) three influences on those who choose at an early age, as I did, to become a teacher. I certainly identified with the teachers around me—they were, after all, frequent guests in my home—and they affirmed my suitability for the profession. Additionally, I was continuing the family occupation. I had no understanding of
the extent of this final influence in my family until, on meeting several of my English cousins as a young adult and telling them that I was a teacher in Canada, they replied, “Grandpa Cooke got another one!” It seems I was not the only member of my generation to enter the profession. Beyond these motivations to enter teaching, I also recall explaining to a non-teaching, family acquaintance that I wanted to teach in order to return to my own high school and become the best Mathematics teacher they ever saw. Contributing to the improvement of the profession underlay my decision even though I had not had a negative experience at the hands of my teachers and, in many ways, wished to emulate or, possibly, exceed their teaching skills.

I began university with my childhood intent of becoming a teacher still firmly in place. I chose a program in Mathematics at the University of Waterloo because, as my father put it to me, “English and History teachers are a dime a dozen but Maths teachers will always be in demand.” Fortunately, I was good at, and interested in, Mathematics. Unfortunately, I also wanted to pursue studies in English, something which was considered bizarre by my first-year faculty advisor. It also meant that I would not be participating in the co-operative teaching option that would allow me to graduate in five years with a degree in Mathematics from Waterloo, a degree in education from the University of Western Ontario and over twelve months of classroom experience. The only possible second teaching subject allowed in that program, at the time, was computer science which was of no
interest to me as I wanted to teach English if I were not teaching Mathematics. As a result, I undertook a program that did not lead directly to teaching but would allow me an alternate career if, after all my careful planning and acquiring suitable experiences through teaching Sunday school, teaching swimming, and tutoring, it turned out that I was not suited to classroom teaching. I did not think this was a likely scenario but it seemed prudent to have something else I could pursue. On graduating from Waterloo I applied for, and was accepted into, a Bachelor of Education program at Queens’ University in Kingston.

Before my arrival at the Faculty of Education, I returned to my hometown and began looking for a summer job. As it was only the beginning of May and the schools were still in session, I offered my services at my old high school as a substitute teacher. At the time it was still possible to do so without having finished a teacher education program. The contacts I had with teachers who had been family friends or my own teachers paid off. One of my public school teachers who had “moved up” to teaching high school Mathematics called and asked if I would take her class for a few days. I agreed and signed on with the board as an “unqualified supply”. My professional teaching career thus began at the age of twenty-one. There wasn’t much by way of teaching that I was required to do in carrying out my duties. Essentially it was glorified baby-sitting as the regular teacher had left enough “busy” work for her students to last twice as long as I was hired to cover her classes. She had been a strict disciplinarian when she had taught
me in elementary school and her reputation in this area remained undisputed by her high school students. Consequently, I had no management issues. Teaching, based on this experience, seemed a rather simple thing to do. I answered a few questions when the students thought to ask and generally ensured that the classes continued with no disruption to the school’s routines. Over the course of May and June I managed to be in her classroom, and those of one or two others who knew me, for a little over ten days. I came away from these encounters convinced that the encouragement I had received as a child from these same people, to enter the profession of teaching, had been made more concrete by their confidence in me to take over their roles.

My experiences, and my reactions to them, at the newly created Faculty of Education at Queen’s were not dissimilar to those of many of the subjects of the studies cited in my literature review. To me, the important classes were those on curriculum methods and the practice teaching sessions were the places where the business of learning how to become a teacher really occurred. Everything else was something to be got through and, at the time, seemed unrelated to what I and my peers would be doing when we got out into the “real” world of teaching. In keeping with the times and the tendency in the mid-1970’s in education to eschew

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1 The original Faculty of Education at Queen’s University was founded in 1907 but closed in 1920 when teacher training was centralized in Toronto. In 1965, the Province of Ontario approved Duncan MacArthur College, a college affiliated with Queen’s University, as a provider of teacher training programs. In 1971, the college was renamed the Faculty of Education in order to clarify its relationship with Queen’s University.

Source: www.qnc.queensu.ca/Encyclopedia/Queen_s_Encyclopedia_E/queen_s_encyclopedia_e.html#EducationFaculty
anything that might smack of elitism, the faculty had also introduced a grading system for teacher-candidates that had only three categories—honours, pass, and fail. This evaluation system was intended to create a community where we were all considered to be professional partners and learners with our instructors. Without the necessity for them to differentiate between an A+ candidate and a D– candidate, the instructors were supposed to be free to assist us all to develop our skills and knowledge about teaching to our fullest potential. What it did, however, was erroneously send the message that this baccalaureate degree in education did not have the same academic value as our previously completed degrees. The currency of the academy—marks—had been devalued subsequently causing many of us to view the program in the same light. It did not take long for many of my colleagues, and me, to determine that working hard to achieve an “honours” designation in a course was not worth the effort we would have put into such a pursuit in our previous degrees. With no external motivation—the possibility of attaining a 4.0 Grade Point Average or receiving an A+ for every course—we deemed irrelevant many of the courses designed to teach us the knowledge we needed to be able to practise the craft of teaching. To my embarrassment now, I managed to miss every class, except the first, in one course yet still achieve an almost perfect score on the final, multiple-choice exam. It was a course in Measurement and Evaluation that included the use of statistics in the classroom. The course, and the accompanying text which was written in simple language with cartoons on every page, was designed to minimize mathphobia for those teacher-
candidates with no background in the subject. As the holder of a degree in Mathematics, I found the course trivial and I treated it as such. When I approached the professor at the end of the course to ask how I could make up the assignments I had missed and be ready for the exam he told me to read the text, do the end of chapter quizzes, which didn’t count toward the final grade, and show up to write the final exam which was the entire basis for assigning a grade. Fulfilling the first part of his instructions took approximately an hour of my time and the exam, which was set for two hours, took approximately a half hour to complete. I received an Honours designation for this semester-long course having invested approximately three hours of work.

The course in creating audio-visual materials for the classroom and the use of technology in classroom instruction, such as it was, I found equally unchallenging. Somehow, learning how to drop a film cartridge into a Kodak Instamatic camera did not seem particularly useful to my future as a Mathematics teacher. As the course was entirely lab-based and self-directed, we were required to log into the lab, work through the learning stations on our own and then fill out a ten-question quiz that was marked on the spot by means of a scanner. One was allowed two attempts to score eight out of ten which was considered a pass. Eventually, groups got together and designated one member to go into the lab at the beginning of the week to complete the activity whereupon the remaining group members would wander through the stations later in the week, without really
doing any of the work, then write the quiz whose answers were already known to us. We were all careful to make at least one or two mistakes and not to draw too much attention to ourselves by turning in perfect scores week after week.

Everyone was deeply interested in the course entitled Discipline and Classroom Management. However, it turned out to be more of a philosophy course rather than one that would teach us practical strategies to put into use when we went into the classroom. That was what my colleagues and I expected and we were deeply disappointed by the course focus. As a result of a serious family illness in his native country, our instructor had to take an emergency leave. His replacement was a retired teacher who thought practical strategies for dealing with the daily challenges of classroom management were really what we needed and wanted. During his brief time with us, we finally felt that we were getting much needed information and we were grateful for the opportunity to learn from someone who had practical, rather than theoretical, knowledge of the subject. When the original instructor returned, which was near the end of our final semester in this one-year education program, he explained that we would have to submit multiple term papers on the philosophies of discipline that he had been trying to teach us before he left in order to meet the requirements for the course. At this, the class rebelled and refused to cooperate suggesting that the imposition of this workload was more about justifying the retention of his position rather than helping us become capable teachers. In the face of such a challenge, he retreated,
both physically and professionally, and we finished the course without having any final assessment of our understanding of the material we were supposed to have learned. With a pass/fail system in place for all courses, it was easy for him to simply give us all a passing grade. We did feel, however, for at least a month in this course, someone had actually taught us something we could use in our own classrooms.

Though probably not the intention of the Faculty, many of us in the program were allowed to carry out in practice much of what has appeared in the research about teacher-candidates’ resistance to material that does not meet their self-perceived needs for things that are practical and aligned with the beliefs and attitudes they already have about teaching. There were no academic penalties for the way in which we approached our course work. The prevailing attitude appeared to be that one got out of a course what one put into it. As a result, a large number of us gained much in our subject specific methods courses but little from any of the others we were required to take.

At the time of my pre-service year, the field experience component consisted of eight weeks in the schools. Teacher-candidates in the secondary school education option completed four weeks in their major subject area and four in their minor. However, each four-week session was arranged into two, two-week long blocks in each subject area. These two-week blocks did not necessarily take place in the same school. I looked forward to this time with great anticipation as
being one where I would be able to leave behind what I believed to be the mostly irrelevant university classroom time and to move forward into the world of teaching where the “real” work of learning to become a teacher would carried out.

In my first placement at a secondary school in a reasonably affluent area of Ottawa, my teacher associate was in the midst of a very nasty divorce proceeding. Consequently, she was preoccupied with the personal problems this occasioned and was herself struggling in the classroom. This is by no means a criticism of her abilities as a teacher. I arrived at a time in her career when it would probably have been the wiser course to take a break from acting as a teacher associate as it added to the stresses she was under. As she had agreed to continue with this important work, however, I was placed with her. With only ten days in the classroom there was little time for easing into a teaching load under the best of circumstances. The expectation was that day one was for observation followed by teaching a significant portion of the teacher’s timetable. Certainly, it was not the expectation that the teacher-candidate take over complete responsibility for all classes. In this case, though, I immediately began teaching all of her Mathematics classes with little to no supervision. She was rarely in the room but did manage to see a few classes over the nine days.

The classes were at the grade nine and ten level and were in the academic stream. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, I had no challenging classroom management issues. The classes were used to coping with the slightly erratic
nature of their instruction and my arrival did not add significantly to this. At the end I received a good report about my abilities to teach. To this day, I remain unsure as to what her basis for this opinion was as she had barely been present when I was teaching. Her students were polite and co-operative and when I left at the end of two weeks she was able to continue on with no messes to clean up as a result of my presence. With no challenges and the freedom of being the only teacher in the room, what I learned from the experience was that my opinion of my suitability for teaching and the “naturalness” of my being part of this family profession was well supported. My Mathematics training at the Faculty of Education had been predominantly in direct instructional methods and everything that occurred in my first placement indicated that I was a good teacher because I could successfully carry out a lesson using these methods. Already I had learned what I needed to know and the rest was just going to be reaffirmation of my strengths. I came away from the experience with no doubts about my choice of profession or my ability to be a successful member.

This two-week placement in my major teaching subject ended on a Friday and I began my first placement in my minor subject—English—on Monday at another secondary school in Ottawa. Again, the school was located in an upwardly mobile middle-class neighbourhood. This time my teacher associate was able to focus completely on my classroom performance and I was less confident in my abilities to teach as I still had no other well-developed teaching strategy other than
direct instruction. My teacher associate’s classes were again at the grade nine and ten level and from the academic stream. She was often present during my teaching so I could never tell whether the class was well behaved as a result of my teaching or of her presence. Regardless of the answer to this question, they were, indeed, polite and co-operative and allowed me to perform at the front of the room without challenging my precarious authority. The two weeks passed without any incidents that required me to make any real adjustments in my thinking about teaching and learning. I delivered the lesson, the students took notes and did their homework and if the minor criticisms about my teaching written by my supervisor had any effect it was soon forgotten. I had accomplished what I needed to do which was to successfully deliver a series of lessons in a subject area I had no sincere desire to teach, and no expectation that I would have to teach, when I got my first job.

The first half of the field experience portion of my teacher education program was now over and while I had expected that it would be where I would actually learn to teach, it had not fulfilled that expectation. It did, however, confirm my belief that my upbringing, family mythology and lifelong focus on becoming a teacher were more than adequate in preparing me for the classroom. I returned to campus to finish classes before the Christmas break.

In the second semester, my field experiences were carried out in two different schools within the school board where I had attended school. My first two-week block was a Mathematics placement in a district high school located in a
small town not too far from my home. Most of the students were bused in and had attended rural elementary schools scattered around this dairy-farming region. The student population was in stark contrast to that of the two schools in Ottawa to which I had been assigned in the first semester. The difference did not stop there. Compared to my first Mathematics placement where I taught a full timetable almost independently from the beginning, in my second placement my associate could not let go of his classes and did not allow me much teaching time. His timetable consisted of senior, academic classes and he allowed me to teach only two of the six for which he was responsible. To his credit, he was a dedicated teacher who was carrying out his own personal, professional development aimed at improving his test making and classroom questioning skills. By doing so, he hoped to improve his students’ performances on assessments. He exemplified for me the idea that teachers should be life-long learners. He was working actively at improving his knowledge of and skills within the craft of teaching. As a result of his personal focus, I learned much about writing classroom tests and questioning techniques that supported the direct instruction method that was the basis of my teaching style. My technique, though, must have been reasonably well-developed as the most serious correction I received from my him was that I should not call a stereo a “hi-fi” because that was an outdated term that would likely make the students laugh and not take me seriously. The students, however, took me seriously enough to allow me once again to stand at the front of the room and deliver a lesson without challenging me in any way. As far as I could gather, as
long as I didn’t use archaic language, I was doing a good job of teaching. My model of teaching as transmission was not called into question. In the end, I received a report that spoke well of my ability to teach and to control a classroom.

I began my last two-week practicum in my former high school with one of my former English teachers who now headed the English department. He taught only grade twelve and, the then existent, grade thirteen levels. All his grade twelve classes were in the academic stream. As my mother was quite seriously ill and in the hospital at the time, a fact known to him as he knew friends of my family, he did not let me teach during the first of the two weeks as he felt I had enough stress in my life. I watched as he taught. I took notes and had fleeting moments where the intervening five years disappeared and I was again a student in his class. This feeling of being a student instead of a teacher was reinforced by the reaction I received the first time I walked into the staff room and was told by the teachers there that students were not allowed. I had to remind them that it had been a few years since I had been a student in the school. My sense of myself as a teacher was eroded by this reception. With only five days left in this session, I finally taught a few poetry classes. As this particular teacher had also been the one to teach the teenage me the same poetry I merely replicated one of his lessons from the teacher’s point of view. Needless to say he found that I did an excellent job. Imitation, it seemed, was seen as the sincerest form of flattery. At the end of my final days as a student teacher I received a report that was laudatory of my
teaching skills and my ability to handle stress. Classroom management was never mentioned.

My arrival in the “real” world of teaching occurred shortly before I actually completed my studies at Queen’s. In late April, the school board in which I had attended public and high school called the Faculty of Education looking for anyone who came from my hometown who was about to receive their qualifications in Mathematics. There were two of us called into the dean’s office. When the other student, realizing I knew the teacher whose serious illness required such an unusual request from the board, deferred the position to me I packed my bags and began my first professional appointment the following Monday. It was a wild introduction to teaching.

The Mathematics classes I took over in this semestered school consisted of one grade ten basic level, one grade eleven general level, and a grade twelve advanced level. The grade ten class was not large but contained students who had difficulties other than their inability to succeed in a Mathematics classroom. Change was not something these students managed very well and they had just spent the previous three weeks having a different supply teacher nearly every day. No teacher seemed willing to teach them beyond two or three days and, having done so, each declined to return for a second round. When I arrived the classroom was in chaos both figuratively and literally. I had to physically bar the door with my body in order to prevent students from walking out before the bell rang. Some
students wandered around the classroom at will. Many of the female students spent most of the class repairing their makeup and combing their hair while a few of the males challenged each other to fist fights which, occasionally, broke out. It was with this class that the training I received as a lifeguard was more useful to me than that I had received in my education studies. I knew how to “stand with confidence”—a phrase I learned years later from a colleague trained in martial arts—even when I did not actually have confidence in what I was doing. When I returned on the fourth day, the students seemed to realize that I was not going to abandon them and they started to settle down. I cannot say that I was particularly successful in teaching them any Mathematics during the six weeks I spent with them but at least I brought predictability and classroom routine back into their lives. When the teacher I had been replacing returned for the final three weeks of the semester, he was pleased with the way the class was functioning. I was happy to have survived. At the end of May, I attended an interview for a position teaching Mathematics in a secondary school in school board in the Greater Toronto Area. I was the tenth of ten candidates to be interviewed for the appointment. I came away convinced the job was mine. I had never failed at anything I set out to do before, so it never occurred to me that I would not get the appointment. In addition, nothing in my pre-service experiences had suggested to me that I was not the ideal candidate for the job. My hubris, in this case, was rewarded with a telephone call a few days later inviting me to join the staff in the fall. I readily accepted the offer.
Despite my experiences in the spring with a class full of students for whom teaching as transmission did not work, I started my teaching career the following September with a clear understanding of how to conduct a Socratic lesson in Mathematics, as that had been the major focus of my curriculum methods course, and not much else. Given that the changes to curriculum and instruction, as instigated by the publication of the Hall-Dennis Report\(^2\), had only been recently implemented in the school system this was not a major impediment to my nascent career. In fact, it matched the pedagogical philosophy and teaching style of my department head perfectly.

During the last week of August—having just moved some four hundred kilometers from my hometown to my new job—I checked in with my department head and received the barest information on the courses I would be teaching, the textbooks I would be using and my general role in the department. With a final wish to me of “Good Luck! See you Tuesday!” he was gone and I went back to my near-empty apartment to spend my final weekend before I assumed the role of full-time teacher trying to prepare for the great unknown of my own classroom and for the responsibility of educating one hundred and eighty teenagers. I was twenty-three years old.

\(^2\) In 1965, the Province of Ontario passed an order-in-council establishing The Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario. Co-chaired by Mr. Justice E.M. Hall, of the Supreme Court of Canada, and Mr. L.A. Dennis, the committee’s report *Living and Learning*, published in 1968, was commonly known as the Hall-Dennis Report. It set new directions for all schools in Ontario which radically altered the curriculum and instructional practices in place at that time.
In that first year I was assigned six sections of Mathematics for students intending to pursue university studies after their graduation from secondary school. Three of these sections were in a graduating year and three were in an initial year course. My peers, many of whom had been assigned the more typical timetable of leftovers—those mostly junior level, non-academic courses no one else in the department wanted to teach—were astounded at what they saw as my good luck. Most would toil for several years before they were entrusted, by their department heads, to teach senior level, university-bound students. It was late November of my initial year—I was avoiding looking a gift horse in the mouth—before I worked up enough courage to ask my department head why I had been given this timetable. His response was that, as a recent graduate of a baccalaureate degree in Mathematics, I was closer to the material the graduating students needed than anyone else in the department and that both the very senior and the very junior students were unlikely to give me many severe classroom management problems—the former being more mature and eager to do well in order to secure admission to the universities of their choice and the latter being too intimidated by their move from their small elementary schools to a secondary school with more than two thousand students to cause much trouble. “In essence,” he said, “I’ve given you a timetable that will allow me to figure out whether or not you can teach.” He went on to point out that it would be difficult for him to make that judgment if I were to be constantly preoccupied with maintaining order in the classroom during the very short, thirty-seven minute, periods in the school’s daily
schedule. In fact, he told me, I would receive exactly the same timetable in the second year of my two-year probationary period which required successful—defined as attaining a permanent contract with the school board—completion before my interim subject specialist certificate would be made permanent by the Ministry of Education in my province. Despite his personal belief that the only good method of teaching was Socratic and his otherwise dictatorial approach to running his department, here was a man who had given some consideration to the effects of initial teaching experiences on the professional development of at least one novice teacher.

Though my timetable only consisted of two preparations, the workload was enormous given that I had no resources in the form of course notes from previous years to draw on. Sharing of material by members in my department was nearly non-existent. The general atmosphere was that everyone else had paid their dues and created their “course books”—binders of lesson plans, handouts, assignments, and tests specific to a course—so it was up to me to do the same. As a result, my daily schedule saw me getting up in the morning for the drive to work, teaching all day, coming home to my apartment to do three or four more hours of preparation and marking then falling into bed to get the sleep I needed to be able to do it all again the next day. Weekends seemed no different. I recall one beautiful spring Saturday spent in a local park marking test papers while everyone around me played Frisbee or enjoyed the sunshine as they stretched out on the grass.
In addition to the workload, as the newest member of the department I did not have a classroom of my own. I shared space not only with members of my department but also with a teacher who taught English. I taught my six classes each day in six different classrooms. As a second year teacher, and one who no longer had to endure moving to a different classroom every period, the English teacher considered this classroom hers and set it up in such a way that the blackboards, which she rarely used, were inaccessible. It was also located far away from other Mathematics classrooms so if I forgot any equipment that I might need I could not just ask the teacher in the next classroom to loan me what I lacked. Basic equipment, such as meter sticks and blackboard compasses, were always in short supply so I could not just leave them in this room in which mine was the only Mathematics class. To gain access to the blackboards, which given my transmission style of teaching was critical, my students had to move the desks at the beginning of the period from the horseshoe formation used by the English teacher into the rows I needed. The process had to be done in reverse at the end of the period as it was made clear to me that I was only “borrowing” the room and that it should always be left the way I found it. With only thirty-seven minutes available, the class always seemed in a state of near chaos. In the rooms I shared with my department colleagues, they complained vociferously if I did not erase the boards before I left their rooms though the same courtesy did not extend from them to me. By the end of the first few weeks I was keenly aware of my place at the bottom of the pecking order.
The school administration had put in place a program for assisting teachers new to the school. Unfortunately, this was never explained to me either personally or in the welter of material sent to me prior to my arrival at the school. The Tuesday after Labour Day came and went as did the rest of September, October, November, and December when, just before the Christmas break a teacher whom I had seen only from a distance at staff meetings and who taught in a department different from mine, introduced herself to me as my “buddy” and explained that she had been too busy herself this past fall to check on my progress and needs but, as I hadn’t sought her out to ask for help, she assumed I had not been having any problems. That was the extent of my contact with the person who, unbeknownst to me, had been assigned to oversee my induction into the teaching profession. I hadn’t asked her for help because I didn’t know she existed!

Despite our ongoing differences over how her classroom was set up, the second year English teacher, Susan (a pseudonym) and I became friends. It was a friendship that was to endure for the next twenty-three years before her untimely death from ovarian cancer. She became, for me, the support system I needed as I began my career. When I asked her about this “buddy” she explained that at the final staff meeting in June of the previous academic year it had been decided that with the large number of newly hired teachers in the school—twenty two in her first year and fourteen in my first year—there was a need to provide them help in acclimatizing to the school which had a teaching staff of one hundred and fifty and
a student population of twenty-three hundred. Teachers “volunteered” to be a buddy and thus the system was put in place. She pointed out that there had been no real planning as to how this program would work and how the time to accomplish the task undertaken by the veteran “buddies” would be found in the busy day of teaching, but there was a hope by the current administration that everything would somehow work out. This *ad hoc* approach to the support of beginning teachers marked the only systemic support that was offered to me during my first year. It is an example of a dismal failure of mentoring as a support for beginning teachers though some may argue that the problem lay not with the idea of mentoring but rather with the way in which it was implemented in this instance.

As predicted, and planned, by my department head, I had few problems with classroom discipline. The students behaved much as he had described they would. The school was located in a community that was experiencing rapid expansion and was either the wealthiest, or second wealthiest, community in the province depending on which newspaper was doing the reporting or what time of year it was. There was a marked difference between the behaviours and attitudes of the students who came from “old money” and those whose parents were part of the *nouveau riche*. The parents of the former, in nearly every case, were supportive of the teacher when their children ran afoul of school rules and apologetic that their offspring had not lived up to their responsibilities. The parents of the latter, in many cases, felt that their children could do no wrong and
it was likely the teacher’s fault for causing a student’s bad behaviour. The not-so-subtle message I received in such parent-teacher contacts was that their money made up for their students’ lack of responsibility. After all, their taxes paid my salary. My biggest problem during my first year, though, arose from being a first-year teacher teaching students who were in their final year of high school. In mid-October when one of them asked me how long I had been teaching—I was barely three years older than some of my students—I replied, “What day is it?” and explained that this was my first year. Within days of this exchange, I was called into a meeting with one of my students, her mother, and one of the three vice-principals. The parent had requested that her daughter be transferred out of my class as this final year of high school was too important to her daughter’s future at university to be taught by a rookie. Her precise words to me—etched in my memory by the degree of offence I inwardly registered but outwardly did not display—were, “No offence, Miss Worrall, but you couldn’t teach your way out of a wet paper bag and I don’t want my daughter to be used as an experimental subject while you try to learn how to teach.” My vice-principal, I believe, managed to stammer that he considered me a fine young teacher but the next day the student was moved to a more experienced teacher’s class. The encounter did little to bolster my waning confidence in my abilities.

In the next two weeks, more requests poured in from parents who wanted similar transfers for their students. No others were moved but the classroom
atmosphere became more challenging as the remaining students constantly questioned, sometimes aloud, whether I actually knew what I was doing. The situation was not helped by the student who was transferred constantly telling her friends how much better she was doing and how much better her new teacher was compared to me. I began to worry about my performance and to compare what I was doing in the classroom with what other teachers of the same courses said they were doing in theirs. I never did get the opportunity to observe for myself whether what I was being told was true. While I had begun my career confident in my ability, and that confidence was underpinned by the knowledge that most of the significant adults in my life also believed I was meant to teach, this incident caused me to begin to second guess what I was doing in the classroom. At the end of the year, the pass/fail rate for my senior students was not significantly different from that of my colleagues. As it turned out, the student who was transferred out of my class finished the year with a mark that was almost the same as the one she had been earning when she was with me. I spent the year, despite my apparent success as measured by the number of students who passed the courses I taught, looking over my shoulder and wondering where the next groundless complaint would originate. My first parents’ night was a study in contrasts as some parents looked at me and asked how I could teach their students when I was barely older than they were while others threw up their hands and wanted to know what they were supposed to do with their nineteen year-old or twenty year-old who was not applying himself in the classroom. I had no answers for either group.
Despite the inner turmoil I experienced in trying to decide whether I was good enough as a teacher, the self-doubts that had crept into my vision of myself as a teacher were not apparent to those around me. Years into my career, Susan and I were collaborating on a research paper based on our experiences as beginning teachers. In the course of writing a narrative of those years from our differing perspectives I was surprised to learn that she was as envious of my rapport with students during my first year of teaching as I was of hers during her second year. Students always wanted to linger in her classroom to talk with her and her outgoing personality meant that laughter was always ringing out into the halls during those times. She seemed able to get students to eat out of her hand with no effort at all. I wanted to be like her but, given my generally reserved nature, didn’t think it was possible. She, on the other hand, wanted what I seemed capable of doing. She described seeing me walking down the hall after classes with one of my senior students and wondering how I could manage to be so at ease with this student. She pointed out that we were having a serious discussion and that the student was keen to know my opinions. She felt her slight stature, youthful appearance, and bubbly personality caused many of her colleagues to not take her seriously as a professional, and that the rapport she had with her students, which I envied, was seen by them as an example of her being more like her students than like a teacher. She wished she could be seen by her students and her colleagues the same way this student appeared to be seeing me—a serious, professional teacher. She had no idea that, at the time she observed me with this student, I was having
serious doubts for the first time about my suitability for teaching. When asked by my childhood teachers, during that first summer vacation, how I liked teaching my reply was, “Well, I haven’t submitted my resignation yet.” It was hardly an enthusiastic endorsement of my chosen career.

True to his word, my department head reassigned me to the same timetable in my second year. I also had earned the right to a classroom of my own. The fact that it was only one of the two in the school that had no windows was not a serious drawback for me because at least it was mine. I didn’t have to carry equipment around the school and I could spend the class change time getting set up for the next period rather than trying to beat my students to the next classroom. Susan and I remained fast friends and with a common lunch had the time to talk about teaching over lunch. Unfortunately, many of our colleagues at the school were annoyed that we should spend their precious lunchtime discussing teaching philosophy so we ultimately ended up eating lunch together in her classroom which was not in use during the period. We thrashed out many ideas over sandwiches and Scrabble and along the way developed a personal philosophy of teaching that would be the foundation of our future work in educational research.

The workload dropped dramatically in my second year. I had my hard-won course books from which to work. I still did not look much older than some of my students so I was more guarded in answering the inevitable question about the length of my career. No students, or their parents, asked for transfers—or I was
not told if they had—and my lost confidence in what I was doing began to grow again. Students still compared me with the more experienced teachers in the department who were teaching the same courses but they were split in their opinion on the chances of their easily gaining a high mark. Some felt that I would cave in and award a higher grade if they challenged me knowing that the administration had caved in the previous year in granting the parental request for transfer while others thought, as my department head had, that being so newly graduated from university I had a better understanding of what they needed to know and, though their mark might be different with another teacher, the content they learned from me was of more value. Both groups were wrong. Mark quibbling at the senior level was an expected part of teaching so I did not pay overmuch attention to this group. Once I offered to remark their papers making sure that I had adhered strictly to the marking scheme and returned a few papers to students with grades lower than that which they received the first time the challenges stopped. As for the second group, my own first year of university was now six years in the past and particular to one university. The secondary school course content was set by the syllabus published by the Ministry of Education so there was no reason for them to believe that I knew better than my colleagues what content they needed to know in order to succeed.

My teaching style remained unchanged. Teaching as transmission worked well in this setting, and was the general philosophy within the department, so there
was little incentive to change or grow. It had been a technique that had worked for me when I was a student so how could it not be a good technique now that I was a teacher? The students, for the most part, meekly accepted what I was doing in the classroom. This included probably one of the most egregious examples of assessment in my career. While no specific marks were allotted on a test for using proper mathematical conventions, marks were taken off for failing to do so. This was a departmental policy. Accordingly, on the test of one of my grade nine students I deducted one half mark for failing to use an equal sign. The student had done all the calculations correctly, had shown all his work, and had the right answer for every question but still failed the test because I not only took that half mark off for not using an equal sign once or twice, I did so every time it was omitted. The equivalent in an English essay would be to penalize a student who cannot spell a particular word, but who is consistent in the mis-spelling, every time the word appears in the essay. On his test, this student had not used an equal sign for each line in every question on the test. That is to say, there were no equal signs on his test. When he came up to me after class to discuss the unfairness of this, I simply pointed out that he was unlikely to do the same thing the next time and that the mark would stand. The student ultimately accepted this and I heard nothing more of it either from him or his parents. Indeed, he never did make that mistake again. I only learned a few years later, when the student returned from university for commencement, just how deeply this had made an impression on him. When I chatted with him after the ceremony at the reception, it was the only
memory of my class that he had. He was graceful enough to laugh about it and I was thankful that I had the opportunity to apologize to him for treating him so unfairly. It is, however, an example of how I saw teaching during that second year. I was the person in the room with the knowledge and power and it was the students’ responsibility to accept that and receive the knowledge I was delivering. None of my students challenged that view meaning that I had, yet again, no classroom management issues. My department head may have been able to decide that I could teach by creating situations in which this would be so but neither he, nor I, had any real idea of what would happen if students decided to challenge my authority. Over the course of my first two years of teaching, and during my pre-service year, I was deemed competent in classroom discipline and management even though I had had no opportunity to practise either skill.

During my first year and again during my second year of teaching, a superintendent was dispatched from the board to assess my teaching by observing one class. This was in addition to the one formal visit to my classroom my principal made during each year. Based on their first year observations, my probationary contract was renewed for its second year. This was not an automatic outcome. A first-year teacher in another department, with whom I had had sporadic contact when we found ourselves trying to make the aging duplicating machine work, did not get a renewal so I knew that having a second year was a vote of confidence in my ability. At the end of my second year of teaching, again
based on the two formal observations, I was recommended for, and signed, a permanent contract with my board. This made my interim teaching qualifications permanent. Officially, I had made the transition from student to teacher. I began my third year of teaching the following September when the task of learning to become a teacher began in earnest and continued for the next twenty-eight years.
Chapter 7
Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

This chapter is organized as a series of discussions of the three narratives contained in this thesis. Each discussion addresses one of the three research questions I posed in chapter one and the thesis aims that underlie it. Following the discussions, I summarize the conclusions I have reached and end with some recommendations for future research into beginning teachers’ careers.

Can Life Experience Predict Success?

As I noted in my introductory chapter, Angela’s curtailed teaching career caused some of her colleagues to opine that had those who hired her known more about her as a person she would not have obtained the job. In effect, they were saying that her personal history should have made it clear that she was not suited to teaching. The fact that she had not really had the opportunity to prove to her critics that she could teach did not mitigate this opinion. The result of hearing the whispers in the staff room was my need to know whether, at some point during a teacher-candidate’s pre-service year or even as part of the application process, it really is possible to say, based on life experiences alone, that this person has what it takes to become a successful teacher. The aims related to my first research question—Can the future success/failure of beginning teachers be predicted with any degree of accuracy?—are: a) to investigate how each participant’s personal narrative influenced the motivation to become a teacher and how it manifested itself in the classroom and b) to assess the extent to which a biography of each
participant contains indicators of success, or possible failure, in teaching. Success, in the context of this discussion, includes not only the definitions I set out in chapter one but also the idea that choosing to remain in the profession and being allowed to do so constitutes a form of success, though a very limited one. Based on the second criterion, Antoinette, Anne and I achieved success. What, if anything, is in our stories that would allow someone to predict this outcome correctly?

My own narrative gives some indication of a reason—other than Angela’s professional demise—as to why I wanted to pursue using life history as a predictor of future success in teaching. Surely, my family background and grooming for this future meant I was “born to teach”. Similarly, Antoinette’s profession that teaching was always the answer to her question of how she could use her life to make a difference in the world around her ought to be a factor in her success. But what of Anne who declared, despite her mother’s experience as a teacher, that she never wanted to teach? Ultimately she arrived in the profession and has been successful. Though there are many teachers, like Antoinette, who feel called to teach there are likely as many, if not more, who have come to teaching without this sense of vocation and who have fallen in love with their jobs as Anne did. Even Angela, who once cried to me that she had never loved a job nor hated a job as much as she did teaching, found some personal fulfillment in the act.

When I applied to the Faculty of Education at Queen’s I did so fully confident that I was meant to teach. I was, at the time, somewhat disappointed that
there was no room on the application to show off my teaching pedigree. When I found that the current OISE/UT application form completed by potential teacher-candidates allowed them to expound on a life experience and its worth as an indicator of their suitability for teaching I was envious in that I had not had a similar opportunity at the same point in my career. I still felt that the idea of being “born to teach” had merit and that there existed in teachers to whom the description was applied an innate ability that needed no refinement or modification by external influences in order for them to perform the job at a high level. For these teachers, pre-service education was irrelevant. After examining the literature and the narratives in this thesis, I have reached the conclusion that there is little to support this notion. In fact, the idea may actually impede success in the classroom.

While there will always exist teachers to whom others will look as exemplars of the profession and for whom the phrase “born to teach” seems apt, these people still had to experience the same learning curve as others as they began their careers. In their cases, however, it was accomplished during an inordinately short adjustment period to the profession. These are the people who would, according to Howard Gardner, be particularly gifted in interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Their capacities to work with people—interpersonal intelligence—and to reflect on their own actions and motivations—intrapersonal intelligence—combine to create a person for whom teaching appears effortless and innate. This does not preclude, though, the necessity of their learning the
knowledge and acquiring the skills and attributes peculiar to the profession of teaching. They still have to learn their craft in the same way as a particularly gifted surgeon must learn that of surgical medicine.

As the literature I reviewed indicated, many teacher candidates, myself included when I started, arrive in professional teacher preparation programs convinced they do not really require what the program is offering and view it as an inconvenient final step that must be negotiated before being allowed to take up the position destiny has ordained for them. Though it is no longer possible to do so in Ontario with membership in the College of Teachers being a requirement for all classroom teachers—something which cannot happen until formal teacher training is complete—I arrived in my teacher education program having already worked in a secondary school as a substitute teacher for a few weeks in the spring after I had completed my undergraduate degree. The experience fed into my belief in myself as being “born to teach”. Rather than being a positive influence, this image of myself may have stunted my professional growth in the early years of my career. The possibility of my not being an effective and successful teacher never occurred to me. The result was that I spent these years examining my students for faults that would explain their failure to grasp the material rather than considering that part of the problem might lie in my teaching methods. My personal narrative manifested itself in the classroom as arrogance. I was meant to teach so any disconnect between what I was doing and what the students were achieving was not caused by
me. I had not yet learned how to teach. I may have been predisposed to teaching and have had the necessary character traits to do so but I was not “born to teach”.

While I brought to teaching my conviction that this was my destiny, Antoinette came to her teacher preparation year quietly sure that teaching would be fulfilling. She truly felt called to do so. This is quite different from the notion of being “born to teach”. In her own words, she stated that she had never proclaimed, “hey, I’m going to teach” but had always known it was something she would do. She knew her feet had been set on this path but did not presume to know where the path might lead her. Rather, she allowed herself to be led, to doubt, to be open to exploring avenues she did not envision and, most importantly, to learn from her experiences. Her capacity for self-reflection did not result in such self-doubt as to make her ineffective. Indeed, by entertaining doubt she acknowledged just how much she needed to learn about the craft of teaching. Apart from the comment after her final practicum that the term “practice teaching” seemed redundant, Antoinette did not have anything negative to say about her pre-service year. She appears to have used the year to learn as much as she could as opposed to viewing it as something to be endured. Her personal narrative, thoroughly grounded in her faith, came through in her pre-service year and the initial years in the classroom as the “quiet courage” noted by one of her associate teachers. Despite the enormous challenges she faced, both personally and professionally, during those years she succeeded in making a permanent transition to the teaching profession. Her success can be measured not only by the limited terms set out at the beginning of
this chapter but also by the criteria for success laid down in Chapter 1. Her success may have been predictable based on her attitude toward and apparent aptitude for teaching but it cannot be said to be entirely predictable based on her life experiences alone.

Anne felt neither a sense of destiny nor a vocational call when she decided to enter teaching. Her motivation to do so appears to have been more a case of answering the question “What next?” when it came time to return to waged work after staying home to raise her young children. Her professional training prior to entering the faculty of education had already led her into the school system, at the board of education level, as a psychometrist so she had more than the familiarity with teaching attributable to having served Lortie’s apprenticeship of observation. As I noted in my narrative of Anne’s experience, she had had some negative experience in her own schooling which may have contributed to her decision to enter teaching, but it was not the only factor at work. Her set of skills seemed appropriate for the teaching profession. Given her extensive background in counseling, one might expect Anne to achieve success but even in her situation it was not assured and, at least once, was in jeopardy. She gave herself a period of induction by choosing to teach incrementally heavier timetables during the first two years of her career and not undertaking fulltime teaching until her third year in the profession. Even with this measured approach, she experienced difficulties similar to Antoinette’s with the exception that they occurred during her third year rather than her first. Based on Anne’s life experiences as a mother, a counselor,
and a mature adult when she entered her pre-service year, it would not seem foolish to assume Anne would be successful. To suggest that she would come as close to leaving the profession as she did during her third year would have seemed an impossible idea. If someone with Anne’s background could fail to make the transition to teaching then what hope for her peers? Yet, Anne struggled to find herself in her new career during that third year. It is a struggle that could not have been predicted by looking at life experiences alone. She became a teacher but not easily and effortlessly. She experienced the type of success described earlier in this thesis but it was hard-won.

That is not to say that life experiences have no effect on the process of becoming a teacher or on what a teacher does in the classroom. There would appear to be adequate research available where the investigators have noted life experiences as unexpected influences affecting the outcomes of their work. What has not happened, it would seem, is a concerted effort to examine this phenomenon directly. The original Section 11 study did gather some autobiographical material from the participants but there is not a sufficient amount to allow me, in using the files on Antoinette and Anne, to make any claims that my study does what others have not, namely find a direct connection between life experiences and success as a teacher if, indeed, such a connection exists. It is an area that could be investigated but the question then becomes, is it a worthwhile research direction? Suppose a series of studies could be carried out which identified a constellation of life experiences that guaranteed success as a teacher.
and this information was then used to make “informed” choices about who should be accepted for teacher training. The crucial element missing in selecting teacher-candidates in this manner would be the recognition that we all—or at least we all hope that we do—continue to grow and develop as human beings throughout our lives. As a result, continuous change occurs as we incorporate more of our experiences into our personal makeup. Who is to say that the applicant who lacks the “ideal” life experience profile cannot become a successful teacher as s/he acquires further life experiences while teaching? Searching for a solid link between life experience and teacher success, assuming it could be found, would eliminate, I am sure, far more potentially successful teachers than it would attract to the profession. Being “born to teach” may be a descriptor of someone who seems to do a very difficult job effortlessly but it is not a criterion for entry. Many teachers feel, as Antoinette did, a sense of vocation on entering teaching but the profession is not made up exclusively of such people. Good teachers come from all backgrounds and have myriad differences in their experiences prior to teaching. Looking for the “perfect” set of experiences would be, I feel, rather like searching for the philosopher’s stone—something guaranteed to turn lead into gold but ultimately a chimera.

Do Certain Traits Ensure Success?

While life experiences alone are not enough to determine whether a beginning teacher will experience a successful transition to the profession, they do contribute to the development of an individual’s personality. This leads to my
second research question, Are there any common qualities/abilities possessed by beginning teachers who are successful in making the transition from student to professional teacher? The thesis aim related to this question is: to document how each participant viewed him/herself as a beginning teacher in the context of his/her school and how this view did or did not change from that held as a pre-service teacher. At first glance this aim and the research question may seem unrelated but both speak to issues of teacher identity and its development over time. How did Antoinette, Anne and I become the teachers we did? Do we have anything in common?

Antoinette entered the Faculty of Education with the intention of becoming a teacher of English in the junior/intermediate divisions. She envisioned herself in that position and it was not until her first practice teaching placement that she realized other possibilities might exist for her. Thus, her view of herself as a teacher began to change immediately upon the completion of this experience. Teaching in a secondary school and working with students in the senior grades, most of whom were in their mid to late teens, had never formed part of her vision but it became an attractive picture for her and one that she felt drawn to as her education studies progressed. Though she completed the rest of her field experiences in the divisions for which she was being prepared through her coursework, she returned over and over again to the notion of teaching in the intermediate/senior divisions. By the end of her program, she had made the decision to start her career in a secondary school and completed the extra courses
necessary for this to be possible. Even as she was acquiring the knowledge and skills for teaching in the elementary panel, Antoinette was experiencing a personal evolution as she realized she might find greater satisfaction working with students in the secondary panel. In Antoinette’s case, her responses to the post-practicum interviews and her journal writing document this shift in thinking. She had arrived in September seeing herself as a teacher of pre-adolescents and graduated in June with a completely different mindset as she prepared for a classroom of adolescents. What did not change during that year, however, was her basic belief in children in general. Repeatedly, she referred to children “as our greatest resource” and this tenet of her thinking about what it means to teach did not alter as she began her work with students who, in many ways, could no longer be considered to be children. Antoinette believed that teaching mattered and could make a difference in a student’s life. The anticipatory anxiety she expressed in her journal on the eve of the beginning of her career was not really self-doubt about her ability to do the job but rather the reaction many have when about to enter into an unknown and untried situation. Certainly, Antoinette had spent time in the classroom teaching but she now faced a blank canvas that was hers to fill rather than painting inside the lines drawn by others.

During the time Antoinette spent in the classroom in her pre-service year, her teacher associates had fostered, for the most part, her emerging self-image as a competent and capable teacher. In her first placement, the doubts she had about her ability to work with students in the senior level were significantly eased by the
constant support and positive feedback she received. This allowed her to see herself in a positive light and to carry that vision forward into her next assignment where such obvious encouragement was not given. She came to the conclusion during this practicum that “no news is good news” and, in the absence of information to the contrary from the classroom teacher charged with her supervision, she continued to see herself as a capable teacher. Despite this opinion of herself, Antoinette was not immune to inner doubts but these had less to do with her confidence in her suitability for the profession than with trying to come to a decision about which part of the profession—elementary or secondary education—she wished to join. Once she came to a decision about this issue the self-doubts that she had been experiencing, which were not noticed by her associates who continued to see her as a talented, emerging professional, dropped away. The view others had of her and her self-image merged to reveal a competent and capable, albeit novice, teacher.

As noted in Antoinette’s narrative, her beliefs—in herself as a competent teacher and in the worth of every student—were severely tested, especially during her first professional year. As a result, at least during the first semester of her career, her self-image as a competent and capable teacher changed dramatically though her commitment to valuing each student as a resource to be treasured remained constant. Her initial instructional methods reflected this. Unfortunately, her student-centred approach in which she and her students would be learners together in the classroom was ill suited to students who lacked both the skills and
the inclination to participate in such an arrangement. It did not take Antoinette long to understand that the vision she had of her classroom and her role within it could not be realized. This led to the erosion of her self-image as a capable teacher. The result of this was a period in which she seriously doubted whether teaching was the right profession for her.

As she adjusted her teaching strategies to fit the reality she was facing in the classroom during the first four months of her initial year, Antoinette experienced a deep sense of sadness. She was doing what was necessary in order to survive the experience but the changes she was making were coming at great personal cost. The journal entry, in which she recounted a conversation with her husband describing how she was surviving, reveals the personal price she was paying as she became “hard” and “tough”. She was hurt by the realization that these adjectives now applied to her. Some might say that all that was happening was another example of an idealistic, naïve, young teacher coming to terms with the reality of the contemporary classroom. Further, they might argue, it is a necessary adjustment that all beginning teachers must make in order to remain in the profession for the long term. In Antoinette’s case, however, her idealism did not arise from the inexperience of youth but rather from her deeply held faith. Her commitment to teaching within the Roman Catholic school system, because the core philosophy of the schools meshed with her personal philosophies, gives some indication of the source of her idealism. Thus, having to make changes to what she was doing in the classroom was, for Antoinette, more than just the growing pains
of a novice teacher. The accommodations were striking at the heart of what she believed not only about teaching but also about the world around her. Her beliefs about teaching were tied closely to her personal belief system at its deepest level. Changing one challenged the other. Given that her faith was one of the major factors that allowed her to continue to face the trials she was experiencing, it is not surprising that the adjustments she was forced to make in how she conducted her classroom caused such personal angst.

As Antoinette’s view of herself as a teacher, both during her pre-service year and during the initial years of her career, was rooted in her faith, there is very little to suggest that her core view changed significantly over that time. Surface details had to change but this did not have a deep effect on her perception of herself as a teacher. Her faith allowed her to know herself and to have a sure compass as she navigated the strange territory inhabited by beginning teachers. The doubts she expressed about her ability to teach are not really about her ability but rather her inability to do as much as she believes needs to be done—especially for the students who characterized themselves “nut cases”. Antoinette’s view of herself as teacher may not have undergone any changes during the three years I examined but I believe it did not need to change. Her beliefs about teaching and herself as teacher came from solid ground that allowed her to build a strong foundation for her career. The labour to accomplish this was not without moments of great suffering but neither was it without moments of great joy.
The development of an identity as a teacher for Anne was, perhaps, a more difficult task than that faced by Antoinette. While Antoinette came to teaching without having had a significant break between completing her own schooling and beginning her career, Anne had worked both inside and outside of the home for a number of years. She had several professional identities—a counselor, a psychometrist, a crisis intervention worker—already in place when she entered the Faculty of Education. These were in addition to her identity as a wife and mother. What she did not expect was the development of a “student” identity in which, as she noted in her journal, she felt a sense of regression into a role previously cast off during her professional work after completing her graduate studies. Rather than entering the classroom as a teacher-candidate with the emphasis on the teacher part of the term, Anne felt very much a student.

Though more mature—both chronologically and experientially—than many of her peers, Anne was not much more advanced than they in seeing herself as a teacher. She believed her experiences and previous training would prove invaluable in the classroom and, as a mother of two children in the approximate age-range of the pupils she would be facing during her practica, she would be able to relate well to her students. She did not, however, enter her first classroom completely believing in herself as a teacher. This is evidenced in her first experience when she was surprised to find herself feeling very uncomfortable even though she had prior experiences standing in front of a group of adults and presenting material to them. Anne expected that this experience would carry over
to teaching and found that the parallel was not apparent. As she noted in her journal, however, she also expected this to be quickly overcome given the strength of her belief in her ability to relate to students.

This reliance on the affective aspect of teaching gives some insight into Anne’s beliefs about teaching as she began her training. She appears to have entered her first practicum convinced that her ability to work with children would be the most important attribute needed to be able to be effective in the classroom. She found, however, was that this was not enough. Anne’s maturity and previous training allowed her to take her associate’s constructive criticism to heart and to see that teaching was much more than being able to have a good rapport with children, regardless of the importance of this trait in teaching. Observing both her associate and other members of the staff in her first placement opened Anne’s eyes to the scope of teaching and once made aware of the challenges of the classroom Anne adjusted her thinking. She became more cognizant of the complexities of teaching and rapidly incorporated her learning into her future forays into the classroom.

Even though she was making adjustments to what she was doing in the classroom and using her considerable ability to reflect on her own actions, Anne continued to see herself more as a student and less as a teacher during her pre-service year. It is only when she is placed in a situation where the other adult in the classroom has no authority to evaluate her—as was the case during the illness of one of her teacher associates who was replaced by a substitute teacher—that
Anne sees herself as a teacher. The students became “her” students and the classroom was hers to direct. This persona was short-lived as she reverted to feeling like a student on the return of the regular classroom teacher. This brief donning of a teacher identity did, however, give Anne some idea of what it meant to be a teacher. There appears to be some evidence that this identity includes the idea that everything that happens in the classroom depends on the teacher as Anne described the experience as being “…really good because the kids were focused on me.” She was leading and they were following. Her perception of teaching would seem to be that of teaching as transmission. It is her job to help the students “get” it by skillful instruction on her part. Her description of her best teaching moment in her second practicum where one of the brighter students suddenly reacted positively to what she was trying to explain adds strength to this interpretation of her belief about teaching.

Even though Anne may have held the view of teaching as transmission, it does not appear to have limited her teaching strategies to accomplish the task. It is possible to hold this particular view of teaching and use teaching methods that are less teacher-oriented than direct or Socratic instruction. Her third teaching report notes her ability to use varied methods of instruction. This, along with her strong interpersonal skills, was seen by her associate teacher as evidence of her suitability for teaching. She also seems to have found the confidence she lacked earlier in the classroom and came away from this particular experience feeling less like a student and more like a teacher. Her final practicum, however, showed how fragile
this identity was as she had difficulty working with the intermediate division students. The confidence she had in her ability to work with students and relate to them was sorely tested. Throughout her previous pratica her associate teachers, by continually noting and praising her ability to relate well to children, seem to have reinforced her belief that this affective aspect of teaching was of primary importance and that the other necessary skills would follow naturally from it. When, in this last placement, the students did not react in the same way as the younger students had to her presence in the classroom, Anne found herself somewhat adrift resorting to yelling to try to maintain classroom control and frustrated by her inability to motivate the students she faced. Her conclusion that she needed to work with younger students then, perhaps, move into the intermediate division suggests that she still believes in the affective as being the main component in teaching. She had not been able to establish the same type of relationship with the older students as she had with the younger ones and one gets the impression that she sees this as the primary cause of her difficulties in her last classroom experience prior to graduating from the Faculty of Education. Anne began the year with a strong belief that her ability to work with children would be the most important attribute needed to be a successful teacher and she seems to have ended the year with that belief still firmly in place.

Anne began her first professional year of teaching with her emphasis on the affective by using strategies that were child-centred and dependent on a good rapport with students. Despite her skills in this area, other aspects of teaching
quickly became apparent to Anne as classroom management once again became an issue. Anne moved to a more teacher-directed classroom to address these issues but did so only as a matter of survival and to align herself more closely with the methods of other teachers with whom she shared responsibility for these students. She did not do so as a result of a shift in her belief about teaching. This is apparent when she notes in the late fall, at a Section 11 Symposium, that she and her students will likely both categorize the year as having been a good one. In spite of the ongoing difficulties she is having, which she acknowledges are partly a result of her not knowing enough about the task of teaching, she is able to make this statement based on what she feels is a good relationship with her students. She appears, still, to be giving primacy to this aspect of teaching over all others. The one shift she has made, however, is her view of herself. Gone are the feelings of being a student and in their place is an image of herself as a teacher. The learning she is doing is not that of a student but rather that of a professional learning her craft. Her statement to the Section 11 graduate assistant “I can teach.” and her personal, summative assessment of her first year in the profession that “…while I have a long way to go in my professional development, I have made good progress this year.” are not the comments of Anne, the student but of Anne, emerging teacher.

In her second year, Anne found a colleague with whom she felt particularly attuned describing her as someone “who really cares for kids.” This resonates with Anne who has a similar core belief in the worth of each and every child in her
classroom. This is partly a result of her training in counseling. She acknowledges this as she becomes involved in, what was in the early years of her career a new idea, the integration of special needs children in the regular classroom. Anne feels particularly able to cope with this new development because of her background and her ability to establish positive student-teacher relationships but soon finds there is a significant difference between working with these students in a small, controlled setting as opposed to trying to accomplish the same task while meeting the needs of twenty or more other students at the same time. Though she experiences the difficulties attendant to this situation, they do not deter Anne. Rather her commitment to student-teacher relationships as the foundation of her view of teaching allows her to transcend the negative aspects and to focus on the joy she gets from working with students who need someone as committed as she is to helping them live up to their potential. Anne has found an area of education that dovetails not only with her professional background prior to entering the teaching profession but also one that is consonant with her belief about teaching. In this setting, her professional growth flourishes and leads her, in her third year, into a full-time teaching position.

Anne’s first year of full-time teaching is a time of great frustration as she is caught in the gap between what she knows is required, and wants to achieve, for her special needs students and what is possible for her to attain given the limited material resources of the system in which she is working and her own limits in trying to juggle her job and her family responsibilities. She also feels that she is
not living up to her own high personal standards of performance, a trait she readily acknowledged in a year-end reflection on her time in the pre-service program. She feels it is her sole responsibility to meet all of the challenges posed by the number of special needs students in her class and is disappointed in herself when she is not able to do so. Asking for assistance in the classroom makes her lose some of her confidence in her abilities and leads to a watershed moment in her career when she sets a Christmas deadline for handing in her resignation. At this point, she would rather leave the profession than abandon her belief in children and her ability to work with them all.

Like Antoinette’s belief that children are the world’s most treasured resource, Anne’s belief in the affective side of teaching as being of paramount importance did not change significantly from the beginning of her teacher education program to the end of her third year of teaching which is the time period for my study. Had she not moved into an area of education in which her strength in developing student-teacher relationships was a major asset, she may have faced more serious challenges to her belief about teaching. Fortunately for Anne, she arrived in the profession at exactly the right time as she exemplified the type of teacher her school board needed for working with special needs students. Throughout the early years of her career, Anne was able to put her belief system about teaching into practice rather than having to fundamentally change that system. It is not that her beliefs were inherently misguided. As noted in some of the research reports I surveyed in chapter two, an emphasis on the affective side of
teaching is not uncommon among students beginning their teacher education programs. What is less common is that Anne did not really give up this view of teaching. While most teacher-candidates readjust the emphasis they give to relating to students as they progress through their program and gain more experience in the classroom, Anne appears not to have done so. That she is able to maintain this stance is most likely attributable to her previous training in counseling. She entered teaching with a depth of experience not held by many of her peers. She was able, perhaps, to use this background to help her in the classroom in ways that were unavailable to her colleagues who experienced the need to change similar views in order to experience success.

As I noted earlier in this chapter, I entered the Faculty of Education already convinced of my ability to teach. I had experience making lesson plans as a swimming instructor and had already done some work as a substitute teacher at my old high school. I knew what teaching was about. It was my job to explain the material and the students’ job to demonstrate that they understood the material by doing well on summative tests and exams. Teaching as transmission formed the core of my belief about teaching. After all, the tactic had worked for me as a student so I had no reason to suppose that the experience had been any different for my peers. However, the time during which I was a student was an era in which this view of teaching was considered the norm. The one teacher I had in my high school years who deviated from this accepted methodology was considered extreme in his beliefs and did not remain on staff very long.
The methodology courses in my teacher education program reinforced my view of teaching. While my English methods course did suggest some approaches that were more student-centred, I did not expect to be teaching English upon graduation. Jobs teaching English would have more than enough applicants whose qualifications were easily superior to mine. Consequently, I paid little attention to how one might teach in a way other than using direct instruction, which was the focus in my Mathematics course. Though I was exposed to other viewpoints they did not challenge my belief system. English, in my opinion, had far more latitude in how it might be taught because it was not a hard science like Mathematics. How could students generate knowledge about Mathematics themselves if I were not there to tell them what the knowledge was? I ended my pre-service program as I had begun it. Student learning was a function of my telling them what they needed to know and then checking to see if they had heard what I said.

Though it became quickly apparent in my first professional experience after graduation from my education program that my view of teaching did not work well with students who were not academically inclined, I persisted in seeing the problem as not one of my making. If only the students were more interested or more capable then they would learn from me. That they did not gain much from my instruction was not my fault. The feedback that I was receiving from the head of the department did nothing to change my views. He was pleased with my work and supported what I was doing in the classroom. The students may not have been learning much about Mathematics but they were at least quiet and no longer
caused major disturbances that had previously disrupted the work of other teachers in adjacent classrooms.

When I began my first full-time position as a Mathematics teacher, I was given academic classes that were capable of playing school. They understood the roles in the classroom in the same way as I did. I was there to explain and they were there to listen. The final exam would tell us both how well we had played out our parts. This arrangement, which went on for the first two years of my career, again did not challenge my view of teaching. There was neither a need for me to change what I was doing nor to question the underlying belief that motivated my actions. As a teacher, I had shown little professional growth between the day I entered the Faculty of Education and the last day of school in my second professional year of teaching. Though I was constantly concerned about my ability to teach I did not spend any time during those two years looking closely at what I was doing and analyzing its effectiveness. The belief system I had in place about my role in the classroom would not begin to undergo significant changes until several years into my career when I began to take additional qualification courses in Special Education and Elementary Education. This finally started the process of change that was needed but absent during my initial years of teaching.

Anne and I may have shared a view of teaching as transmission but hers was tempered by her training as a counselor and her skills in the affective domain of teaching. It was also modified by her maturity in comparison to my callow beginning as a teacher. Though Antoinette and I were approximately the same age
at the time we began our respective careers, Antoinette did not have the impediment of believing that she knew what teaching was and feeling that she did not need to learn much from her experiences. In fact, both Antoinette’s and Anne’s ability to translate experience into professional growth, through a capacity for self-reflection, is most likely responsible for their ultimate success as teachers. The requirement that they keep professional journals as part of their participation in the original Section 11 Project aided them in this process. While I did not keep such a journal, and from the outward appearances of my work in the classroom it would seem that I did not engage in much self-reflection, I believe the doubts I harboured about my ability to teach came not so much from outside incidents such as the parent who wanted her daughter removed from my class, but from the many lunch hours Susan and I spent discussing what we were doing in the classroom during my first two years. We talked about everything we were doing and, being in disparate subject areas, had to talk not so much about how to teach our specific curricula but more about what it meant to teach in general. The seeds for the changes in my view of teaching were sown in those conversations.

An ability to reflect on what it means to teach is the trait which, I feel, links Antoinette, Anne and me together. None of us changed our beliefs about teaching much during the time frame considered in my study. In Antoinette’s and Anne’s case, this was not a difficulty as their beliefs served them well in the classroom. In my case, however, my view of teaching needed to change in order for me to grow as a teacher. I could choose to retain my view as many of my older colleagues did
at the time or I could choose to change it to prevent myself from stultifying as a teacher. The decision to change ultimately came from recognizing that what I was doing in the classroom was serving neither my students nor myself in any positive way. That recognition was only made possible through the discussions Susan and I had throughout my early career. I think that the ability to stand back and see what is happening while it is occurring rather than merely reacting to it is one of the characteristics necessary for, though not a guarantee of, success in teaching. Antoinette and Anne certainly had that ability from the beginning and I developed it over time.

**What are the Effects of Initial Placement on Beginning Teachers?**

The beliefs and life experiences that beginning teachers carry into the classroom as they start their careers have a significant effect on their actions and the development of their identities as teachers. But this effect is mutable as many novices who are capable of effective self-reflection become more aware of these underlying factors and adjust, as necessary, both what they believe about teaching and how they carry out the act of teaching. What are often beyond their control, however, are the circumstances of their first professional positions. This leads to my third research question—What role is played by external influences on beginning teachers as they make the transition to professional teaching? The thesis aim related to this question is: to search for ways the school systems in which each participant worked influenced her/his development as a beginning teacher. Certainly Angela’s initial placement experience launched me into my graduate
studies as it seemed, at the time, to be an extreme example of the system having failed a young teacher. After examining the first years of Antoinette’s and Anne’s careers as well as reflecting on my own beginnings, I began to see that the assignment faced by a new teacher is likely the most important factor that determines whether s/he is ultimately able to make a successful transition into the profession, using the definition of success set out at the beginning of this thesis, or whether, like Angela, s/he leaves the profession almost immediately upon entering it having had her/his hopes and dreams crushed by a seemingly indifferent professional environment. Antoinette, Anne and I had quite different experiences as we took full responsibility for the students in front of us. The effect of these differences on how we negotiated a successful passage from student to teacher gives some indication of the types of initial placements we, as a profession, might consider for those who have chosen to teach.

Antoinette could very easily have become another Angela. She began her first year of teaching with a degree of confidence about her ability to teach that was appropriate for someone at her level of experience. She recognized that she still had much to learn and, based on her pre-service year, was capable of learning it as she worked. She had secured a position teaching in a secondary school and was looking forward to developing into “…the educator I am to become.”. While she was trained in the teaching of English, most of her timetable during her first semester was made up of classes in English as a Second Language. There is a significant difference between the two courses and Antoinette was not specifically
prepared for the latter. She approached the task with a positive attitude and a belief in herself as a competent teacher. She would be able to rise to the challenge. Everything was in place, from her point of view, for her to be able to put into practice all that she had learned during the previous year. The speed at which this view disintegrated is nothing short of astonishing. Within three days, she came to the realization that the timetable she had been given was not what it appeared to be on the surface and by the end of her first week of teaching she was contemplating leaving the profession to which she felt she had been called. Thus began a time of trial that was a major factor in Antoinette’s development as a teacher.

Antoinette did not assign blame for her predicament to the system that employed her nor to the preparation, or possible lack thereof, that she underwent during her pre-service year. Rather she took personal responsibility for it—if she were just a better teacher she would be able to meet the needs of the students before her. She would be able to create a learning environment for them that was not like the chaotic situation she, and they, faced every day. The stress created by this stance became cyclical. The more worried she became about her inability to live up to her personal expectations the less able she became to do so. The less able she felt the more worried she became. During this period, it was not only the support of her family and her abiding faith that kept her from spiraling into complete despair, as Angela had done, but also that of her peers in the Section 11 Project. Contact with this group gave her a place where she could be completely open about her fears and in turn receive reassurance that she was still the same
person who had entered teaching with such a deep belief in the worthiness of the enterprise. Her concerns, as expressed in her journal, that she was “hardening” and becoming “tough” and that she had “virtually lost [her] sense of humour” were eased, somewhat, by people whom she felt understood what she was saying because they, too, were coming to terms with beginning teaching.

In spite of the daily difficulties she faced in the classroom, Antoinette persevered. In many ways, her ordeal helped her to become a much stronger teacher than she may have become had she been given a timetable that posed no problems. As she wrote in her journal at the beginning of the second semester, the final months of the semester “…held incredible change and tremendous learning opportunities.” Few beginning teachers would be able to hold such a positive view of working with students with whom even the more experienced teachers within her school were having problems as evidenced by their comment to Antoinette that “if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.” Antoinette’s ongoing search for answers to her dilemmas went beyond merely finding ways to survive her first semester. She actively worked to become a better teacher as she was “[c]onstantly thinking of improving, changing & modifying curriculum.” Though this quote is taken from a journal entry written in her second semester, there is little doubt that this activity was also taking place during the first semester. Much of this work, unfortunately, was being accomplished in near isolation.

The support Antoinette received during that first semester, other than the passing comments made to her by colleagues who meant well but whose advice to
be less personally involved could not be taken by Antoinette, appears to have been non-existent. Although she was assured by her vice-principal, when she finally turned to him for help after a fight erupted in one of her classes, that she was not alone and that there were support systems in place, there does not seem to be any evidence of these systems swinging into action to help Antoinette. Antoinette does not give any indication in her writings during the first semester of what those systems might be but one gets the impression that she must be the one who accesses them rather than them being put into action on her behalf. She did get some assistance when some of her more difficult students were removed from her class but this was not the type of ongoing professional support she likely needed. In fact, removing these students merely added to Antoinette’s belief that she was responsible for what was happening in front of her and if she were better at her job these students would not have had to be removed. She was left on her own to figure out how to accomplish the task of becoming a better teacher. This experience led her to another area of professional growth.

There is an attitude still held, unfortunately, by many teachers who have struggled through and survived their early years of teaching that having paid their dues it is up to the next generation to likewise pay theirs. A first year, such as Antoinette experienced, is just part of the journey to becoming a teacher. They went through it so why should there be any major concern on their part that those who follow be spared the initiation? Antoinette did not become part of this group. As she began her second year, she made a commitment to do everything she could
to assist those who came after her if they wanted such support. This need was
evident as four new teachers availed themselves of her offer. Though only a
second year teacher, Antoinette had already begun thinking about ways to make
the profession a better place for beginning teachers. Her journal entry, in which
she mused about the inadequacies of the system calling out for leadership to
initiate change and her possible role in answering that call, indicates just how
strongly she felt about this concept. As Angela’s professional demise led to my
commitment that it not happen to another young teacher, Antoinette’s first year
experiences led her to a belief that if she could not prevent others from having a
similar first encounter with teaching then she could at least provide them with the
support and help that appear to have been missing for her.

Anne’s measured entry into the profession prevented her, initially, from
experiencing the type of first year that is, sadly, more often than not like that of
Antoinette. As she began her first year, she was sympathetic to the plight of many
of the other participants in the Section 11 Project who, like Antoinette, were
struggling with their teaching assignments. She considered herself fortunate that
her administration was supportive of her work and understanding in their
acknowledgement of her novice status. This, she felt, insulated her from what she
saw as unfair and unrealistic demands of her peers made by people indifferent to
their needs. By choosing to teach part-time, she had given herself the time, as she
wrote in her journal, for “reflection, professional development & adequate
program development”. The environment she created for herself gave her the
confidence, even in her first year, to start putting together material to assist other new teachers. This activity, however, was also in response to the lack of information she felt she had been given about the administrative side of teaching. Her anticipation of an upcoming Section 11 symposium was not so much precipitated by a need to discuss matters related to curriculum and classroom practices but more by a desire to talk about the peripheral responsibilities she found occupying much of her time. On the whole, however, Anne’s first year of teaching, though be it part-time, allowed her to become more confident about her skills as a teacher and affirmed her decision to enter the profession. The second year of her self-imposed introduction to teaching, in which she continued to teach part-time, seems to have gone as well as the first. Again she had time to address issues brought about by the presence of several special needs children in her classroom. She noted the increased workload occasioned by this arrangement but did not ultimately find herself overwhelmed by it. She continued to grow and develop into a confident and capable classroom teacher. It was her third year, when she not only started her first year of fulltime teaching but was also part of the staff opening a new elementary school, that Anne experienced that which, for many, typifies an introduction to teaching—a difficult group of students coupled with a lack of professional support.

Prior to this experience, Anne had had the time and space as well as the support of an understanding administration to develop an identity as a teacher. She was confident in her ability to teach and had learned much about the day-to-day
business of running a classroom. What she suddenly lacked in this third year was the luxury of time. In addition, with the opening of a new school there was no deeply established culture to observe and from which to gain knowledge and no clearly delineated set of procedures and policies in place. In a sense, everyone—novice and veteran teacher alike—was put in the position of being a first-year teacher again. Everything, though familiar, was new and had to be learned from the beginning. Thus, when Anne needed help she was hesitant to ask for it, as she wanted to carry her share of the load. Everyone was busy and working hard to lay a sure educational foundation in the new surroundings and Anne’s difficulties appear to have been lost in the busyness of that first year.

One result of Anne having to find solutions to problems that should have been anticipated during the planning for the opening of the new school was her development as a strong advocate for the special needs students. At the same time, a less salubrious outcome was a loss of the confidence she had developed as a teacher as she began to question whether her decision to enter teaching had been the right one. This was in spite of having had two years in a classroom during which time she had described herself as content and happy at having entered the profession. This points to the importance of initial placements on beginning teachers. Here was a mature individual who had already experienced a period of significant professional growth who was reduced to setting herself a deadline for getting out of the profession in order to regain a measure of control and balance in her life. At no time during the previous two years had she entertained the thought
of leaving teaching. The difficulties she had experienced during that time did not bring her to that point. She was fortunate, as she readily acknowledged in later writing about this period in her career, that the administration of the school was as supportive of her as they could be and worked as fast as they could to get her the type of daily assistance she needed in her classroom. Had this not been the case, Anne would, most likely, have been yet another entry in the long list of beginning teachers who leave the profession during the critical transitional period between graduation and the gaining of a permanent contract with a school board. While Antoinette had to face the decision about continuing in the profession during her first year, Anne faced the same decision for similar reasons three years into her career.

My initial two years of teaching were orchestrated by my department head who ensured that the classes I taught would not present any classroom management challenges and who limited me to two courses. Even with this careful introduction to teaching, I still felt overwhelmed by the amount of work that was required as there were no other supports in place to help me learn the school culture and policies as I learned the curriculum I was expected to teach. Collegiality was not a concept that existed either in my department or in the school in general. As many beginning teachers do, I did not ask for help as I assumed to do so would signal to my immediate supervisors that I was not capable of doing my job. I turned to Susan who had no authority over me to learn the intricacies of running a classroom while trying to deliver the course content. Though I found out
half way through the school year that someone had been assigned to me to fulfill this role, the support system for new teachers like me was so loosely defined and poorly implemented that I was never informed of its existence. While the self-reliance that such a situation engendered was one of the positive outcomes of this arrangement, the lack of constructive feedback about what I was doing in the classroom left me with deep misgivings about my ability to teach. Outwardly, I presented to the world the image of a confident young teacher but inwardly I constantly compared myself to my colleagues who were teaching the same courses as I and always felt inadequate. I made a successful transition to teaching in that my probationary contract was replaced with a permanent one and my government certificates authorizing me to teach in the province were also converted from interim to permanent, but it was a very limited success when compared to the definition I set out in the introduction of this thesis.

When the early years of our careers are compared, there is a common thread that binds Antoinette, Anne and me together. We all entered our careers believing, for various reasons, we could teach and we all experienced, to varying degrees, an erosion of that belief attributable to the nature of our initial placements. While these first experiences as professional teachers ranged from the near impossible situation Antoinette faced through Anne’s self-imposed gradual introduction to my seemingly benign and trouble-free entry, each one left its mark on us as teachers. We all became successful teachers but we all had to do so with little to no support from those around us who, in an ideal world, should have been
the ones to help us make the transition to teaching. This made all three of us look for help from outside. Antoinette and Anne were fortunate in that they had a built-in support system available to them through their participation in the Section 11 Project. I found Susan who became the person who did for me what Section 11 did for Antoinette and Anne.

Conclusions

There are two distinct, though strongly tied, parts to the beginning of a career in teaching. There is that which occurs during a formal professional preparation period, which may last one to two years, and then there is that which occurs during the first critical years of professional teaching. Consequently, I present my conclusions within each of these time frames.

The Professional Preparation Period

As I noted in my discussion on the utility of life experience as a sole predictor of success in teaching, it is not possible to look at particular sets of life experiences and say that this person will be successful while that person will not. Were it to be so then teaching would become a very barren place where everyone involved in it would be similar in personality and outlook. The very strength of teaching comes from the diversity of people practising their craft. With no defining set of experiences to determine who is accepted into a professional preparation program it is likely that some who enter may not be entirely suited to the profession and will leave teaching within a few years of graduation or, indeed, withdraw before completing their training. While this is not an ideal situation, it is
one that cannot be prevented entirely. However, it would be better, both for the individual and for the profession, if those unsuited to teaching were able to come to this recognition before entering a classroom of their own. In order to do so, some adjustments to how we prepare people to teach need to occur. In making these changes not only will those who ultimately choose to leave benefit from the ability to make an informed decision about their withdrawal, but also those who graduate into the profession will be better prepared to face the challenges of beginning teaching.

Antoinette and Anne were successful in making the transition to teaching partially as a result of a character trait they shared. Both women had a strong sense of self. They were comfortable with who they were as people. When they encountered difficulties during those early years they bent but did not break. Antoinette’s source of strength was her deeply held faith while Anne’s came from the maturity of her years and her previous professional experiences. That is not to say that everyone who is accepted into teaching should either have firm religious beliefs or be of an age sufficient to allow a significant degree of personal growth to have already occurred. It would be impossible, if not also illegal, to limit entrance to teaching to those persons having one or both of these two attributes. What is possible, however, is to include in a teacher preparation program the means by which the participants may develop a sense of self that will help them through some of the more difficult times in beginning teaching.
Most, if not all, teacher preparation programs require the teacher-candidates to have an understanding of child and adolescent psychology. Time is given for them to learn about the development of self in the students whose futures will be entrusted to them. What is not usually given is time for the teacher-candidates themselves to examine their own personal development and the effect it will have on what they do in the classroom. Numerous researchers whose work I examined commented on the effect of teachers’ personal experiences on their actions in the classroom. Many of the teachers they worked with were likely not aware themselves of the source of their behaviours. It is my contention that as part of a teacher preparation program, students should be taught the skills necessary for self-reflection so that they may come to a better understanding of themselves as people.

As was noted earlier in this thesis, reflective writing is widely used. That it is not well used becomes apparent as students complain about having to write such pieces. Rather than being a way to come to an understanding of themselves, many students see it as just another exercise to be completed. The writing they do is often not particularly reflective as they have not been taught the skills needed to truly stand outside themselves and see what they are doing and, having done so, to analyze those actions in light of their own experiences. Part of assisting students to carry out the type of self-reflection that will foster personal awareness and growth is allowing adequate time for discussing what has been written. Whether this is done in a group setting or a one on one meeting with the instructor depends on the
nature of the reflection being required. In either case, it is also necessary that instructors who are involved in this aspect of a teacher preparation program be qualified to work with students engaged in such writing. At the very least a strong background in adult psychology is required. Qualification as a clinical psychologist would be ideal.

Along with the personal awareness and growth that would be the outcome of including such training in the preparation of teachers would be the ability to make manifest to the students their beliefs about teaching. As indicated by some of the research I considered, many students either temporarily adopt the knowledge they are gaining about how to teach only to abandon it when faced with their first classes or they adapt the knowledge to fit their internal view of teaching even when the two are at odds with one another. In the latter situation, it would be particularly helpful if the student were able to recognize these internal beliefs, to understand the source of those beliefs and to question their value in light of the new knowledge being gained.

When teachers enter classrooms it is not possible to do so, though some manage to accomplish it, without bringing every experience that shaped them as teachers along with them. “Donning the mantle of teaching” does not mean transforming oneself from Clark Kent to Superman as the classroom threshold is crossed. Rather, it is incorporating into one’s personality yet another aspect. The successful teacher is the one who remains true to her-/himself both inside and outside of the classroom. This is what Antoinette and Anne were able to do. With
appropriate teaching, I believe all beginning teachers would be able to make the same transition.

The ability to alter how we prepare teachers is limited by the time available to do so. Though many graduates are critical of their professional preparation programs for not teaching them *everything* they need to know about teaching and not providing them with a “how to” handbook to address every possible classroom issue that arises, such a program would take much longer than the one or two years that is currently standard. Even the suggested change I have made would, if it were acted upon, require that two years become the standard program length. Thus, I have only made the one recommendation. However, this one change addresses several issues that were identified in the research I considered. Of all the possible changes that could be made to teacher preparation, from more time in the classroom to more emphasis on issues such as classroom management and discipline, it is the one that I believe would have the most benefit and result in more beginning teachers being more like Antoinette and Anne and less like Angela.

**The Transitional Years**

Teaching is possibly unique among all the professions in that its newly qualified practitioners are immediately given the same responsibilities as those who have been in the profession for years. In many cases, this is happening at a time when these same people are experiencing other major life transitions such as settling into a new community, choosing a life partner, or, as is more common
recently due to economic constraints, leaving home for the first time. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that many beginning teachers experience a difficult adjustment period. For some, it becomes overwhelming and results in their premature departure from the profession. Others make the adjustment with varying degrees of ease and speed. How the profession might help prevent the former and encourage the latter is the focus of this section. There are three distinct ways in which I feel this can be accomplished—induction, progressive responsibility, and legislated limits to teaching load and involvement in extra-curricular activities.

**Induction**

Induction is a word that often, unfortunately, is used as a gentler way of saying indoctrination. The purposes of orientation sessions held by many institutions are to assist new employees to learn about the overall aims of the institution as well as the policies and procedures that directly affect the employee’s daily work. It is much the same in teaching. School boards hold sessions to provide the new teacher with information considered necessary to the daily functioning of the schools. At the school level, staff meetings, either before the opening of school or during the first week, accomplish the same task. This overload of information, which is general in nature, often does little to help the new teacher start down a path that will lead to a successful transition to teaching. During the year, when time is taken for the professional development of the staff there is often no consideration given to the fact that the professional development needs of beginning teachers are distinct from those of experienced practitioners.
While some experienced teachers are still at the consciously competent stage in their development where they are able to perform the act of teaching without assistance but must think about what they are doing, many more are at the unconsciously competent stage where they have become so adept that they no longer need to think about what they are doing and often, as a result, are unable to explain to others how or why they carry out certain actions. Beginning teachers, for the most part, start their professional preparation program unconsciously incompetent in that they are not aware of their deficiencies and often do not accept the relevance or usefulness of the skills and knowledge to which they are exposed. By the end of their program, as they graduate and take up their place in the profession, most have reached the consciously incompetent stage which is marked by their recognition that they have still have much to learn and they are determined to do so. Unfortunately, most of the assistance they are given often assumes a more advanced stage of development that leaves them unable to use the information provided. A properly designed induction program would address this difficulty. Antoinette, Anne and I all began our careers at the consciously incompetent stage of the development of a new skill. We were left on our own, to varying degrees, to acquire the necessary learning to move beyond this stage. How much easier would it have been for us all had there been a system in place that focused on helping us accomplish this task?

The Ministry of Education in Ontario deems the induction of new teachers into the profession so important that it mandates such programs in every school
board under its jurisdiction. What it does not do, however, is prescribe exactly what those programs should be. Each board is free to develop its own program based on local needs. The result, as reported by the Ontario College of Teachers in 2006, is a wide disparity in the implementation and quality of these programs. As a delegate to the second Teacher Induction Practices Symposium, held in Edmonton, Alberta in November 2007, I found that this situation is not unique to Ontario. In one break out session an official from a large, urban school district, in speaking about the induction program being used in his jurisdiction, noted that most of the first-year teachers they hire end up working in difficult, inner city schools. While this is not an unusual situation, his statement that the administration had no idea why that occurred left those in the room stunned by his admission. He quickly turned the session over to the Alberta Teachers’ Association representative who explained that it was the union who was charged with the task of conducting the induction program in this board. She went on to describe workshops that did little more than provide new teachers with the same information they might get from general, new employee orientation sessions. This was in stark comparison to another school district whose program involved every level of administration from superintendents to lead teachers and every new teacher whether novice or veteran. Their program provided professional development that acknowledged the differing needs of the participants. It also did much of what Section 11 did for Antoinette and Anne. It provided a forum for new teachers to meet in non-evaluative settings to discuss their experiences and receive
assistance from experienced teachers to help them address specific issues in their classrooms. New teachers were involved in this induction program for the first three years of their employment with the school district. During that time, as each cohort moved through the system, they were given differing levels of support with those in the first year meeting more often and receiving professional development in areas determined by the administration, such as classroom management and discipline. In the third year, the participants met less often on a formal basis and the topics addressed were in response to the needs expressed by these teachers. Though there were fewer mandated meetings, many of the teachers who were in this last year of induction met informally with their colleagues and carried on their own professional development. They had become part of a community of teachers who actively supported one another in their journey into teaching. It is this second model of induction that I believe should become standard practice.

There is much in the research I surveyed that lionizes the concept of mentoring as the best way to assist new teachers in making the transition to professional teaching. However, as Semeniuk (1999) has pointed out, it is a concept that is ill defined having as many meanings as there are practitioners. In addition, she suggested that the underlying principle of mentoring is friendship. It is hard to tell either a beginning teacher to go out and find a new best friend to be their mentor or to direct an experienced teacher to become a novice teacher’s mentor by becoming their new best friend. Such relationships develop over time. Certainly that was the case in my relationship with Susan. We became friends
before we became each other’s mentor. Teacher induction needs to move beyond the notion of mentoring, though it need not necessarily preclude it from happening, and provide the kind of deliberate, planned professional development that will assist novice teachers to move from unconscious competence to conscious competence and beyond. Implementing such programs, though costly, would do much to reduce the human cost incurred by potentially exceptional teachers leaving the profession both disappointed and disillusioned.

**Progressive Responsibility**

Antoinette’s first year of teaching, especially her first semester, found her with full responsibility for students she was ill equipped to teach. Anne sidestepped the issue of full responsibility during the first two years of her career by teaching part-time but came face-to-face with it in her third year. I was given full responsibility for students who were barely younger than I when I began my career. In each case, we were making decisions about students that potentially would have far reaching effects on them at a time when we were minimally capable of carrying out our jobs effectively. Happily, none of us was so incompetent as to cause serious, long-term damage—though my evaluation practices during my initial years no doubt caused many of my students to have some negative memories of their time with me. As Antoinette wrote in her journal, “…it’s highly unlikely that I’ll do anything so atrociously negative that it’ll do serious damage to a student. So, not only will I survive, but they’ll survive having had me this year!” The implementation of progressive responsibility would do
much to help novice teachers ease their way into teaching as they learn more about the craft of teaching. Anne’s self-imposed period of part-time teaching allowed her to do just that. Though she experienced difficulties in her third year, she had two years where she was not the only one involved with a particular group of students and in which she had the time to pursue her own professional development. As a result, she brought to her third, and difficult, year a maturity that Antoinette lacked when she first realized the enormity of the challenges posed by her students.

Progressive responsibility, as I envision it, is a form of internship. Under such a system, the novice teacher would co-teach with an experienced teacher who would ultimately have the final responsibility for assigning grades for a course or determining whether students move into the next grade level with or without modifications to their programs. Ideally, the experienced teacher would teach fifty per cent of their assigned timetable with the novice having responsibility for teaching remaining portion. As the year progresses, the time spent teaching by the novice would increase until a full time load is achieved. The time made available to the experienced teacher by this arrangement would allow her/him to observe the novice and provide constructive criticism of her/his teaching. The time spent not teaching would give the novice the opportunity to observe not only the experienced teacher to whom s/he is assigned but also other teachers within the school with exemplary practice. In addition, the hidden work of a teacher—planning and marking—could be more easily accomplished by the novice when there is more time to accomplish these tasks. Both the novice and the experienced
teacher would also have time to pursue personal professional development which could be within with an effective induction program.

There are many impediments to the implementation of such an internship not the least of which is money in an era when government funding of education is stretched to the limit. It is obvious that both the novices and the experienced teachers would have to be paid for the work that they do and it is unlikely that experienced teachers would become involved in such a project if it meant a reduction in their salaries. As the teaching load for the novices increases, it is not unreasonable for them to expect concomitant increases in the monetary compensation they receive. Despite the logistical difficulties in implementing this idea, I believe it would do much to increase the chances of beginning teachers completing a successful transition to teaching and, in the long run, of their moving into the highest stage of skill performance, unconscious competence, in the shortest amount of time.

**Restricted Work Load**

As a result of my department head’s philosophy I was given only two courses to teach. This situation was not the norm then and according to the Ontario College of Teachers remains, for the most part, an anomaly as it reported in 2006 that many first-year teachers were still being given timetables containing subjects they were not qualified to teach, four or more different class preparations and classes much like that which greeted Antoinette on her entrance to the profession.
The culture of teaching requiring the paying of one’s dues that I commented on earlier would seem to be flourishing still.

There is, of course, a difference between the organization of elementary and secondary schools in Ontario. In the secondary level, teachers are assigned specific courses to be delivered to different, usually six, groups of students while in the elementary panel, teachers may have only one group of students but they are expected to deliver multiple different curricula to this class. In both cases, the amount of planning and preparation required of the new teacher is often beyond what they are capable of accomplishing. In addition, there is an expectation that they, along with their colleagues, will contribute to the extra-curricular program within the school. The share of these duties is not always evenly distributed as some of the more time consuming activities such as coaching and supervising the preparation of the school’s yearbook are avoided by more seasoned teachers and loaded onto the backs of beginning teachers who are eager to show that they are, indeed, part of the team. Saying no to participating in extra curricular activities is less of an option now for novice teachers as their ability to contribute to this part of school life is often considered during the hiring process alongside their academic qualifications. While the benefits of working with students in non-classroom settings which allow a teacher to develop positive teacher-student relationships unrelated to those fashioned during teaching are many, they come at the price for the novice for whom time is a precious commodity in short supply. More than once, in my work with beginning teachers, I have reminded them that
there are only one hundred and sixty-eight hours in a week and to remain healthy enough to be effective in the classroom they should be spending at least forty-nine of those hours getting an adequate amount of sleep. By the time I have helped them subtract the hours they are either in a classroom or preparing for teaching and those which must be spent on such mundane activities as preparing and eating meals, commuting to and from the workplace, and personal chores including laundry and housework they are astounded at how little is left over to spend time with friends and family or for any other activity which would contribute to their overall wellbeing, especially if they are heavily involved with extra-curricular activities. While more hours cannot be added to a week, the number of hours available for a beginning teacher to engage in activities that would allow them to be more effective professionals can be increased. To do so, however, requires changes to the types of timetables given to novices and to the expectations concerning their involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Based on the experiences of Antoinette and Anne, I propose that beginning teachers be limited to no more than three different class preparations and that these be in subject areas for which they have an appropriate academic background and in which they have completed a program of professional preparation. Thus situations such as Antoinette’s where she was given a timetable that contained English as a Second Language for which she had no preparation could be avoided. In secondary schools, it is not uncommon for a timetable to be cobbled together from the leftovers after tenured teachers have been given schedules commensurate
with their seniority. Thus a beginning teacher qualified in Mathematics and Science might find her/himself teaching not only these subjects but also Family Studies and English in the misguided perception that the latter two do not require a great amount of training on the part of the teacher. It has certainly happened in more than one school where I have taught. In addition to this restriction on the number of subject areas a new teacher may be assigned, extra-curricular involvement should be limited to one activity each year during the first two years of the teacher’s career. This would allow a novice to say no to many of the demands made of them in this area by their supervisors and colleagues. By limiting the breadth of a new teacher’s timetable and keeping the extra-curricular workload to a minimum, more time will be available to the novice to concentrate on learning the craft of teaching and starting on a path leading to a successful transition to teaching.

Even my own students in teacher education readily admit that they will accept any teaching load in order to obtain a fulltime position. Their thinking is that they will do whatever is necessary to make it through the first year and hope for an improvement in their circumstances in future years. Perhaps this is why so many of the first-year teachers in a particular school district in Alberta are employed in inner-city schools. As long as there are willing takers of jobs that are likely to increase the teacher dropout rate during the transitional years there will always be those types of jobs available. Unfortunately, stopping this practice will require hiring more teachers on a part-time basis to cover the “odds and ends” and
it is likely the novice teacher who will be the one to address this need. While restrictions on workload may have many benefits for beginning teachers, it also carries with it the risk that these people will find themselves in a permanent part-time situation with no hope of finding a fulltime position in their field.

**Areas for Future Research into the Careers of Beginning Teachers**

As I wrote earlier in this thesis, any research into a possible direct connection between life experiences and success in teaching is not something that is desirable. What is desirable, though, is more research into the ways those experiences act as lens through which the prospective teachers view their pre-service training. Such research has the potential to improve such programs in ways that go beyond that which I have suggested in my conclusions. In addition to this branch of inquiry, more needs to be known about the core beliefs of beginning teachers and the ways in which these change, or not, over time. By having this data available, it may be possible to address, either during the pre-service years or the transitional career years of novices, situations in which such beliefs inhibit their professional growth. Finally, in jurisdictions where solid induction programs such as the one I described exist, research into the differences in the success rates between new teachers in these school districts and those starting their careers in ones where programs are poorly designed or lacking may allow the profession a way of making informed changes to a prevailing culture that, at present, seems satisfied with the status quo.
Summary

The challenges faced by beginning teachers have remained nearly constant over the years despite numerous recommendations such as the ones I have made in this thesis. I have often expressed my opinion that teaching is the one profession where we tend to eat our young. We provide them with the minimal skills necessary to begin in the profession as a result of the amount of time available to do so and then send them into a world where they are given the same responsibilities as a long-time member of the profession. On top of that, we give many of them nearly impossible teaching assignments with next to no support and then express our surprise when so many of them flounder and, in some cases, fail to experience success. The surprise should be that so many of them do manage to cross the divide successfully. Unfortunately, they often have to build their own bridges without adequate sets of blueprints or training to do so. It is time that the teaching profession makes a commitment to reversing this situation. As Antoinette continually asserted during her pre-service year and her horrendous introduction to teaching that children are the world’s most precious resource, new teachers who teach those children are the profession’s most precious resource. We must begin to treat them accordingly.
Bibliography


Hanson, Susan & Moir, Ellen. (2007). Beyond mentoring: How veteran mentors apply their new skills as teachers and leaders in schools. In Proceedings from the Teacher Induction, Mentoring and Renewal Academic Symposium. Toronto: Centre for Teacher Development, OISE/UT.


Appendix A

Letter of Informed Consent

Dear (Name of Invitee):

My name is Alyson Worrall. As a co-member of the original Section 11 Project, I am inviting your continued participation in this research by becoming a participant in my study, *Starting and Staying on Course: Influences of Pre-Service and Initial Placement on Beginning Teachers*. I am undertaking this research as part of the requirements for completing the Doctor of Philosophy degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. The following outlines the study itself and information about your participation should you decide to accept my invitation. If you require any further information or explanation, please contact me at [phone number deleted] My thesis supervisor is Dr. Johan L. Aitken who may be contacted at the OISE/UT at [phone number deleted].

The objectives proposed for this study are:

- to investigate how each participant’s personal narrative influenced her/his motivation to become a teacher and how it manifested itself in the classroom,
- to assess the extent to which a biography of each participant contains indicators of success, or possible failure, in teaching,
- to document how each participant viewed him/herself as a beginning teacher in the context of his/her school and how this view did or did not change from that held as a pre-service teacher,
- to search for ways the school systems in which each participant worked influenced her/his development as a beginning teacher.

Rationale for the Study: Research into this area is significant at this time as Ontario faces a shortage of teachers caused in part by the large number of teachers who have retired or will retire in the next five years. Information on ways in which Faculties of Education and/or school boards might work with pre-service and beginning teachers to assist them in becoming successful members of the teaching profession is of paramount importance. It is expensive, in terms of both time and money, to train a new teacher. Public education in Ontario cannot afford to lose capable and qualified entrants to the profession if implementing programs that might be informed by the findings of this study can prevent their loss.

A Brief Overview: While the Section 11 Project had over thirty participants, my study will be confined to only three of these people. As my study is limited to the pre-service year and the two years immediately following, I am interested in those
members of Section 11 who fit this time frame and who either remained in the teaching profession during that time or who, for various reasons, chose not to continue in the classroom. Based on the information from the synopses of the symposia you and I both attended I believe you fulfill these criteria and I invite your assistance with my work. Your participation in this study would consist of three interviews of approximately one hour with me between the date of your agreement to participate and December 2003. These would be carried out at a time and place convenient to you and will be audio taped. I will make a written transcript of each interview. During the interviews you may decline to answer any questions posed without prejudice. The purpose of the first interview is to update your information regarding your employment as a teacher since the end of the Section 11 Project. The second interview, which will take place during the data analysis phase of my study, is to provide you with an opportunity to discuss with me the validity of the observations and conclusions I come to after analyzing your data. The third interview, which will take place at the end of the study, is to allow you a final opportunity to discuss my conclusions. In addition to the interview transcripts, I intend to use data you have already provided in the original Section 11 Project. This consists of transcripts made from video and audiotapes of the Section 11 symposia, questionnaires, practicum placement reports, personal narratives and biographies, and reflections on practice. By means of this letter I am asking your permission to access your material contained in the Section 11 files.

What are the benefits for you?
While you will not be paid, nor offered any other compensation, for your participation in this study, I hope that your participation will provide you with a degree of personal satisfaction and will allow you an opportunity for professional growth through continued reflection on your practice. The information you provide may well be essential if I am to attain the objectives of the study. At the completion of my work, I will provide you with a summary of my findings. Additionally, once the University of Toronto accepts the final thesis, you may, if your wish, gain access to the entire thesis in the OISE/UT library.

What are the risks incurred by participating in this study?
There are no external risks to participating in this study. Only you, Dr. Aitken, and I will be privy to the data that has been and will be collected from you. All the raw data will be kept in confidence and you will not be identified by name in the study, nor will your school be identified. The audiotapes of the interviews will be erased once the written transcripts are completed. The written transcripts will not be added to the original Section 11 data without your permission. I will keep the interview transcripts on file for a period of five years after your participation. After that time, the transcripts will be shredded. The original material collected by Dr. Aitken for the Section 11 Project will remain under her control.
In addition to my Doctoral Thesis, the expected uses of an analysis of the data collected in this study are articles authored by me for publication in refereed journals and presentations by me at conferences related to the field of study. The probability of others discerning your identity in published material is extremely low and would appear to me to be confined to those among your close friends and colleagues whom you may inform of your involvement in this study.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw without prejudice at any time by indicating to me in writing that you wish to withdraw. On receipt of such a letter, I will destroy the written transcripts of your interview(s) with me.

**When will your participation begin?**

If you decide to participate in this study, please sign and date both copies of this letter and return one copy to me in the enclosed stamped addressed envelop. Please retain the second copy for your personal files.

Upon receipt of your signed consent, I will arrange with you a date for an initial interview.

Sincerely,

Alyson M. Worrall
Ph.D. Candidate
The Centre for Teacher Development
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
OSIE/UT
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto ON M5S 1V6

**RESEARCH CONSENT**

I have read and understood the terms and conditions under which I will participate in the study *Starting and Staying on Course: Influences of Pre-Service and Initial Placement on Beginning Teachers* and agree to being a participant. Additionally, I agree that Alyson M. Worrall may use materials I provided for the original Section 11 study for the purposes indicated in the attached letter. I have signed two copies of this letter and have retained one for my personal files.

Name:_________________________________________________ Please Print

Signature:________________________________________________________________________

Date:_____________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Interview Questions/Prompts

Preamble

You may choose not to answer any of the questions I pose without prejudice.

Interview 1

1. Tell me what you have been doing since your last involvement with the Section 11 Project.

2. How would you define a successful teaching career?

3. Would you say that your teaching career has been successful to this point?

4. Thinking about your involvement in Section 11, what effect/impact did that involvement have on the early years of your career?

5. Thinking about the skills and experiences you brought into your pre-service year, what effect/impact did they have on who you became as a teacher and/or the teacher you became?

Interview 2

1. Now that you have had an opportunity to read my interpretation of the data you provided, the observations I made, and the conclusions I came to, do you feel that it fairly represents your response to your pre-service and early career years? Providing as much detail for the view you hold will assist me in making any necessary re-assessments.