

Chapter 6

The Long and Winding Road: Reflections on Experience of Becoming Teacher Educator

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The long and winding road.... will never disappear, I've seen that road before.... (Lennon and McCartney)

Introduction

Nine years into my present role as a teacher educator in pre-service and graduate education programs at a small university in Northern Ontario, Canada, and after a successful career as a teacher and administrator in public school systems on both sides of the Atlantic, the opportunity to write this retrospective chapter has further illuminated how multi-faceted layers of knowledge and experience have contributed to the (still-a-work-in-process) development of my professional identity as a teacher educator. Surfacing and re-visiting knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences encountered across different career roles have relevance to my continued development of pedagogy and reflective practice—along with generous contributions of wisdom from those encountered en route. As Schubert (1991) suggests, “Teachers are continuously in the midst of a blend of theory (their evolving ideas and personal belief systems) and practice (their reflective action); I refer to this blend as praxis” (p. 207). As teacher educator and self-study researcher, I too inquire deeply and write about my practice, including as “research” rich insights and understandings revealed as embedded in my work.

Thirty-five years since completing my initial teacher education in London, England (1975–1979), I have been fortunate to teach and learn alongside many others, formally and informally, in diverse geographical locations and socio-political contexts and as a result of different professional roles (e.g., teacher (pre-K–post-graduate); educational consultant; elementary school principal (JK–8); author; teacher educator; student; educational researcher). As someone who relishes the challenges and opportunities inherent in such professional transitions (particularly

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as these relate to my being and becoming a teacher educator) the theme of this book offered a welcome opportunity to explore my own story of *the journey to here*. Believing that, “*Stories, as they are told, retold, represented and enacted define, unite and situate us. They have the power to shape our futures.*” (Australian Literacy Educators Association (ALEA) Conference theme 2008), and considering I am still in the process of “shaping my future,” I habitually return to overarching themes of stories, places, spaces, and people as lenses through which to examine profound and related influences on my experience. My identity as teacher educator and self-study researcher continues to evolve. The metaphor of traveling along the road as professional journey evokes my experience. Along my own long and winding road of constant becoming, significant transitions and transformations have marked key stages in the journey. Fostering and sustaining meaningful relationships over time, and interrogating, developing, and enacting relevant and rigorous teacher education emerge as characteristic of my life and work.

My narrative seeks to illustrate how, more than 30 years after graduating as a teacher from the University of London, my pedagogy of teacher education is consistently transitioned through critical reflection on experience and research guided by self-study of teacher education practice (S-STEP). As Clandinin (2010) suggests:

Our work is not to create spaces that educate us for fixed identities, fixed stories to live by. It is to create education spaces in which teachers can compose stories to live by that allow them to shift who they are, and are becoming, as they attend to the shifting subject matter (p. 281).

Critical reflection on experience leading to increased awareness of transitions and change in my thinking and practice, contribute much to my own story. Through the metaphor of a “long and winding road” I share explorations of constructing the meaning of my own experience for me, as a teacher educator and self-study scholar; I revisit interconnected events, changes in direction, signposts, signals, and revised topography that reflect transitions, change, and transformation in my constantly evolving beliefs, practice, and sense of professional identity as teacher educator.

Theoretical Understandings

My philosophy of education and work with beginning teachers continues to be shaped and informed by experience. It has become increasingly clear that efforts to facilitate, explore, and understand teacher candidates’ perspectives *alongside* them remains a priority. Interpretations of Vygotsky’s work (1978) are also consistent with my views of literacy and learning as a transactional process: that is, knowledge is constructed as a result of sensory information, mental activity and experience; thus knowledge also depends heavily on culture, context, custom, historic specificity, and sensitivity.

My initial teacher education in England was considerably influenced by the thinking and writing of John Dewey, and his pivotal ideas remain thought-provoking, and a source of inspiration in my own work today. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested, “Dewey’s writings on the nature of experience [have] remained [my] conceptual and imaginative backdrop” (p. 2). *The personal and the social are always present in Dewey’s definition of experience*. Individuals need to be understood as such, but they are always in relation to a social context or contexts (Maguire 1994). While Dewey did not foresee the complexity of multiple contexts interacting in the same ways as more recent discourse suggests, he did regard education, experience and life as inextricably intertwined: To study education is to study experience. For me, the study of *teacher* education as a reciprocal process involves not only learning about education by thinking about life, but also learning about life by thinking about education. Loughran (2006, 2007) work on the complex nature of developing and enacting pedagogy for teacher education provides rich sources of action/reflection and connectivity: I consistently plan for courses of study and conversations as a mediator of learning, endeavour to model Dewey’s (1916) pragmatic influences in an epistemological stance as a social constructivist, while espousing wisdom of practice (Schulman 2004).

My research and writing advocates for teacher education that successfully combines elements of both theory and practice. Returning to Dewey and his technical definition of education presented in *Democracy and Education*, “That reorganization or reconstruction of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (1916, p. 76), is key to my understanding of theory as more than an intellectual construction. Rather, the embodiment of theory in practice (or *praxis*) “assumes a continuous process of critical reflection that joins and mediates theory and practice” (Schubert 1991, p. 214). Routman (1994), for example, contends that the resource materials we, as teachers, select and use in our classrooms are only as strong as our theories of learning. Another critical lens through which I view the development of teacher expertise as a career-long process is that of Duffy (2002) who argued that “Teachers do not become experts as a result of teacher education programs” (p. 225).

While initially prepared through an excellent teacher education program (1975–1979), rich and multi-faceted opportunities for ongoing learning (1979–present) and a varied career path have resulted in travel, emigration, and the fostering and sustaining of significant relationships with many others. These experiences are partially responsible for a personal/professional stance that does not shy away from transition and change. A self-study conducted recently, *(Re)-visioning self as educator in and through critical reflection on experience* (Elliott-Johns 2014) connects directly to my work for this chapter. Mitchell et al. (2005) emphasized *Who we are* (as teacher educators) and *How we know it* (the focus of the narratives in this collection also being explorations of *How we got here*) is a complex, multi-faceted endeavor, and an intrinsically fascinating one. Examining and understanding *Who we are* and *How we know it* (and how we got here) can also be potentially transformative in terms of rich personal and professional insights gleaned by starting with the self (Elliott-Johns and Tidwell 2013; Kirk 2005; Russell and Loughran 2007).

My current professional identity is perceived as having evolved across a variety of changes and transitions, while drawing upon knowledge and rich lived experience derived from studying, travelling, conducting research, and wearing numerous educational hats over time. Inter-related roles, relationships and experiences continue to shape, inform, influence and transform my professional identity—and *praxis*—in turn, enriching the narrative inquiry central to my life and work.

Begin at the Beginning

Born and raised in England, I grew up in a family with several teachers, and beloved maternal grandparents who saw education as a life priority. I was encouraged to complete advanced levels (A levels) of study in high school and to attend university in order to become a teacher. I was the first on both sides of the family to attend university, and to receive a Ph.D. I was also the first in my family to leave England to live permanently overseas, a major transition that represents, to this day, a huge fork in the road for my life and work.

The Journey Begins—Initial Teacher Education

I completed initial teacher education at Middlesex Polytechnic at Trent Park in London, England (1975–1979). Prior to 1975, Trent Park had been a College of Education but, with restructuring and the advent of Middlesex Polytechnic, degree programs, including the Bachelor of Education, were accredited through the Institute of Education (University of London). Trent Park, once the country estate of the Sassoon family, was set in extensive grounds that included a lake, woodlands, ornate steps, statues and a conservatory. The Mansion housed classrooms and faculty offices as well as administrative offices. Additions to the campus included B Block where the library, auditorium, and more classrooms and offices were located (strategically placed out of sight of the main building, modern brick monstrosity that it was!), and another wing in The Mansion housed the theatre, dance studios and gymnasium. In addition to taking as many drama and dance courses as I could, my program involved a full year in a Combined Arts course, during which time we integrated Music, Art, Drama and Dance across the curriculum. The culminating activity, a “Roman Day”, was held in the campus grounds with participants festooned in togas and engaged in performing arts activities—an idyllic setting that complemented the theme admirably. Suffice to say, a great time was had by all on this and many other occasions while I was learning to teach at Trent Park. The camaraderie and sheer fun of this learning period contributed a great deal to my own personal growth, as we enjoyed the ambience of living in residence on a country estate, within 30 min of the hustle and bustle of Central London.

Staying in residence (first year) and then sharing a house with five others (second through fourth years) helped in adjusting to newly found independence, and to establish friendships. I met and associated with fellow students from all over the U.K. and overseas, individuals who frequently possessed different cultural backgrounds, outlooks, aspirations and world views to my own. I recall discussions and debates that propelled themselves well into the early hours—regarding them just as much a part of the ‘education’ I received as more formal discussions in classes as these sessions made substantive contributions to my own personal development and self-expression. The ability to make a strong case, defend a position, and yet still be able to agree to disagree was well grounded as a result of these experiences. We were having fun, adjusting to independence, growing up... while *also* learning to be teachers.

Living in London for 4 years, away from home and yet not, in the technical sense, having actually left home and the support of family entirely, enabled the ability to grow into my persona as a young adult learning about teaching. Concurrently, I was also learning a great deal about becoming an adult with responsibility for my own decisions and increased autonomy. I learned to increasingly rely on my own judgment in terms of forging my way in the world, while still supported and encouraged by family at a distance (interspersed with occasional weekends at home); my independent streak continues to thrive and, suffice to say, the visits home are far less frequent these days—although I remain very close to, and still supported/encouraged in my being and becoming, by family, friends, and colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic.

When talking with pre-service teachers in my classes today, they share a wide variety of background experiences and compelling stories about their time as students and reasons for wishing to become teachers (and/or related decisions to live at or away from home as young adults). The range of knowledge and experiences they bring to the faculty of education is equally wide and diverse—if, inevitably, different to my own. However, the 1-year Consecutive program does not always receive entirely positive reviews, and/or experiences fail to match their expectations on entering the program. This is often not so much about the brief time span of the B. Ed. program (i.e., approximately 8 months) as about the content of the program or how available time is utilized. Reflecting on my own initial teacher education, I can’t help but think it represents a fortuitous starting point on the road to becoming the teacher educator I am today. In Ontario, we are currently in the process of extending teacher education programs but, I would argue, it is how we *utilize* additional time that will make all the difference in (a) preparing teacher candidates effectively for contemporary classrooms, and (b) the forging of more tangible, meaningful links between faculties of education and schools. If we continue to do the same thing, just for longer, tangible improvements are unlikely. Based on my own experiences, taking up the challenge of renewing approaches to teacher education with innovative, rigorous, and relevant programs of study, and equally rigorous school experience, is a preferred option that may also generate much needed transformation.

The Journey Continues—My Career as a Qualified Teacher Begins

I began teaching in 1979 at Church Mead, an inner-city junior school in East London. I had completed my first extensive teaching practice there in 1975, so already knew most of the staff and the headmaster. I considered myself extremely fortunate to walk into a full-time, permanent position in 1979. The uncertainties of the job market were prevalent at that time and prospects for full-time employment as a teacher were bleak (a seemingly never ending story). The headmaster became a mentor with whom I maintain contact today. I recently received an e-mail from him, a message reflecting his perspective on my arrival as a new teacher at the school, and evidence of transformation in the intervening years:

It also seems so long ago you sat in my little office up those stairs, fresh from university and a glint in your eyes when discussing your plans for your classroom. I was so pleased to have you as a member of staff, a breath of fresh air that we needed badly in those days at Church Mead!! ... You were at the beginning of your professional journey and I knew then you were to go far and be very successful in your chosen career. So proud of you!! (A. Jones, Personal communication, February 11, 2014)

The children were inner city, multi-cultural students and many experienced challenging backgrounds and low socio-economic status. However, they were resilient individuals, eager to learn, and a pleasure to work with. Behaviour problems were infrequent (students would get in far more trouble at home if they misbehaved in school), and I gradually learned how to manage personalities, behavior, and problematic situations. Collegiality and support of other teachers on staff were integral to my learning about effective classroom management and what we now call “positive discipline” but in those days much of it seemed like common sense. Even when their behaviour was problematic, students needed to be treated with respect and dignity and assisted in solving the problem—and saving face as necessary. Over the course of my career, including time as a school administrator, students experiencing difficulties have always been a priority; I found them to be unique characters who were often very capable students once we moved past the outward defenses. Learning from experience continues to underscore, for me, the how (and why) of three principles of seamless classroom management that I return to over and again with pre-service teachers today. These are: learning how (and why) to hold consistent expectations with/for students; how to talk to/with our students (rather than at them); and how to appreciate and model the vital intersection of effective instructional decision-making and behaviour management in classroom practice.

So my professional journey was launched at Church Mead. I spent 3 years there as a beginning teacher (2 years in grade 6 and a year in grade 1), learning so much that is still reflected in my theory and practice today. Characteristic elements serve as evidence that some things do not change significantly over time; rather, they become the foundations of who we are, regardless of time and context. For example, the orientation of the day was a child-centred approach to education and teaching with themes designed to truly engage students. A little book called *Children and*

Themes by Alan Lynskey (1974) became an invaluable resource to guide my planning of learning experiences for students, a resource that has travelled with me to many destinations and remains in my professional library. In these days of increasingly compartmentalized curriculum and assessment and the focus on achievement as test scores, teacher candidates in my classes at the faculty often have difficulty understanding integrated approaches to teaching and learning. It is sometimes especially challenging to introduce teacher candidates to ways of meeting students where they're at, and to learn how to effectively move students along, e.g., utilizing Vygotsky's responsive "zone of proximal development" and relevant resources. However, it's worth the angst when I can leverage innovative, creative thinking about approaches to teaching and learning that might make a difference for these future teachers and their students.

Highlights of my first 3 years of teaching in London included progressive approaches to curriculum, instruction, discovery learning supported by the local education authority and the headmaster, and how new teachers were supported in their quest for professional knowledge. An induction program for all new teachers took place over the first full year of employment and we were released for one half day every week to attend workshops and presentations at the local Teachers Centre. Workshops included classroom management, curricular issues, assessment and evaluation and provided a valuable forum for discussion of difficulties and successes experienced. As did Mark Twain, I always considered education to be far more than schooling ("I never allowed my schooling to interfere with my education"), and seized every opportunity to take students out of school to experience the world beyond their classrooms. We walked to the library every other week (very inexpensive); we visited local London museums, art galleries, the Tower of London, and a farm deep in the heart of Suffolk. Two five-day trips to Belgium and Holland were taken with students in my second and third years at the school—an incredible experience for 11-year-olds who had rarely travelled. I was building on my initial teacher education and learning more about the intrinsic development of my personal style as teacher and how best to provide more authentic learning opportunities for students (what I would refer to nowadays as actively developing and enacting a pedagogy of teacher education).

The very nature of knowledge and experience gained from my initial teacher education program and time as a teacher at Church Mead were transformative in shaping the kind of teacher I was to become. I believe this grounding enabled me to establish core beliefs about learning and teaching, and to become increasingly comfortable with naturalistic approaches to teaching, learning, and leading, e.g., preferring conversation to lecturing, prioritizing teaching students over programs, working towards an at-promise rather than a deficit model of students' role in, and contributions to, their learning processes, and highly collaborative approaches to school and system leadership. Integrated approaches to curriculum, instructional decisions that take into account students' needs and interests, age levels and abilities, and respect for teachers' abilities to make informed instructional decisions, contributed clear directions on my journey to becoming a teacher educator. While my understandings may now be more sophisticated, all of these continue to make sense as guiding principles for my work.

I was a very young teacher at Church Mead, impressionable, and eager to travel. Hearing about experiences of colleagues who took advantage of teacher exchange programs (two to the U.S.A., and one to New Zealand) directly influenced my ambition to seek overseas adventures. Conversations with the exchange teachers we hosted in London also opened my eyes to opportunities to travel and experience life and work far beyond London, England. When combined with reflections on my increasing independence, an excerpt from a journal lends further insight into my thinking about leaving at that time:

It is hard to pinpoint when I began to get 'itchy feet' and the yen to travel. Perhaps it began with venturing forth on those trips to Belgium and Holland, but when a member of staff returned from a year's exchange in the United States with all kinds of tales to tell, and later returned to live there permanently, I think the seeds of "Is this all there is?" had been sown. When the opportunity to emigrate to Canada presented itself in 1982, I pulled up stakes without hesitation and followed my colleague's lead to explore the 'New World'!

After 3 years of full-time teaching and eager for adventures new, I decided to follow the signposts pointing across the Atlantic. I left England in October 1982 to live and work in Canada.

The Journey Takes a Significant Turn—New Country, New Life

One does not discover new lands without consenting to leave the shore for a very long time... (Andre Gable)

After crossing "the Pond" I was employed in Montreal as a teacher in an Early Years Centre (1982–1984) where I taught pre-kindergarten students in both English and French for 2 years before enrolling at McGill University to complete my M.Ed. Arriving just prior to the teachers' strike of 1983, I rapidly discovered those years were not a happy time for teachers in Quebec. Significant rollbacks to teachers' salaries combined with layoffs and redundancies made the possibility of securing an elementary teaching position unlikely for some time. Therefore, I decided it was a good time to gain further qualifications and experience, and began graduate studies at McGill.

While sometimes wondering why I was undertaking additional qualifications in a field I was already experiencing difficulties navigating a way (back) into, I knew I wanted to teach elementary school students again and believed an M.Ed might help (especially if, subsequently, I moved out of Quebec to another province). I justified my commitment to a career in education over and again, contemplating other pathways only briefly. The guiding question was, "Do you want to change direction because you cannot get a job here as a teacher? Or do you really not want to be a teacher?" As the consistent response was, "If there were teaching jobs available, I would not be seeking alternatives," I completed my M.Ed in Elementary Education. This was most definitely a testing time for me as an educator in the face of professional adversity, but I resolved to remain confident that

new opportunities were just ahead, and self-assured that I did not want to switch careers. New opportunities were indeed just around the proverbial corner.

At McGill I was fortunate in meeting two significant individuals from the (then) Baffin Divisional Board of Education who were also studying for their Masters, and we became good friends and colleagues. They suggested I apply to teach in the Far North. Suffice to say, my knowledge of Canada's geography at that time was not extensive and I had no concept of what it would be like to live 600 miles North of the Arctic Circle. However that's exactly where I went after accepting a contract to spend a year teaching E2L in Pond Inlet (1986–1987).

Living and working in Pond Inlet, 2000 miles north of Toronto, was extraordinary in numerous ways. The experience brought a whole new meaning to concepts of isolation and self-reliance and was, in many ways, transformative. I still marvel at my youthful fortitude in deciding to go and live there, alone, but I think the lure of having my own classroom again obscured any concerns I might have had. Professionally, I was responsible for teaching a grade 3 class alongside a full-time Inuk teaching assistant, Lydia. Personally, I experienced so many unique and enriching life experiences (e.g., seeing the sun go down in December, not to reappear until mid-February; sailing out to view an iceberg at close quarters; traversing the Arctic Tundra on a komatik pulled by a dog team; drinking tea made from glacial water; and becoming reacquainted with the art of amusing oneself with books, music, and only one TV channel, CBC North). The following journal excerpt, from my time in the High Arctic, suggests that the time to “stay quiet,” rediscover spending time in my own company, to reflect on being and becoming as a teacher, was welcomed:

There are new friends to be made here too, but I spend a lot of time alone—and am not ‘lonely.’ Awareness of contentment with my own company has come gradually as it has not always been something I’ve been very comfortable with, or have even thought about very much, really (social bee that I am). But I’m enjoying challenging myself just to see that I can do it, and how I feel about it. I have time to reflect, to read and to write, to listen to music and realize, yes, I can be quite at ease being here alone. The personal journal I’m keeping reflects moods, thoughts and feelings as I reflect on day-to-day happenings (including temperatures outside!) and my ongoing learning. Comparisons made between things I find myself doing here, how I spend my time, and what I’ve been used to doing previously, in entirely different contexts, serve as constant reminders of the need for a broader perspective on what constitutes ‘education’ (my own and the students I teach)...

Students in grades K–2 at Takijualuk School learned full-time in their first language, Inuktitut, with Inuit teachers; grade 3 represented a transition year during which students were supported by Lydia (my Inuit Teaching Assistant) and I, in learning both Inuktitut and English; by grades 4 and 5 the classroom program was entirely in English. Support for students’ second language learning and, specifically, concept acquisition were greatly facilitated by working closely together in the classroom to foster and develop our abilities in the art and science of team teaching. We were fortunate to have an active Teachers’ Centre based out of Arctic College in (then) Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit), and access to a wide range of culturally sensitive and linguistic teaching materials including bilingual curriculum documents.

While I have participated in a number of different team-teaching situations since, the roots of what I currently understand to constitute effective team teaching leading

to optimum student learning can still be traced back to my rich and informative experience in Pond Inlet. Consistently sharing space with a teaching partner in the classroom on a daily basis necessitates demonstrating respect for each other, for shared space (literally and figuratively), for expertise as instructors, and the sharing of ideas, strategies, and resources to engage all students in active learning. When a partnership is working well, I believe students (and their teachers) benefit enormously. Alternatively, I do not consider what sometimes passes for team-teaching, or co-teaching, as the same thing at all (for example, when this essentially means dividing class hours equally down the middle and teaching in parallel). In my experience, much can often then be lost, including the potential for cross-pollination of expertise and opportunities for students to experience different teaching styles operating successfully alongside each other in the same context.

As a result of my own positive experiences with authentic team-teaching in a wide variety of classroom contexts, I believe natural tendencies towards working collaboratively have become self-evident in my teaching style, my planning for instruction, and much of my research and writing. My pedagogy overtly includes encouraging others (e.g., beginning and experienced teachers) to first recognize authentic team-teaching and then to sample and foster related tendencies in their own practice.

A Significant U-Turn: From South to North and Back Again

One year later, I could not reconcile myself to an entire career spent in the Far North even though some very appealing job offers were presented. Truthfully, I missed all four seasons too much and was spending a great deal of money having reading materials shipped up (this being prior to the advent of e-books). So I returned to southern Canada and began the job quest once again. Public Boards of Education in Ontario were still not hiring teachers in abundance, but I was recruited by a private school in Toronto and spent 2 years there teaching intermediate students. The school was one recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education and, after 2 years of full-time teaching and an evaluative visit from a Supervisory Officer, I was granted certification to teach in Ontario. Soon afterwards I was hired as a teacher in a progressive public Board of Education in Ontario—2000 miles *south* of Pond Inlet.

Two journal excerpts each reflect significant personal and professional transitions as a result of my professional journey. The first is from 1991, and written after I received a permanent contract in the public school board; the second is from 1992, after almost 10 years in Canada. Taken together, they express a distinct sense of regaining personal and professional stability along what had seemed, at times, a rather challenging “long and winding road”:

I have now been with the same school board for two years and just received my permanent contract. This represents a major landmark, not only on my personal journey of ‘being and becoming’ a teacher, but also in terms of my sense of integration and permanence here in Canada. I have been a Canadian citizen for over six years now, but it may be indicative of

the reciprocal nature of my personal and professional ‘lives’ that I can only now express my intention to stay with confidence. I perceive a regained sense of security and voice in my chosen profession, and welcome opportunities to contribute to that profession in my adopted homeland... What is now known as ‘whole language’ was no stranger to student teachers at Trent Park in the late-1970s, and aspects of this philosophy remain close to my own heart and my developing practice. I delight in collaborating with others who are interested in exploring integrated approaches to elementary curricula, while furthering my own knowledge and expertise in the field (June, 1991).

Ten years on, I feel confident my experience since arriving in Canada has come full circle, re-establishing both personal and professional equilibrium. Perhaps I am even more confident because of challenges encountered—and, undoubtedly, there have also been opportunities. With the benefit of hindsight I do not feel diminished by my experiences, quite the contrary. After initial frustration related to regaining entry into the teaching profession (and a permanent position), there have been numerous opportunities to ‘accentuate the positive’ and this, I think, is just what I have learned to do... (1992).

And the rest, as they say, is history. I enjoyed a successful career over the next 10 years and moved through several transitions as teacher, consultant, and school administrator. I continued my own education as a practitioner (e.g. completing Principals and Supervisory Officers Qualifications, qualifications that contributed to learning about, and transitioning into, leadership roles in public school systems). I was also gaining experience teaching part-time in teacher education programs and began to seriously consider this as a possible next step. Suffice to say, a momentous life and career decision was taken when I resolved to resign from my position as principal, return to full-time graduate study, and complete my Ph.D. at McGill University (2001–2004). It was not predetermined what I would actually *do* with the Ph.D., but I knew I wanted to complete further graduate study and empirical educational research leading to a doctorate. I saw this as (potentially) creating other future options. Relocating from Ontario to live in Prince Edward Island, a beautiful place to live, study, and write, I could also reflect on my career path with a different sense of perspective on the “where to next?” question. Following completion of my doctorate in 2004, I considered several different directions for someone with my experience and a newly minted Ph.D., while working with the Eastern District School Board in Charlottetown as a consultant (2004–2006), Effective July 2006, I accepted a faculty position at Nipissing University resulting in the move back to Ontario.

Changing Gears and Changing Direction—The Academic Route

If you make a change and it feels comfortable, you haven't made a change (Lee Trevino)

My sense of self/professional identity as teacher/teacher educator continues to shift and change, a journey informed by enrichment and self-renewal as a result of experience and systematic self-study over time. A significant theme that emerged in a recent self-study entitled, *Re-visioning self as educator in and through critical reflection on experience*, is of relevance here. Close examination of critical

reflections clearly illustrated the significance I attributed to meaningful relationships with colleagues and to processes of enrichment and self-renewal in my ongoing narrative of ‘becoming teacher/teacher educator’ (Elliott-Johns 2014). Relationships were seen to involve complex networks of colleagues near and far—locally (e.g., on-campus, elsewhere in Ontario), across Canada and around the world and included rich personal relationships as well as *inter-textual* relationships (i.e., as a result of actively reading and reflecting on the published work of others). These colleagues have become, beyond metaphorically, fellow travelers on my professional journey. Analysis of written reflections made it apparent that my practice was very much a global enterprise: Significant others who shaped and influenced my practice as teacher educator were found at my own university; but many others were located across North America, Australia, Israel, the U.K., the Netherlands, and elsewhere. My understandings of the complex nature of contemporary teacher education—what it is, and what it might yet be—are thus continuously informed and enhanced by multiple (and varied) perspectives. Formally and informally, an extensive range of contributions nurture and sustain my interactive participation in these relationships—resulting in discourse that sees us both anchored in, and revitalized by, shared experiences along the roads we continue to travel together. Miller and Thurston’s (2009) description of ‘mentoring relationships’ including friendship, collaboration, information, and intellectual guidance resonates deeply across my experience. I recognize all four characteristics in reflections on significant relationships encountered, and consider myself privileged as a participant in vibrant networks of (mostly) *informal* relationships—including some that clearly involve mentoring. Such relationships provide sources of energy, motivation, mentoring, and inquiry—all vital in terms of their substantive contributions to sustaining enthusiasm for my work as teacher educator:

As a result of relationships cultivated with others, over time, I know I have become acutely more aware of the benefits of identifying and unpacking assumptions in efforts to better frame problems of practice as teacher educator. Multi-faceted processes of filtering “problems of practice” as part of critical reflection on experience offer increasingly rich insights into developing practice and renewal of ‘self’... this has undoubtedly been an integral aspect of the re-visioning encountered in this self-study. (Journal, October 11, 2013)

Conclusion

Using the metaphor of a “long and winding road,” three major themes can be identified in the narrative presented in this chapter: courage (to teach), tenacity, and the importance of relationships. My understandings of these three themes, and how they continue to resonate in my own life and work as teacher educator, are explored and discussed below.

Understandings of the Journey So Far: Looking Back, Moving Forward

A ship in the harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are built for (J. A. Shedd)

Early in this narrative, I wrote, “As a teacher educator and self-study researcher, I inquire deeply and write about my practice, thus including in my sense of “research” the rich insights and understandings revealed as embedded in my work.” Work for this narrative precipitated delving into the early, middle, and most recent evolutions of my career as teacher educator. Traversing the complex journey to here with all its twists and turns, changes and transitions, (in more than 30 years of being and (still) becoming a teacher educator) and viewed through the lens of today’s insights and aspirations, feels a bit like riding along without a final destination on one’s ticket. Never one to carry a clear roadmap to the pre-determined destination, I prefer to enjoy the variegated landscapes along the way. Locating self and my efforts to consciously work towards blending research and practice in *praxis*, requires close examination of decisions made and various outcomes manifested along that long and winding road—a road I’m still travelling. Working towards *praxis* is, perhaps, as close as I can come to conceptualizing anything like a roadmap for my journey. A quotation from Kathy Short (2014) on story as the landscape of knowing resonates with the construction of my own narrative:

Story is the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers—our knowledge is ordered and understood by story. Our rich stockpiles of storied knowledge... construct (our) narrative in action. Stories are the touchstones and metaphors by which we conduct our professional lives... They constrain and position our identities and roles as well as provide a way of knowing and of creating community among ourselves and with our students.... (p. 1)

Inquiries that seek deeper understandings, beginning with the self, enable us to capture the complexity of critical reflection. As Loughran (2007, p. 12) writes, “A central purpose in self-study is uncovering deeper understandings of the relationships between teaching about teaching and learning about teaching.” Training the lens directly onto our innermost thinking, and being willing to share that thinking, is not without inherent risks. In my experience, and in the broader context of self-study, the learning that occurs is well worth the risk.

In conclusion, I will briefly address each of the three themes identified, courage, tenacity, and the importance of relationships, underscoring how I see each one in relation to my professional identity and the rich contributions experience makes to my research and practice as a teacher educator.

Theme 1: Courage

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow". (Mary Anne Radmacher)

Along with Rosa Bruno-Joffre, I see courage as a fundamental virtue that, “defines the life of an educator; courage to question, courage to build a democratic community in our schools, courage to imagine the future, and courage to love our students in the uniqueness of their life situations” (Bruno-Joffre 2004). In reflections on experience, an emphasis on quiet but resilient courage threads itself through explorations of the journey that have led to my current work as teacher educator. The journey has been pursued through twists and turns, alternate routes, unanticipated detours, planned detours, and all manner of transitions described. Experience of change has impacted directly on my professional knowledge, identity and practice as a teacher educator in relation to the theme of Courage. Today, a priority for me, is asking (1) How we might effectively go about promoting conditions that develop the kinds of courage cited by Bruno-Joffre in contemporary teachers? (2) Are concerted efforts being made to foster and develop the kind of rigorous courage that prepares future teachers to have confidence in (and be able to articulate) their own theories, practices, visions of teaching, pedagogy, and build comprehensive understandings of relevant resources for teaching and learning? Related support and guidance are essential aspects of authentic teacher education that not only serve to inform and enhance instructional decision-making and program design, but also have the potential to move us beyond the technical-rational “tips and tricks” that still constitute “teacher training” for some. Residing at the heart of my work are critical questions about the gradual release of responsibility for developing knowledge and expertise, or, what kinds of responsibility for their own professional learning should beginning (and experienced) teachers be reasonably expected to take? And how do we share our accumulated wisdom and rich insights gleaned about learning to teach, as well as teaching about teaching? Inquiries of this nature clearly align with my own experience of the courage needed to navigate across transitions and change, and continue to inform and energize my research and practice.

Theme 2: Tenacity

The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity. (Amelia Earhart)

What contribution does my experience offer to knowledge about the profession of teacher educator? Perhaps more than anything else, it has taught me to forge a professional career path without precluding possibilities ‘outside’ a pre-formulated plan (particularly anyone else’s pre-formulated plan). While, at times, the challenges and opportunities nested in processes of change and transition have not always been anticipated/welcome, or were not particularly easy to navigate, valuable personal/professional learning has usually been the outcome. Attributes such as flexibility, the ability to conceptualize and appreciate different perspectives on a given situation or issue (and agree to disagree, as necessary), the building and sustaining of positive relationships, problem-solving skills, and effective organizational and communication skills have been acquired over time (formally and

informally) as integral parts of an evolving professional identity—and as a direct result of critical reflections on experience.

In my work with novice (and experienced) teachers, graduate students and colleagues, I share the excitement experienced in transitions and change—in moving beyond one’s comfort level—and the tenacity (or perseverance) required to successfully create one’s own options. Transitions and change often seem to get a bad rap but I, personally, do not subscribe to a view that necessarily sees these as threatening or scary. If we are to educate teachers to go boldly into their own futures, and to have confidence in themselves and their own agency, I believe we need to model such qualities by “walking the talk” in our own lives and work. Tenacity emerges as a significant theme in my narrative and I’d suggest tenacity is a great quality to have—especially if you’re venturing out on a challenging journey that takes time to complete. Lesson #1: Becoming teacher/teacher educator *is* challenging *and* takes a long, long time to accomplish—tenacity *not* an option!

Theme 3: Importance of Relationships...

Who are all these people you have brought with you?

The disciple whirled around to look. Nobody there. Panic.

Lao said, “Don’t you understand?” (The Way of Chuang Tzu)

The significant influence of positive, rich, collegial relationships in my research and practice as teacher educator becomes evident to me in this narrative. Simply stated, I have been fortunate in building local, national and global networks of colleagues and friends who enrich and enhance my life and work. Helping teacher candidates in my classes to appreciate and understand *why* these networks and relationships *matter* so much—and modeling potential benefits of cultivating networks in their own professional lives—is, again, an important aspect of how my own experience continues to inform and extend my contributions to the profession of teacher educator. Thus, my advice for teachers today is to foster and sustain similarly meaningful networks towards developing skills and confidence in their own abilities to “rethink, unlearn and relearn, change, revise, and adapt” (Niess 2008, p. 225).

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