



**Hitching One's Wagon to a Star**  
*Narrative Inquiry into the First Five Years  
of Teaching in Iceland*

**Lilja M. Jónsdóttir**

**Doctoral Dissertation**  
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**UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND**

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Professor Robyn Ewing, University of Sydney



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Háskólaprent ehf.



*To my three grandchildren, Valdís Eik,  
Vilhjálmur Bjarki and Ragnhildur Lára,  
for the future is theirs; their schooling and  
education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*



## **Abstract**

The purpose of this longitudinal research was to explore the meaning beginning teachers make of their experiences in the first five years of teaching in Iceland. The aim was to create knowledge that would bring to light their learning and development; what hinders and what supports them. Another aim was to examine what kind of support novice teachers need during the early years of teaching.

The methodological background of this qualitative study was both phenomenology and postmodern theory, and the central analytical perspective was the philosophy of narrative inquiry, which shaped the research methodology and the methods used. This research draws heavily on Connelly and Clandinin's ideas, terms and definitions on narrative inquiry, especially the term 'personal practical knowledge'. This thesis delineates the stories of three participants. Each was met with once before they started teaching and two times during the first year of teaching, then after their second and third year of teaching, and the final meeting took place at the end of their fifth year of teaching.

The findings from this research confirm, and substantiate, a strong link between the participants' experiences from their homes and upbringing as well as their 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling, both positive and negative, to their ideas of what constitutes a good teacher, and therefore what kind of teachers they initially wanted to become. It is suggested that the development of their personal practical knowledge of teaching and learning was formed during their childhood and teenage years at home and in school. This was where their knowledge of schooling originated from, and this was the knowledge they brought with them to their teacher education program and formed their personal beliefs and visions of teaching and learning. The results considerably add to the current understanding of the term personal practical knowledge as well as bestowing it with greater depth and extension. The findings moreover bring to light that during their teacher education they encountered ideas and beliefs, values and dispositions, regarding education which they subscribed to and which further shaped their ideas of the teachers

they wanted to become. Further, during the early years, these ideas faced heavy challenges and contradictions in their classrooms, as they struggled to assimilate their views to the realities of teaching and in order to obtain a better grasp of their professions.

By laying emphasis on the experiences of novice teachers, particularly in their early years of teaching, the study distinctly illustrates the importance of considerably greater support than has hitherto been available to novices, which extends over a longer period of time than just one induction year. Also, taking part in a longitudinal research encouraged the early career teachers' active reflection; therefore their pedagogical knowledge and practices developed, at least partly, out of their involvement in it. The study has thus revealed, through the well documented individual paths the participants have travelled in the form of their comprehensive and detailed stories, the development of their five year journey from being beginners in teaching to becoming effective professionals earlier than expected.



## Ágrip

Í þessari langtímarannsókn var könnuð sú merking sem nýir kennarar leggja í reynslu sína fyrstu fimm árin í grunnskólakennslu. Eitt meginmarkmiðið var að skapa þekkingu sem varpaði ljósi á hvernig þeir náðu tökum á starfi sínu og hvernig þeir þróuðust sem byrjendur; hvað hindraði og hvað styddi þá. Annað markmið var að athuga hvers konar leiðsögn nýliðar í kennslu þurfa á að halda fyrstu árin í kennslu.

Aðferðafræðilegur bakgrunnur rannsóknarinnar byggðist hvoru tveggja á fyrirbærafræði og póstmóðernisma og hið heimspekilega sjónarhorn var narratífa, en hún mótaði bæði rannsóknaraðferðina og einstakar aðferðir. Í þessari rannsókn var fyrst og fremst stuðst við hugmyndir, hugtök og skilgreiningar Connellys og Clandinin á narratífu, einkum hugtakið 'persónuleg, hagnýt þekking'. Þessi ritgerð segir sögur þriggja þátttakenda í rannsókninni. Rætt var við hvern og einn þátttakanda rétt áður en hann hóf kennslu í fyrsta sinn og svo tvisvar á fyrsta kennsluárinu, næst í lok annars og þriðja kennsluársins og loks var rætt við þátttakendur í lok fimmta kennsluársins.

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar bæði staðfesta og styrkja enn frekar þau sterku tengsl sem eru á milli reynslu þátttakendanna af uppvexti á heimilum sínum, ásamt 14 ára grunnskóla- og framhaldsskólagöngu, bæði jákvæðrar og neikvæðrar reynslu, og hugmynda þeirra um hvað einkennir góðan kennara og um leið hvers konar kennarar þeir vilja verða. Niðurstöðurnar gefa til kynna að þróunin á hinni persónulegu, hagnýtu þekkingu á námi og kennslu hafi mótast þegar í bernsku á heimilum og skólagöngu þátttakenda. Þaðan er þekking þeirra upprunnin og þá þekkingu tóku þeir með sér í kennaranámið og það var sú þekking sem mótaði hugsjónir þeirra og sýn á kennslu og skólastarf. Þessar niðurstöður bæta talsverðu við fyrri skilning á hugtakinu persónuleg, hagnýt þekking um leið og það öðlast meiri dýpt og breidd. Þá varpa niðurstöðurnar ennfremur ljósi á að í kennaranáminu kynntust þeir hugmyndum og viðhorfum, gildum og afstöðu til skólastarfs og menntunar sem mótaði enn frekar hugmyndir þeirra um hvernig kennarar þeir vildu verða. Þar að auki sýna niðurstöðurnar hvernig þessum hugmyndum og viðhorfum var ógnað

af þeim erfiðleikum sem nýliðarnir stóðu frammi fyrir á sínum fyrstu árum í kennslu um leið og þeir voru að reyna að ná tökum á þessari starfsgrein sinni.

Rannsóknin sýnir ljóslega hversu mikilvægt það er að veita byrjendum í kennslu mun meiri stuðning en í boði hefur verið hér á landi og í töluvert lengri tíma en þetta fyrsta ár sem hefur tíðkast. Þá má nefna að þátttakan í rannsókninni reyndist hinum ungu kennurum mikið tilefni til ígrundunar, þannig að sjálf þátttakan hafði jákvæð áhrif á starfsþroska þeirra. Rannsóknin leiðir einnig í ljós, í gegnum hinar ítarlegu og yfirgripsmiklu sögur sem skrá vegferð hvers og eins þátttakanda, hvernig þróunin hefur verið þessi fyrstu fimm ár í kennslu; allt frá því að vera byrjendur í kennslu og til þess að verða mjög hæfir kennarar fyrr en búast mátti við.

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This thesis has journeyed with me since 2005, beginning in that fall in Copenhagen when I had first opened a file containing stuff for the thesis. I brought it with me countless times to *Lækjarkot*, our cottage by the small mountain lake *Meðalfellsvatn*, where I have pondered various problems in my study, facing the lake and the mountain. As the lake and the mountain took on different visages in harmony with each season, it provided a repose for me to shift my eyes away from the computer-screen and toward the view before me, where they could rest for a moment or two. On calm days the lake is like a mirror with the opposite mountain reflected upside-down in it, on windy days the lake looks wild and grim; both equally reflecting the various faces of my thesis journey. The thesis was with me in Toronto where I stayed during my research leave in the fall of 2008, and when my older son moved to Sweden with his family, the thesis was part of the luggage every time I was there on a visit. Traveling the paths of a doctoral thesis is a journey into the unknown. Some paths are dead-ends while others open up into the wild. Some take you up steep mountains, others downhill. Although, there are always peaks in sight to conquer. The metaphor for my teaching and for my thesis, is climbing mountains, and the last journey up a mountain I literally took in October last year where I perceived how the thesis journey lay before me.

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

Every year, roughly one hundred beginning teachers set out to teach all around Iceland. Beginning teachers typically have great expectations of what lies ahead in their first year as fully qualified teachers, like most people beginning their professional careers, and presumably they are excited and at the same time anxious to start their teaching careers. They know that teaching tends to be both a tiring and difficult job, but simultaneously ever so rewarding and creative. They have to some extent come to know and to anticipate this during their student teaching. One can assume that novice teachers want to be good teachers and that they cannot wait becoming the teachers they envisioned themselves becoming during their initial training. Stories of such expectations are abundant. But many novice teachers also tell stories of severe difficulties in their first year of teaching and even some years thereafter. For instance, there are stories of excesses of responsibility, stories about their school environment lacking support, and stories about their initial training not preparing them well enough for what was to come. It is highly unlikely to find many workplaces that expect the novice to jump virtually fully-fledged onto the stage, but this is often the case in the workplace called school. Sometimes it is even said that beyond the first week of school their principals and colleagues have completely forgotten that they are indeed beginners! What awaits the beginning teachers in their first five years of teaching is explored in this present research.

This study examines the lived experiences of three young teachers during their first five years of teaching through narrative inquiry. By way of interviews and conversations over a period of five years, the stories they live by are probed, and the meaning they make of them is explicated. These stories tell of creating and re-creating of self as a teacher, and how a beginning teacher reconstructs the past and the intentions for the future in order to deal with the requirements of the present situation.

In this introduction I will, first, start by exploring and explaining the reasons for my choice of topic by presenting my story. Second, I

discuss the need for this research in Iceland. Third, I describe the purpose of this research, and fourth, the research questions will be portrayed. Finally, I will outline the structure of the thesis.

### **1.1 The Origin of the Researcher – Choice of Topic**

Following is, first, a story which is an image from my childhood. This story is retold as I remember it, and, as can be seen, I tell the story in the third person in order to provide distance in both time and space, and without making any comments along the way to create a coherent whole. The purpose of bringing this story into light is to explain my origins as a teacher.

#### **Shame**

This morning was different. She didn't just have butterflies in her stomach. This time she felt sick. Really sick. Rows of second graders waited impatiently for their turn to enter the splendid new school building. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, afraid of not being able to control her nausea. She closed her eyes in concentration and told, no, commanded her stomach to quiet down. For a while it worked. It always worked for a while, but then it hit again. She hadn't noticed that they were already inside the building, climbing the stairs, to the top floor. The second graders had their classrooms on the top floor. She wondered if she would make it all the way up and to the washroom. Suddenly it was all there, on the beautiful shining floor in front of her. She had thrown up on the floor in front of all the second graders, in front of the whole school, - on one of the landings. Now, everyone could see what she had had for breakfast. She had fixed the breakfast herself this morning, as she so often did. And it was not always the healthiest meal thinkable. She stared at the puddle before her feet and she sensed nothing but shame, and the sounds of disgust from the kids standing around her. The butterflies were back, and now the shame too. This filled her stomach, her whole body and soon she learned that the only way to control, not to notice, - no, to push them out, to the back of her mind, - was to talk. She became very talkative in class. The teacher wrote the names of the kids who talked too much for her liking on the blackboard, her name was always at the top. School pictures prove

that. And she was only seven, eight, nine years old. By grade five she had trained herself to think the butterflies away. She wasn't talkative in class anymore. She became shy, or so she was told. Shyness wasn't her nature though and later she learned other names for this; insecurity, no self-esteem. She need not be ashamed, or blame herself, - it was her father's alcoholism. Her teachers were all nice people and she especially remembers her first teacher. She had a smiling face with dimples, she was a kind, caring teacher, but strict in a just way. A new school and her teacher of grades five through seven was a firm, but kind man, whom she respected and liked. Everyone was afraid of him in the school except the kids in his class. She really liked going to school and very often would stay behind when it was over. She was not in a hurry to go home. That teacher would allow her and her girl friends to have the classroom all to themselves after school. They took turns in role-playing teaching and school activities. She had lots of friends, - always. The classrooms in elementary school were nice places with an atmosphere of warmth and a touch of light-heartedness. A traditional way of teaching was the common practice of that time, and she hardly paid any attention to it. It was just the way it should be. Her grade nine teacher praised her and believed in her when she certainly did not herself. He went to the principal and without a word he put in an application for a track which demanded better grades than she had on the average at that time, and she was accepted. She remembers that always.

This story tells of both painful and pleasant experiences. In my experience, when people are asked to reflect on their childhood and schooling, on both positive and negative experiences, the conclusion usually is that positive memories are not necessarily associated with single events, but rather feelings connected with the classroom, the atmosphere or the caring, pleasant teacher. The opposite is most often the case with memories of a negative nature. Single events perhaps stand out like a distinct picture. The lesson I learned from this is that a pleasant, caring teacher and an atmosphere of warmth is the starting point in all teaching: everything else follows from that. What I feel supports this is when I sat down to think about my own days of schooling, my mind wandered back, on the one hand, to negative memories which I could remember in detail, and, on the other, to two

teachers whom I remembered distinctly and felt had made a difference in my life. The positive recollections of these teachers manifest how I felt in their classrooms, rather than remembering specific teaching methods or assignments in any detail. These experiences provided me with the understanding that the wellbeing of the students in the classroom is imperative. I took this personal knowledge with me to teacher education and to my own beginning teaching. However, I attended school at times when the well-known traditional approach to teaching was customary, as mentioned in the above story, and the more traditional teaching methods of such as fill-in assignments and workbook seat-work was therefore the practical knowledge of schooling which I brought with me into teacher education.

In 1978 I graduated from The Iceland University of Education (hereafter IUE) with a B.Ed. degree and majored in English (TEFL) and Social Studies. My husband was a teacher at that time and so were most of our friends. They were young, passionate novice teachers who spent countless hours discussing educational matters. These discussions left me with high expectations of what teacher education should revolve around. However, everything I learnt the first year I felt was irrelevant, and I considered dropping out. I would have, if it had not been for the ongoing discussions and debates on education in Iceland at that time, both outside and inside of the IUE, due to the new Compulsory School Act (CSA), which was followed by new National Curriculum Guide for The Compulsory School in 1976–1977. A host of heated discussions and debates on traditional teaching versus progressive education took place on a multitude of occasions, regarding the virtues of adopting mixed-ability classes or mixed-age grouping, schooling versus deschooling, to name but few. Both the CSA and the National Curriculum Guide were considered quite progressive. They gave me insights into the kind of schooling I felt I wanted to be a part of and I remember how passionately I felt about this kind of schooling and how it would have made a difference in my life as a child, and thus becoming a part of my personal and practical knowledge.

The teacher I was placed with for my first practice teaching was my other main source of positive learning experience during my teacher education. This teacher introduced me to a completely new dimension of teaching and learning. In her classroom I experienced



the kind of schooling I felt I wanted to take part in, and in her, I perceived the ideal image, the role-model, of the teacher I felt I wanted to become. Several years later this same teacher changed the course of my teaching when we became a team: team-teaching two fourth grade classes. Consequently, my passionate interest in progressive education influenced the choice of topic for my B.Ed. thesis, which was *The Open Classroom*. This then became my philosophical and political vision in education. Ultimately, the topic made me even more determined to aim in this direction in my own teaching – I knew that this was the path I wanted to travel.

I started my teaching career in a school which was, at that time, and until 1996, an independent department of The IUE. It was its Lab School or Development School, called The Training School (with the definite article). This was, and still is, a grade 1–10 school like most schools in Iceland. The principal of that school was one of my teachers at the IUE. He was a psychologist by education and profession and I attended his course on educational psychology during my last year. His progressive, humanistic educational vision made me want to become a teacher in his school and thus to realize my educational dreams. At that time, The Training School was regarded as one of the most innovative schools in the whole of Iceland. It was considered easier for a camel to pass through the needle's eye than to get a post there. I think that my choice of a topic for my B.Ed. thesis had an influence on why I was hired, because the principal wanted a teacher who was eager to team-teach in an open classroom environment. My first class was a grade three class of 36 children in one big classroom. From 1989 I had an additional post as a master teacher (or teacher trainer) within The IUE. My duties included teaching courses on the pedagogy of teaching 10–14 year olds, and the pedagogy of teaching Social Studies in grades 4–10, as well as to take on student teachers for their practical training in my classrooms. On August 1, 1999, I became an Assistant Professor within The IUE and simultaneously held 1/3 of a position in my school. This teaching was considered as part of my research duties as an assistant professor since my specialty is pedagogy. Five years later, in 2003, I ceased to be a teacher in compulsory education. By then I had been a teacher in that school almost uninterruptedly for 25 years.

As I mentioned earlier, my B.Ed. thesis dealt with the open classroom concept, its origin, development and physical environment (Jónsdóttir, 1978). From the outset of my teaching, I was determined to organize my teaching and the learning of my students in the spirit of these ideas. I had only come across this in the form of theoretical ideas, in books, and as these ideas were in no sense of the word a part of my personal or practical knowledge, I soon found that there was a long road to travel from theory to classroom practice. My grade three class turned out to be an exceptionally difficult group of eight year olds. There were at least ten children with severe behavioral problems, as well as those who were sad and unhappy from unruly homes. Additionally, there were also simply 'ordinary' disobedient children, so on tumultuous days most of the class joined in the upheaval! Consequently, I felt that my first year of teaching was a huge disappointment and a failure! Everything that could possibly go wrong went wrong! I was not doing what I had intended, teaching was not what I had anticipated, I worried about my students, I doubted myself as a teacher, I did not appreciate myself as a teacher. I was overcome, knocked to the ground. The reality of teaching hit me hard, with unimaginable challenges and I wanted to quit at the end of the year! Later I found out that no teacher in the school had been willing to teach this class, so the beginning teacher was thrown into the 'deep end' along with the only teacher available, who had two choices: either this or leave the school. I have no memory of having received any support of any kind from anyone as a beginning teacher, neither from my principal nor from any of the veteran teachers. My only source of support during this painful time was my husband; he was my only mentor. I could seek advice from him and we could discuss teaching and learning without end.

The colossal behavior problems and upheavals in our classroom, which we were supposed to sort out for ourselves, was a 'situation' neither of us had come across in our teacher education. If anything, my team partner was more ignorant than I concerning the concept of open classroom education, whether in practice or in theory, as I had my B.Ed. thesis to turn to. When one is confronted with such severe behavioral problems, theory does not appear to guide one's practice. Managing and operating an open classroom was not part of my

personal practical knowledge, nor was it hers. I did not manage to make use of my strong sides – I did not even know what they were! What I did then was to turn to what I knew best, which was my experience from my own schooling as a student and that became the practice I looked toward. My research interest lies, therefore, for the most part, in my experience as a first year teacher.

In spite of the challenging and severe difficult beginning I decided to give teaching another chance and gradually, step by step, I began to validate myself as a teacher and was finally able to use my experience to develop my ideas and practices further, especially the integrated curriculum, creative classroom activities, learning contracts, an individually based curriculum in mixed ability classes and team-teaching. My professional knowledge developed in the context of my school and I believe that part of the reason this school retained its status as the most innovative school in Iceland for over two decades, was the passionate pedagogical discussions in staff meetings and in the staff room alike, where most of the teachers used the terminology and the language of their profession (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

What disturbed my identity formation, however, was my feeling that the earlier ‘situation’ in my classroom had stuck to me and become part of my reputation. At that time, it made me feel that I was not considered a part of the group of innovators in my school, but this came true some years later. This learning and my consequent development took time in two different senses: First, lesson planning and designing each project was extremely time consuming, not to mention the realization of what the planning of a quality lesson entailed, that is, through deliberate practice (Berliner, 2001), and how that could help students learn. Second, this development took many years. Indeed my identity as teacher had been shaped and constructed during my teacher education program, and it was re-shaped and re-constructed several times during my wobbly experiences in the first five to six years of teaching. It was not until my seventh year that I felt confident enough to claim that the teacher I had envisioned in the early days of my initial teacher training, and writing my B.Ed. thesis, was finally in sight.

Despite my challenging beginning, I was determined not to return to the more traditional teaching methods which I knew so well as a

student from my own years of schooling and which constituted a vast segment of my practical knowledge of the classroom. Instead, I began participating in various developmental projects within my school quite early on in my teaching. It is common in Iceland that teachers are so called class-teachers. They usually follow the same class for three or more years and teach most of the academic school subjects. For me this meant that I was able to develop my ideas within the same group of students and I could adapt these to different ages, abilities and grade levels.

Gradually I developed my own program, which can be called in English: Teaching in the flexible and diverse learning environment. I saw my program as a holistic education, with components of integrated projects, creativity, negotiating the curriculum, cooperation and creating a community in the classroom. Thus, team-teaching in the diverse and flexible classroom became a distinct part of my personal practical knowledge. As a result of this, I was asked to give in-service training courses for practicing teachers, and for the past 28 years I have given around 90 talks and roughly 50 professional development courses and workshops. I have travelled to all parts of Iceland and given courses in rural schools, in village schools as well as in urban schools. I have also had an advisory role within several grade 1-10 schools. Additionally, I wrote a book called *Creative Schooling – A Handbook for Teachers and Student Teachers on How to Organize Integrated Curriculum* (Jónsdóttir, 1996) and *A Teachers' Guide on a History Textbook* (Jónsdóttir, 2001). Moreover, I visited schools both inside and outside Iceland in order to gain more practical knowledge in this field, attending in-service training courses and talks about these issues, all intended to add to my pedagogical knowledge base.

My difficult beginning year and my faltering and stumbling over the uneven school landscapes some years beyond that made me feel that teaching was a tough and demanding job. I have, at times, found teaching the single most difficult job there is, but simultaneously, both exceptionally creative and truly rewarding. Accordingly, the metaphor for my teaching is mountain climbing. Drake (1993) offered “the metaphor of a journey as a guide for the process ahead” (p. 6), but I want to offer the metaphor of climbing mountains as a guide to the foregoing narrative. This metaphor surfaced when I was doing my

master's degree at OISE. It had been somewhere in the back of my mind for years, but through the coursework I came to understand how it provided me with an analogy for my feelings about myself as a teacher from the very beginning of my teaching career. I saw my journey as a teacher as steadfastly climbing mountains. I often wondered how high, how steep and how numerous the mountains could be. All too often fog was present, so dense that I could not see. Then, sometimes suddenly, the fog lifted, and there ahead of me was the peak of a mountain. I have managed to reach some of them – even many of them, but there are still unclimbed mountain tops, some perhaps not climbable at all. When the climbing was more or less effortless it felt good, but when I managed to conquer one that was painfully difficult, I felt exhausted but ecstatic. But woe betide me, triumphantly standing on the tallest boulder; before I knew it, doubt set in and I wondered if I had really done all I could or left something out. Before I knew it, I found myself yet again at the foot of another mountain!

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) maintain that “[I]t is your passion for your chosen topic that will be a motivating factor ... You tap into your subjectivity, of which your passion is a part, to find topics appropriate to your interests” (p. 14). My experience during the first year, or years, of my teaching stays with me and is an integral part of who I became as a teacher. It is and will be the fuel needed to ignite and propel my interest on the doctoral research topic.

## **1.2 The Rationale for this Research**

This research explores, through narrative inquiry, the experiences of beginning teachers and how they cope during their first five years of teaching in grades one to ten. This is the first longitudinal study of beginning teachers conducted in Iceland, which began with a pilot study in the fall of 2001. The following summer the actual study commenced and data was collected with in-depth interviews and conversations with five beginning teachers, as well as field visits. Novice teachers have been the subject of countless studies outside Iceland for many years. Besides this research, only one study on beginning basic-school teachers has been conducted in Iceland (Steingrimsdóttir, 2005, 2007), and one on high-school teachers (Ingvarsdóttir, 2009). I would like to make a note of the use of

concepts regarding teachers in their first years of teaching. From the beginning of this study I used the terms 'beginning teachers' and 'novice teachers' more or less interchangeably. When I began ploughing through the research literature I came across terms such as newly qualified teachers (NQT's), which I have mainly seen in British research literature. I also noticed the term early career teachers, which seems to have its roots in the Australian research literature, and I have seen how this concept has gained widespread acceptance to date.

Even though one can expect that beginning teachers in Iceland must have a lot in common with novices in other countries, collecting Icelandic data is of great importance. First, the Icelandic context is in some ways different from elsewhere. To mention but a few: for decades there has been a great teacher shortage, not just in rural areas but across Iceland. Until quite recently, that is, when the local educational authorities took over the compulsory schools in 1996, it did not seem to affect the Icelandic educational authorities greatly, or as long as the principals reported the ability to staff their schools by September 1st (which was not always the case)! This teacher shortage was due to several factors. One may have been that formal induction programs did not exist. In fact, such programs were unknown to most Icelandic educational professionals until late in the past century. One might assume that there was no need for such a program, but of course this was not the case. Icelandic beginning teachers have experienced similar difficulties as their colleagues elsewhere, as my story exemplifies. Surprisingly as it may sound, this ongoing teacher shortage did not ignite any kind of formal programs for retaining teachers or encouraging young people to enter teacher education. Apparently, there has been a kind of indifference towards this shortage in the attitudes and actions of educational authorities of all levels. It is generally accepted that teaching and teacher education is culture and context bound (e.g. McIntyre, 1988). If this is the case, we need to gather information from within each context. Hence, it is important to collect Icelandic data, which can be of use in developing Icelandic induction programs and to facilitate formal support for beginning teachers.

It was predicted by The Icelandic National Audit Office in 2003 that every grade one to ten school would be fully staffed by qualified

teachers by the school year 2008–2009 (Policy of The Iceland University of Education 2005-2010, 2005). This may not have appeared quite realistic, but even though this had been the case, it still remains that beginning teachers will most likely continue to encounter severe difficulties in their first year or years of teaching. As we began to receive stories of successful induction programs and formal support for beginning teachers, a demand for such programs was articulated by educational professionals. Icelandic research data certainly supports such demand. Further, longitudinal research like the present study will offer knowledge in relation to the potential need for support beyond the first one or two years of teaching.

Second, collecting Icelandic research data is important simply because it is more likely that the Icelandic people, from the policy makers to the teacher education organizers, the local school boards, the principals, the practicing teachers, the current and future student teachers all the way to the parents and the general public, will be more carefully attentive to findings from Icelandic research data because it will be more meaningful to them. This seems to be the Icelandic reality, for all too often, when someone from academia reports educational research from abroad, it can be heard that this is of no use in Iceland because the Icelandic context is so different from that of other countries: a claim which is of doubtful credibility. As we have often found it hard to learn from the experiences of other countries, it is frequently said that we are making the same mistakes that other countries had already made, but ten years later! Thus, there is an apparent need to examine how early-career teachers cope in this country.

Third, collecting data on Icelandic beginners in teaching is also important for the development of teacher education in this country. Even though one might assume that there are many similarities between teacher education programs in Iceland and those in other countries, there are, of course, aspects which only apply here. As teacher education at the University of Iceland, in the School of Education, is presently in a transition, I find it imperative to gather data on the beginning teachers' experience of their initial teacher training program, and how, due to their experience as new teachers, they envision it should change.

Last but not least, and as mentioned above, this is the first longitudinal study with beginning teachers in Iceland. Whereas research on beginning teachers has been prolific, most of the studies have only covered one year or a maximum of three. The present longitudinal study, which follows novice teachers closely during the first five years of their teaching, offers unique insight into our knowledge of teacher learning in the initial years, thus adding to the existing body of knowledge of the development of the beginning teacher.

### **1.3 The Major Aims of This Research**

Understanding the meaning which beginning teachers make of their experiences once they enter their chosen profession, is at the heart of this research. The major aims of this research are:

- to create knowledge which makes it possible to explore what kind of knowledge, skills and attitudes beginning teachers need and how the research findings can be used to improve teacher education in Iceland;
- to create knowledge that will bring to light beginning teachers' learning and development from the beginning of their teaching to the end of their fifth teaching year: what hinders and what supports them;
- to disclose what kind of support beginning teachers require during the first year or years of their teaching so that the research findings can be utilized in aiding novices to develop and actualize their images of the teacher they wanted to become at the onset of their teaching.

Since my third year of teaching, I have had student teachers in my classroom practicing their skills. In my tenth year of teaching I took on a role as a master teacher at the Iceland University of Education and for the past thirteen years I have held a permanent position as Assistant Professor, my specialty being pedagogy. Research with beginning teachers, such as the study presented here, provides important insights which can be used in pre-service teacher education and to support early career teachers, which may thus positively affect and change their beginnings, ultimately improving the education of our children. As noted earlier, I have worked with practicing teachers on several levels as a master teacher. Inevitably, early career teachers



crossed my path, and when I did a project with two rural school boards which included meeting with teachers at the end of their first year, I heard many stories, most of which resonated with my own. The experiences I have gained in my work with student teachers as well as practicing teachers constitute the purpose of my study.

### **1.4 The Research Questions**

The rationale for this research provides the foundation for my research questions. The following questions seek to further clarify and illuminate the experiences and the meaning which the participants make of their experiences regarding the complexities of practice for the revelation of the intentions and beliefs of teachers:

1) How do beginning teachers experience their first five years of teaching in Iceland?

- What are their expectations, concerns and dilemmas, joys and difficulties, successes and failures – and how do they come to grips with it all?
- How do they develop their embodied knowledge of creating and managing relationships with students, colleagues and parents, and of creating a classroom community?

2) How do beginning teachers work with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become?

- How do they create and re-create their identity as teachers?
- How does their personal practical knowledge develop through their first five years of experience in teaching?

In my work with student teachers and practicing teachers over a number of years I have heard how passionately they described the vision of the teacher they wanted to become, which they began developing during their teacher education program. I have also heard how strenuous and challenging they have found to travel down this path towards their vision. All too often, the path was rough and often vast boulders turned up, blocking them. The teachers received little or no support, and experienced the lack of support as a great impediment in their development toward the direction they wanted to head in their teaching. Hearing the disappointment and sadness in their voices

because they possibly had to settle for something much less, made me wonder why this was all too often the case. It seems that Ewing and Manuel (2005) in their research also heard “a real poignancy in the reflections” (p. 13) of teachers when they were re-visiting and re-viewing their initial visions, one teacher saying: “When I first started teaching I wanted to be a teacher of excellence. Five years down the track I feel I am still a long way off” (p.13).

The vision of becoming an excellent teacher sets the teacher out on a journey which seems too often long, rugged and tortuous. This works against beginning teachers, who in turn do not seem able to use their leverage to their full potential. This inevitably raises the question as to why it is so difficult, or near impossible, to fulfill the desire of becoming the good or even the excellent teacher most beginning teachers want to become. Simultaneously, it raises another question about whether this vision is indeed not a destination but rather the star of excellence they aim at reaching. Therefore, it could be claimed that the newly graduated teachers hitch their wagon to this star and then set out to travel toward it because they aspire to achieve great things. However, as they travel the path towards the star, it is, like the rainbow, a phenomenon where the closer one moves toward it, the further it always appears to move ahead. That is the way it is, and that is the way it should be, because one should never stop seeking excellence and improving one's craft. Hence, it is my sincere wish that this research will provide fruitful knowledge that can be utilized in support of beginning teachers: on the path they travel towards the star that holds the vision of the teacher they initially intended to become.

### **1.5 The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter One presents an introduction. Chapter Two briefly describes the Icelandic context, such as the compulsory school system, the teacher education system and several components of the compulsory school or the basic school, relevant to this study. Chapter Three focuses on the review of the literature, with an emphasis on the most relevant research which helps to place my research questions and the conceptual framework into the proper theoretical context. Chapter Four presents the methodological background: The epistemology, the theoretical perspective and the methodology. Narrative

inquiry is given special attention in this chapter, since it is used in this research both as a phenomenon under study and a research method. Moreover, this chapter delimits the specific way in which I work with narrative inquiry, how the data is analyzed and how the research texts are composed. This refers both to the presentation and the discussion of the findings. Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the major findings for three of the participants in the form of theme-stories, each with their sub-stories. Following each theme-story are my analysis and my interpretation of how that theme-story can provide insights into the theme for which it has been chosen. In Chapter Eight I discuss the findings in relation to the research questions and in the context of the literature reviewed. Finally, in Chapter Nine, conclusions are presented, where an additional discussion of the findings can be found, with special emphasis on the contributions of this research to knowledge about teachers' professional development, their implications for teacher education and for local educational policies, accompanied by a set of further questions.



## Chapter 2 – The Icelandic Context

In this chapter the background of the educational school system in Iceland will be presented, and the context in which this research is carried out is explained, such as the structure of the compulsory school and the teacher education in the Iceland University of Education, as well as some of the specific circumstances within the compulsory school that are relevant for this research.

### 2.1 The Icelandic Compulsory School System

In 1974, a new Compulsory School Act was passed which stipulated nine years of compulsory education from the age of seven to sixteen and gave all children the right to attend school from the age of six, if the parents wished. Up to that point in time, the compulsory education ceased at the age of thirteen. In 1991, compulsory schooling was extended to ten years instead of nine, that is, it became mandatory for all children to start school at the age of six. New legislation on compulsory education, passed in 1995, made the local municipalities responsible for the operation of schools at the compulsory level.

Compulsory education in Iceland is organized into a single structure system: The primary and lower secondary education, or *the basic school*, as it will be called hereafter, form a part of the same school level, and generally take place in the same school building. Additionally, primary and lower secondary education is divided into three sections: the youngest section, grades one through four; the middle section, grades five through seven; and the teenage section, grades eight through ten. While this research was carried out it was governed by the Compulsory School Act from 1995: The Compulsory School Act (Lög um grunnskóla), No. 66/1995. Grade 10 in Iceland is followed by four years in so-called upper secondary school or grammar school which most often leads to a qualifying exam, called *studentspróf*, accepted at all universities.

## **2.2 The Teacher Education in the Iceland University of Education**

The School of Education at the University of Iceland succeeded the Iceland University of Education (Kennaraháskóli Íslands), when these two universities were merged in 2008. The history of the Iceland University of Education goes back to the Icelandic Teacher Training College (Kennaraskóli Íslands), which was founded in 1908, and in 1971 it was upgraded to university level. The Iceland University of Education (the IUE) was the only institution that educated compulsory school teachers until 1993, when the University of Akureyri was founded. However, it should be noted that from 1951 it was possible to get a qualification as a teacher from The University of Iceland, where the emphasis was on subject teaching and geared toward high-school teaching.

The teacher education at the IUE was a three year B.Ed. program (180 ECTS or credits) until 2010, when it became a five year program requiring a master's degree (Kaaber & Kristjánsdóttir, 2008). The teacher education program, at the time when the participants in this research were doing their teacher education, was structured as a three year program to a B.Ed. degree. The study program in the teacher education curriculum at the IUE was composed of three major components: The basic or core course of study; the subject-based courses with students choosing two areas of specialization, to 80 ECTS, which was typical until 2007; and a list of courses they could select from up to 20 ECTS. The core courses were for instance on developmental psychology, on learning theories and teaching Icelandic and Mathematics in the compulsory school. The subject-based courses were areas of specialization linked to the subjects in the compulsory school, and the elective courses featured various issues which were regarded an importance for the future compulsory school teacher, such as dealing with trauma in the classroom, classroom management, the duties and responsibilities of being a class or a homeroom teacher, using educational games in the classroom, to name but few.

### 2.3 The Compulsory School – The Basic School

Icelandic school principals are not required to allocate a mentor or any formal support to beginning teachers. Teachers' salary-contract used to stipulate the possibility of payment for one hour per week for mentoring or supporting a beginning teacher, but this ceased to be on offer over a decade ago. Therefore, there is nothing in the rules or regulations for schools in Iceland that pertain to novice teachers. In spite of that, many principals ask their teachers to support a beginning teacher even though they might not pay them for taking on that role.

Schools in Iceland are generally organized into classes by age, from grade one to ten and students normally attend the school closest to their homes. Officially, there is no streaming by ability and children automatically move up from one grade to the next according to age. The Compulsory School Act (Lög um grunnskóla, 91/2008) does not contain any provisions concerning the maximum number of students within a single class but there is an informal agreement that students in a single class in grades 1 to 6 is not to exceed 24 and in grades 7 to 10 there may be 28 to 30 students. In smaller schools, mostly rural schools, several grades are grouped into a single class with one teacher. Increasingly, new schools are adopting the policy of grouping students in mixed-aged classes.

Classrooms are generally allocated to individual classes. Certain subjects in most compulsory schools, for example arts and crafts, home economics and physical education, are taught in classrooms that are specially intended for them. Students, with varying learning disabilities, as well as deaf, blind and otherwise disabled students, are provided education in accordance with their abilities. They are generally accommodated within their home school and in a class with their peers, but usually these students leave their classes, in a pullout system, during the school day to go to the remedial room within that school, where a specialized special education teacher is generally present.

In the youngest section of the basic school (grades 1–4), a class teacher teaches most of the subjects in her or his class. The borders between individual subjects at this age are normally unclear. In most schools, the same goes for the middle section (grades 5–7), however, the borders between individual subjects become clearer. Instruction in

clearly defined subjects characterizes teaching in the teenage section, where the borders between traditional subjects are clearly defined and teachers tend to be subject teachers.

It is common in Iceland that teachers are class teachers in the younger and the middle sections of the basic school. Usually they follow the same class for two to three years, or longer, and teach most or all of the academic school subjects. This classteacher concept has its roots far back in the Icelandic school tradition. In the teenage section each class has a homeroom teacher, or a supervisory teacher, as it is called in the Compulsory School Act (Lög um grunnskóla, 91/2008). These teachers are called “*umsjónarkennari*” in Icelandic and usually they follow their class the three years of the teenage section like in the younger sections of the basic school. The Compulsory School Act refers to this as an obligation; that is the right for every student to have *umsjónarkennari* who caters to their needs. According to the Act this teacher must monitor her or his students educational needs, their development and general wellbeing, she or he shall guide their students in their studies and school work, provides assistance and advises them regarding personal affairs and encourages collaboration between the school and homes. The class teacher plans and organizes the teaching in cooperation with other teachers of the class and is a key person in connection with implementing requirements about differentiated teaching and the evaluation of the students' learning outcomes from the teaching. The students call all their teachers by their first names as is customary in Iceland because neither surnames nor titles are used in communication.

As discussed above, teachers who graduated from the IUE until 2007 majored in two areas, for instance in Icelandic and Natural Science or Math and Social Studies. They were qualified to teach those subjects in grades one through ten, along with being certified to teach in grades one through ten regardless of subjects. This means that it is a quite common practice in the Icelandic basic school that teachers teach outside their subject areas because they may need additional lessons to fill their teaching posts. They often find themselves teaching e.g. reading to the six year olds, despite not having taken a single course in how to teach reading, or they find themselves teaching Icelandic in grades eight to ten, even though they



majoring in different subjects. Moreover, it is also a common practice that teachers, without having qualification in special education teaching, teach in the remedial room, again, most often because they need additional lessons to fill their teaching posts.

In the first month of each school year, every class teacher and homeroom teacher must have the so called curriculum introduction meeting for all the parents of her or his students. The main purpose of this meeting is to give brief introduction of the educational materials and textbooks that will be in use the forthcoming school year, and in general describe and discuss the aims of the program, the major tasks or projects and assessment procedures. In addition, there is a vote on a representative for the PTA. This meeting is widely seen as an important opportunity for the teacher to get to know the parents of her or his students, and not least for the parents to get acquainted with one another. Knowing your students and knowing the parents is seen as a very important factor for effective schooling in Iceland.

## 2.4 Summary

Teacher education for basic school teachers has been outlined above along with several features of the basic school, with the purpose of providing relevant context for the reader in reference to upcoming stories of the participants in the present research. The above coverage on the compulsory school system in Iceland is primarily based on information from the web page *Organization of the Education System in Iceland* (Eurydice, 2009/2010). I shall now turn to reviewing the chosen literature in the field of teacher research with special attention given to the relevant field of narrative inquiry in this literature.



## Chapter 3 – Literature Review

The research I present in this thesis on the experiences of beginning teachers during their first five years of teaching, is located at the intersection of two distinct research areas: The literature on the experiences of beginning teachers in their first year or years of teaching and research focusing on how teachers learn to teach whilst shaping their professional identity. Accordingly, the following chapter is divided into two main sections, together with a brief report on research on teacher education in the very beginning: *Experiences of Beginning Teachers*, and *Professional Learning of Beginning Teachers*. The purpose of this review is to focus on selected literature to provide a context for the rationale, the research questions and the findings of my research. I have chosen to include qualitative and quantitative studies, both of which inform important aspects of this research, although the former heavily outweighs the latter. I have also tried to draw together the most recent studies I could find as well as older studies that are considered relevant in providing insight into how these topics have been reviewed over a period of time. In addition, I have sought to balance the attention given to each topic, although I have found that this was not always possible since some topics both grew in my hands, as it were, and available research turned out to be unevenly distributed.

Each section of this chapter is divided into sub-chapters that address the selected topics. In section two; 3.2 *Experiences of Beginning Teachers*, there are four sub-chapters. In the first one, Chapter 3.2.1, I review research on personal practical knowledge. As this term is one of the key terms in narrative inquiry, the research literature which addresses the term will be explored at length in order to extract the possible impact of personal practical knowledge on teachers' lives and their experiences in their classrooms. In Chapter 3.2.2, research on the expectations beginning teachers have for teaching is examined, with particular attention directed toward the time from their graduation from teacher education programs until they enter their first classroom. Chapter 3.2.3, which examines the so-

called reality of teaching focuses on the beginning teachers' difficult times, especially during their first year of teaching. Finally, Chapter 3.2.4 explores research on supporting and retaining beginning teachers, where I present the various ways in which support for them can be further facilitated.

In section three; *3.3 Professional Learning of Beginning Teachers*, there are three sub-chapters. In the first one, Chapter 3.3.1, findings of research focusing on supporting teachers beyond the first year will be explored. It seems that challenges continue to linger for the teachers who remain in the classroom beyond that year. Chapter 3.3.2 reports studies on how teachers learn to teach. The focus here is on the process of learning about professional practice. Finally, in Chapter 3.3.3, I will investigate the research literature which elucidates how teachers shape their professional identity with special attention on the factors that interact in that development.

However, before I turn to reporting the literature on the experiences of beginning teachers, and the professional learning of beginning teachers, I will briefly, in Chapter 3.1, consider research on teacher education in order to shed light on what is generally considered an appropriate and fruitful teacher education: what teachers need to know, what they need to learn and what they should be able to do.

### **3.1 Research on Teacher Education**

The professional preparation of teachers is a concern of many researchers as can be seen widely in the research literature. There are consideration such as what teachers need to know, what they need to learn and what they should be able to do: “Clearly, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for optimal teaching are not something that can be fully developed in preservice education programs. Instead, teacher education candidates need to be equipped for lifelong learning” (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 358). Ingvarsdóttir (2002) supports the claim of teacher education being a lifelong learning, so does Feiman-Nemser (2001) because learning to teach only begins with teacher education. Fullan (2001) is very critical of teacher education in his review of research on teacher education in the US, where he claims that the education programs are

characterized by vast gaps: “how to work with parents, assessment literacy vis-a-vis the standards movement, constructivists’ pedagogies, understanding diversity, learning to be collaborative – the very things needed to work in professional learning communities” (p. 243-244). Further, Korthagen (2010) holds that “to date there are at least some serious doubts about the effectiveness of teacher education in general” (p. 99). Another criticism is from Craig (2013) on “the longstanding disconnect between teacher preparation programmes and what subsequently transpires in flesh-and-blood schools ... which spills over to the first year of teaching” (p. 25). Moreover, novice teachers criticize their teacher education, e.g. that “they learned all they needed to know in the “trenches”, not the “towers” [sic]” (Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Wang & Odell, 2011, p. 3).

This criticism is notable in view of the central conclusion in a survey which was sent three years in a row to teachers in Iceland at the end of their first year of teaching, which was that a majority of the respondents believed that much of the teacher education proved useful, particularly the practical pedagogy. However, a number of elements were missing from the teacher education program, such as they wanted more of the practical pedagogy, increased field work and an extension of both practice teaching and the duration of the program (Jónsdóttir, 2005). These findings might indicate that there do not exist these theory–practice transfer problems (Korthagen, 2010) to the same extent in the Icelandic context as seems to be found elsewhere. This shifts the focus to the three year university-based teacher education to a B.Ed. degree – whether it is sufficient preparation for what lies ahead in the schools. Teacher education is of considerable importance, and it appears that increased teacher education is more significant than less. Darling-Hammond and Ball (1999) found that teacher education programs “that offer a five- or six-year program including an extended internship – find their graduates to be more successful and more likely to enter and remain in teaching than graduates of traditional undergraduate programs” (p. 6). These research findings are relevant for my research given the fact that the teacher education in the University of Iceland is in transition and has now become a five year program to an M.Ed. degree (The Higher Education Institutions Act No. 63/2006).

So what should a good teacher education program look like? According to Darling-Hammond (2001), a good teacher education program is coherent, in the sense that there is a clear idea, a vision about what good teaching consists in and all the course work is subsequently organized around that vision. The courses are connected to practice as well as theory; the student teachers work constantly in the classroom with master teachers and are simultaneously learning, for example, about effective teaching strategies, how children learn and how to assess their learning. Darling-Hammond (2000) and her colleagues studied seven exemplary teacher education programs in the USA. The goal of the study was to explicate the core features of a range of programs that make a difference in preparing teachers who understand their students and who can teach in ways that develop deep understanding and high levels of competence. It was concluded that all the seven programs had six common features and among them were the following:

- a common, clear vision of good teaching that is apparent in all coursework and clinical experiences;
- well-defined standards of practice and performance that are used to guide and evaluate coursework and clinical work;
- a curriculum grounded in substantial knowledge of child and adolescent development, learning theory, cognition, motivation, and subject matter pedagogy, taught in the context of practice;
- extended clinical experiences (at least 30 weeks) which are carefully chosen to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven coursework;
- strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs among school- and university-based faculty; and
- extensive use of case study methods, teacher research, performance assessments, and portfolio evaluation to ensure that learning is applied to real problems of practice (p. x).

The 2-year redesigned teacher preparation program at the University of Toronto (on top of a 4-year B.A. degree) include these same components and a pilot study of that program showed that the students “felt significantly more prepared in their 1st year of teaching and were judged by employers as more prepared” (Fullan, 2001, p 246). Judging from this, it is clear that a three year university-based teacher education, to a B.Ed. degree, is far from enough preparation for the

reality that awaits beginning teachers in the schools. Is it possible, despite the university-based teacher education, whether three or five years, that Fullan (2001) is right when he says that initial teacher education is always an afterthought in any reform effort, because “learning to teach effectively takes time, and the way in which one gets started on the job dramatically effects the rest of one’s career, including driving out potentially good teachers in the early years” (p. 249). There is additional evidence in the literature which suggests that those who have the potential to become strong teachers are the ones most likely to leave teaching fairly early in their teaching careers (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2005; Lovett & Cameron, 2011), because they have high expectations of their own performances and are not willing to make concessions.

The support of beginning teachers, Fullan says, is closely integrated and congruent with other parts of the solution to the whole area of teacher education reform. The view that one learns to teach primarily by teaching, as Bullough puts it (2004), which presumably means that it takes time to learn to teach, gives credence to Fullan assertions.

### **3.2 Experiences of Beginning Teachers**

As mentioned earlier, the experience during my first year of teaching can be described as arduous to say the least. I had been assigned a class that many veteran teachers had given up on and which nobody wanted to teach. In fact, this experience was so taxing that by the end of the schoolyear, I was exhausted to the point of wanting to quit, of wanting to part with the teaching profession for good. I felt hurt and was frustrated at my principal for placing me in the position where failure seemed inevitable. It is safe to say that during this time I went through all the phases Moir (1999) says that new teachers experience: “New teachers move through several phases: from anticipation, to survival, to disillusionment, to rejuvenation, to reflection” (p. 19). However, I felt that since I survived this first year of teaching I might as well endure a second year and became determined to prove that I could achieve this.

When I now reflect on this experience several questions arise, such as: is my experience as a first year teacher unique, or something relatively few have to endure? Or is it common and perhaps even

typical? Do the teachers who encounter laborious experiences during their first year of teaching have something in common? – Are their site conditions somewhat similar? Is it possible that both can be the case? Darling-Hammond (1998) notes for example that most beginning teachers in the U.S. are generally assigned the most educationally needy students whom no one else wants to teach. In addition, they are given the most demanding teaching loads, and too many of them merely learn to cope rather than to teach well. As this resonates with my experience I find it of considerable interest to look at whether this might also be as common with teachers in Iceland. Further, what is also interesting to consider are issues relating to what beginning teachers need to know, and how they create their knowledge of the classroom environment, once they are out in the field, which might therefore support their professional learning.

### **3.2.1 Personal Practical Knowledge**

I have now for a long time, like Connelly and Clandinin, been “fascinated with trying to understand teachers as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subject matter, of teaching, of learning” (1999, p. 1). Years ago, when I came to be involved in the professional development of teachers, I found myself becoming increasingly frustrated at how slowly school improvement was developing, and at that time I did not understand why this was the case. Then I learned about the term *personal practical knowledge* in one of the courses I attended when I was studying for my master's degree in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at the University of Toronto, and it gave me at that time an understanding I had not possessed before, as well as a view toward how closely linked it is with the process of learning to teach. In addition, in light of the fact that this term is one of the key terms in narrative inquiry, the research literature on the term personal practical knowledge requires further interrogation. Thus, I will review and discuss studies aimed at examining the personal practical knowledge of teachers.

#### **3.2.1.1 Earlier Studies**

As researchers, Connelly and Clandinin have made a substantial contribution to studies on teacher thinking through their research on teacher's personal practical knowledge (see e.g. Willinsky, 1989,



Craig, 1995, Beattie, 1995a). Before I turn to their contribution I intend to probe into the earliest reports of studies on practical knowledge. Research on the knowledge teachers possess and create seems to go as far back as 1980, for example as explicated in Elbaz's doctoral research on the practical knowledge of teachers (Elbaz, 1983). In a report of the case study from her doctoral research, Elbaz (1981) expresses her concern for what she holds is the prevailing view of the teacher as a passive transmitter of knowledge. By the same token, she finds the opposite view of the teacher as an active agent in initiating and shaping new curriculum and classroom activity, equally inadequate, since it rests on similar assumptions about the ability of teachers. In order to portray the role of the teacher in a more sufficient and appropriate way, she suggests that the teacher should be looked upon as holding and using “practical knowledge” [sic]. Elbaz explored this view in her case study of one teacher, an experienced high school English teacher, where she argues that „there is an unwillingness to view the work done by teachers as the complex activity that it is” (Elbaz, 1981, p. 43).

According to Elbaz, there is a specific problem attached to the teacher's task of translating theoretical notions into practice, i.e. of how to “apply” [sic] theory to practice when the curriculum development process is seen as a linear progression instead of the complex activity mentioned above. Further, Elbaz (1983) made the assumption that “teachers hold a complex, practically-oriented set of understandings which they use actively to shape and direct the work of teaching” (p. 3) and refers to studies on the work teachers do, which show that teachers hold implicit knowledge of how and what to teach and further, that teachers bring to their work their ideas of curriculum, child development and learning. It is interesting to note here that Elbaz (1981) emphasizes that her conception of practical knowledge which she was developing at that time is in fact a broader notion since it encompasses “knowledge of practice as well as knowledge mediated by practice” (p. 46).

In the above mentioned doctoral thesis, Elbaz (1981) set out to look at the work of teaching as “the exercise of a particular kind of knowledge, for in doing their work, teachers confront **all manner** [sic] of tasks and problems, and they draw on a variety of sources of knowledge

to help them to deal with these” (p. 47). She wanted this knowledge, the practical knowledge, to be seen as dynamic, firmly grounded in the individual’s inner and outer experience, and open to change.

Elbaz came up with three major aspects of practical knowledge: The first was its content, the second its orientation and third its structure. Within each of these aspects she found several categories and within each category she indicated the specific items of knowledge held by each teacher. She sought to locate the origins of this knowledge, how it developed and what guiding ideas appeared to underlie the teacher’s understanding in each category. Further, Elbaz argued that we need to develop ways of talking about, what she refers to as “cognitive styles” [sic] or different modes of using practical knowledge, that illuminate the real work of teachers. She arrives at the conclusion that the analytic terms she developed seemed to open up a wide range of possibilities regarding teacher research, as well as developing tools which might perhaps be most be of most use in the hands of the teachers themselves “as tools in their own work of becoming aware of the knowledge they possess, how they use it, and how they might extend it and use it more effectively to further their purposes” (p. 68). What I find especially interesting here is the contention that if teachers know where their attitudes regarding teaching and learning derive from and if they know how that knowledge affects their daily practice in the classroom it is more likely that they will be able to change what they are doing if that is their intention.

A few years later, Clandinin (1985) discusses teachers' knowledge, where she reports a study of teachers' classroom images, and emphasizes that their knowledge is neither purely theoretical nor merely practical, but rather that “teachers' knowledge is composed of both kinds of knowledge, blended by the personal background and characteristics of the teacher and expressed by her in particular situations” (p. 361). Note that Clandinin has added the *personal* to Elbaz's term, *practical knowledge*, whose work, Clandinin explains, precedes her own. Furthermore, Clandinin claims that together with Connelly, this term, *personal practical knowledge*, was explored by them in detail (it was for instance discussed in a conference paper in 1984), and in fact they maintained that they “coined the term 'personal

practical knowledge' [sic] to mark the boundaries of our inquiry into teaching" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, p. 296). The term is to mean that the "personal" [sic] part of the knowledge "participates in, and is imbued with, all that goes to make up a person. It is knowledge which has arisen from circumstances, actions and undergoings which themselves had affective content for the person in question" (p. 362). Studying beginning teachers' experiences for the extended number of years as I have done through my research, might contribute to these understandings, as well as expand knowledge, and perhaps add greater depth and extension to this concept.

In Clandinin's (1985) research on two experienced primary school teachers in their classrooms over more than a year, she examined how they coped with students, parents, other staff, the principal, and consultants and with program demands, in order to understand the teachers' personal practical knowledge. The central idea of her research was that "teachers' classrooms grow out of their experiences, both private and professional" (p. 379), and her aim was to develop the concept of *image* which assumes its meaning within the framework of personal practical knowledge.

According to Clandinin (1985), image is the glue that melds together a person's diverse experiences, both personal and professional, and in her research it is "a kind of knowledge, embodied in a person and connected with the individual's past, present, and future" (p. 379). Hence, *personal practical knowledge* is also an emotional and moral knowledge which is closely connected with the personal and professional narratives of our lives. Clandinin concludes that her research emphatically illustrates that personal practical knowledge need not be clearly articulated and logically definable in order to have a powerful influence on the lives of teachers. She argues that her research has two practical consequences: Firstly, the term personal practical knowledge, its language and perspective, makes it possible to view school practice with an attitude which credits and values teachers' knowledge, and secondly, a different notion concerning the improvement of schools that rigorously build on personal practical knowledge of teachers is formed "by working with them rather than on or against them" (p. 383). These consequences create the foundation for my interest in using personal practical

knowledge as a major concept through which I intend to examine the data in my research on the experiences of teachers through their first five years of teaching.

In another study carried out by Clandinin (1989), she focuses on the development of one novice teacher's personal practical knowledge during his first year of teaching. In her study she “explores the experiential basis of teacher's personal knowledge as it is made practical within the context of the first year teaching situation” (p. 122). Clandinin writes that few researchers have looked beyond the most common explanations of the beginning teachers' lack of skills, to explore the transition from novice to experienced teacher. Importantly, this particular aspect figures prominently into the foundations and context of my research. One of its aims is to examine how my participants' personal practical knowledge develops through their first five years of experience in teaching. What is more, by virtue of being a longitudinal research it may give further account of the abovementioned transition, and thus add to this body of knowledge.

Furthermore, I believe Clandinin (1989) reports some very interesting findings from her study of the beginning teacher. First, she claims that it is clear that learning to teach involves much more than learning and applying skills; it involves the narrative reconstruction of a teacher's experience, because personal practical knowledge is shaped through its expression in practical situations. Second, Clandinin asserts that the focus on the professional development for this novice teacher was directed toward the professional side, i.e. on various skills instead of the personal and emotional aspects and needs of the beginning teacher, thus, opportunities for reflection were not a part of this novice teacher's on-going experience of teaching in the school and classroom. And third, there is no meaningful support for this novice teacher. Clandinin maintains that the form in which the support is offered must be characterized by features that allow for the reflective reconstruction of the novice's narrative of experiences.

Increasingly, researchers seem to be telling stories about teaching, says Elbaz (1991), and she proposes to examine the development of an area of research which looks at teaching “from the inside” [sic], focusing on teacher thinking (p. 1). She discusses the discourse of narrative and biography as reflected in the works of Connelly and

Clandinin on the one hand and of Butt and Raymond on the other. Elbaz argues that both Connelly and Clandinin's narrative unity and Butt and Raymond's autobiography “tend to carry with them into our discourse some of the positivist assumptions from which we are striving to distance ourselves” (p. 5). These assumptions, Elbaz insists, revolve around for example the existence of a given and knowable empirical reality, which attempt to convince us that the author is in a position of 'authority' with respect to a particular portion of that reality – his own life. Instead of using the terms narrative unity or autobiography, which is derived from particular traditions of literature, Elbaz proposes the notion of 'story' as the discourse for teacher thinking research. Her arguments are as follows: Firstly, the notion of story is one which keeps the teller clearly in focus; secondly, the story keeps the audience firmly in mind; thirdly, the story as a tale told on a certain occasion is malleable, and is unlikely to become frozen into fixed form; and lastly she says that the notion of story evokes an image of a community of listeners which is particularly needed at this point in their work.

Elbaz concludes that the concept of story seems to be particularly fitting to make public the teacher's voice and adds that “[t]he sense of a community of teachers and researchers, working together, listening to one another, is especially important at a time when the work of both groups is being increasingly bureaucratized” (p. 16). Even though Elbaz wrote this almost 20 years ago I find her criticism of Connelly and Clandinin's term narrative (unity) surprising, given that their understanding of it, as discussed earlier, seems to be in accordance with Elbaz's abovementioned discussion of story as means to examine and explain teachers thinking as well as their understanding of a community of teachers and researchers. Perhaps this simply characterized the discourse of narrative inquiry at a time when the latter was still in its infancy, as it were. Since Elbaz delivered her criticism, much water has run under the bridge and narrative inquiry seems to have subsequently found its niche as a valid research method in conjunction with the researchers that advocate it.

Another voice of criticism comes from Willinsky (1989) who holds that the conception of teaching in Connelly and Clandinin's research in the early stages of narrative inquiry tended to isolate the

teacher, because of its inability to address the institutional elements on this form of work. By making the personal practical knowledge of teachers more noticeable, the hope is that the consequential growth in meaning will bring about an act of school reform, although, Willinsky is doubtful. He argues that as Connelly and Clandinin have repeatedly “acknowledged that the teacher's work is embedded within “the social history of schools and schooling” [sic], the challenge remains to both uncover and situate the variety of personal, practical senses made out of living that embeddedness” (p. 263).

Perhaps Elbaz's and Willinsky's criticism can be viewed as critical voices from the infancy of the concept of personal practical knowledge, as it had not yet been properly established at the time when Clandinin and Connelly (2000) felt they were working at the margins of established inquiry traditions in their field. However, while reviewing the literature from this era I was attracted by Johnson's discussion from 1989 on *embodied knowledge*, and how he supports what I understand as Connelly and Clandinin's notion of this concept. Namely, he insists that the study of “teachers' personal practical knowledge ... focuses on the way teachers' understanding of their world affects the way they structure classroom experience and interact with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators” (1989, p. 261). Additionally, he adds a dimension to the term which I find particularly intriguing, which is the *embodied* nature of personal practical knowledge.

### **3.2.1.2 Embodied Knowledge**

At that time Johnson was pursuing his own hypotheses about the crucial role of human embodiment in understanding, reasoning, and knowing, and whether there is any significant connection between cognition and the structures of our bodily experience. In his book: *The Body in the Mind* (1987), Johnson argues that if human beings are rational animals, it follows that our rationality is embodied. Johnson (1989) asks for example whether we are “reasoning animals whose bodily experiences influence the way we are able to have, understand, and know our world and ourselves as part of that world” (p. 366). Yes, he affirms and explains that this knowledge is practical activity and the locus of that practice includes our embodied being in the world. And how we come to know that world involves patterns of our bodily

experiences: “Human beings have bodies that are the locus of their complex interactions with their environment. Because of the nature of our bodily experience, there are certain constraints on what we are able to experience and on how we are able to understand that experience” (p. 366). Additionally, Johnson claims that there is significant correlation between the structures of our bodily experience and what we regard as our 'higher' [sic] cognitive abilities, such as reasoning and knowing. Structures and patterns of our bodily interactions with the environment ground and affect abstract concepts and rational processes and as such, our ability of meaningful engagement and reasoning are necessarily tied with our embodied being in the world. In short, this means that the concepts we can utilize to think are structured by what our bodies are like and how they function in the world. This is knowledge which grows out of our personal experience and is the very means by which a transformation of that experience is possible. Therefore, this may be knowledge which is held within the total system of brain, body, and environment, and which would include our cultural context as well. Johnson insists that the teachers' knowledge “is the very way they construct their reality as they live it through their embodiment, with all its tempos, moods, patterns, and projections” (1989, p. 372). This understanding of embodied knowledge is important in the context of my research as it adds a new dimension and enables me to probe into the development of my participants' embodied knowledge, i.e. how they create and manage relationships with students, colleagues and parents, as well as creating classroom environments.

Other researchers have expanded on these concepts and ideas and the teacher knowledge studies since the earlier days when this concept was still being developed, reported for instance a story of an experienced teacher. Beattie (1995b), in a two year study, tells a story of a teacher who constructed and reconstructed her personal practical knowledge through the reflective practices of her inquiry within the context of organizational and personal change. Beattie concluded that her participant had grown in her “understanding of herself and of others and developed her abilities to become more responsive and reciprocal within her relationships with others” (p. 148). The story of only one teacher provided insight into the way in which personal

theories are constructed through reflection on practice. Beattie's research expanded on previous research concerning the ethics and the aesthetics of the art of teaching, as she phrases it. What is more, Beattie found that for example the teacher's understanding of her students, lessons, units, planning and her view towards herself as a learner was multi-layered and as did her recognition, that it was her experienced knowledge that guided and directed the restructuring of her personal practical knowledge. In addition, this study shows how her assessment of her successes and failures and professional development, for instance, were connected to the relational situation within which they were determined and understood. Indeed, it also brings to light how her story gives insight into the way she dealt with a number of paradoxes originating in her on-going struggle to strike a balance between less teacher talk and more student talk, between less teacher control and more student self-control, between more flexibility on her behalf to a more student-directed structures, to name but few. These findings from Beattie's (1995b) study are particularly interesting in the context of my research as they open up toward similar issues which I also find important to explore.

### ***3.2.1.3 Coming to Know Professional Knowledge***

Another two year study from 1995, centers on the knowledge beginning teachers hold and how they develop their knowledge in context as they become experienced teachers (Craig, 1995). The study examined the connection a beginning teacher makes between his personal practical knowledge and his experiences within the context of his school. During her research, Craig came to identify the people that effected the professional knowledge context of her participant, who had to negotiate meaning for his beginning teaching experiences. These people Craig conceptualized as her participant's knowledge community. The significance of pointing this out ties in with Craig's conclusion as it helped her unravel some of the complexities surrounding how beginning teachers' knowledge is subtly shaped in their professional knowledge contexts. Craig asserts that her study is the first one to explore "how it is that teachers come to know professional knowledge in ... their professional knowledge contexts" (p. 152), while numerous other studies have explored the development of teachers' personal practical knowledge.



Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) criticism of Fenstermacher's (1994) review of the conceptions of knowledge in the literature of research on teaching, is in my opinion informative. Fenstermacher sets out to examine how notions of knowledge are employed and analyzed in a number of research programs that study teachers and their teaching. Like Craig above, he was especially interested in the increasing amount of research literature regarding the knowledge that teachers create as a result of their experience as teachers, presumably in their “professional knowledge contexts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 24). Fenstermacher points out that there is a distinction between that kind of knowledge and the knowledge which is generated by those who specialize in research on teaching, and adds that the latter uses more conventional approaches to the study of teaching which results in a separation from those that might be thought of as alternative approaches. Fenstermacher prefers to divide his review into two strands, based on research that seeks to delimit the scope of teachers’ knowledge, one being the knowledge created by research *on* teaching and teachers, and the other based on the work of Elbaz and Connelly and Clandinin, who emphasize that teachers create knowledge through their experience in the classrooms.

In his review, Fenstermacher (1994) maintains that Connelly and Clandinin face a certain risk with their use of theory and concepts of becoming too “heavily enmeshed” (p. 12) in them; the risk being that they become blurred by their own abstractions. Judging from this, Fenstermacher does not seem to hold this strand of research in high regard: “Those whose predilections are for more formal, more conventionally science-oriented perspectives on the nature of knowledge will experience some consternation on reading ... [their] definition [on personal practical knowledge]” (p. 10). Further, Fenstermacher claims that it is not clear to him “whether the insights and understandings teachers express in narratives are accorded the status of knowledge merely because they are teacher-articulated insights and understandings or whether they must meet some categorical standard before being accorded the status of knowledge” (p. 13), and he asks the question: “What is it that the teacher [knower] knows, and how is it known that the teacher knows it?” (p. 13). Clearly, Fenstermacher believes that this strand of research simply

takes teachers' knowledge at face value without making any claims to justify or an attempt to warrant that knowledge, and for this reason, he insists, that "[t]he challenge for teacher knowledge research is not simply one of showing us that teachers think, believe, or have opinions, but that they know" (p. 51). I feel that Clandinin and Connelly (1996) contend with this, what seems to be a deliberate 'lack of understanding' and resistance, with quite some decorum. They find it indeed surprising "that researchers might feel compelled to demonstrate that teachers know things" (p. 28). Of course teachers do, they say, and the idea that teachers might not know that they know, they find equally surprising. However, as research has repeatedly shown, much of teachers' knowledge is tacit (e.g. Elbaz, 1983; Pope, 1993), and if I understand Connelly and Clandinin's work correctly, by applying the concept personal practical knowledge, it aims to bring out this tacit knowledge.

Fenstermacher arranged his review around four questions which Clandinin and Connelly (1996) say are essentially the questions that have infused and driven the vast research on teaching. In their notes they write that since Fenstermacher arrived at those four questions through a philosophical perspective primarily interested in epistemology, drawing a distinction between practical and formal forms of knowledge and structuring his review around the latter notion, they are then not engaged in a shared inquiry. They argue that there is a widespread sense in which the literature resulting from the above kind of research on teaching has not amounted to much. Instead, an understanding of teachers' personal practical knowledge placed in the context of their professional knowledge landscape, as Clandinin and Connelly prefer to call the school setting, is more likely to result in some improvements in teachers and teaching. Further, Clandinin (2007) suggests that "narrative inquirers locate themselves in relation to ... the debate whether narrative inquiry is descriptive or interventionist; that is, does ... [it] set out to change the world" (p. xv). In my view, Clandinin and Connelly's arguments are more in line with my intention of using narrative inquiry in my research, hence I locate myself in relation to the interventionists. It is indeed my hope that my research will show that the participants know and develop their professional knowledge landscape and better yet, that they know that

they know, which will hopefully result in a furthering of understanding and knowledge that can change some school landscapes.

I will conclude this review of research where personal practical knowledge is under study by looking briefly at two more recent ones. Tsang (2004) investigated for example the role of teachers' personal practical knowledge in interactive decision making for three pre-service non-native ESL teachers and found, like earlier studies, that in making interactive decisions, and in other decision-making processes, teachers indeed apply their personal practical knowledge. The two major findings of this study were, first, some elements of the teacher's personal practical knowledge may be competing amongst themselves in a way similar to the tension created as a result of competing instructional goals. And second, personal practical knowledge is open and developing rather than stable and limited.

Dobson (2005) focused his inquiry on the aesthetic dimension of personal practical knowledge; an aspect which he claims has been unappreciated. Dobson aims at searching for “a means of an aesthetic epistemology in both academic research and in teacher education/development” (p. 328), which he calls the 'outer' narrative, and the 'inner' story referring to a study following a research participant who was in transition from a successful career as a theatre professional to becoming a high school teacher. His main conclusion is that the outer and the inner stories are “inextricably intertwined” (p. 337), thus “the aesthetic epistemology informing the theoretical and methodological framework of this inquiry ... provides a means of understanding that the implications arising from this study ... may be of interest ... because they are authentic and revelatory like art” (p. 337). Consequently, the finding illuminates the aesthetic dimension concerned with competence and facility as well as with imbuing education with meaning for students and teachers. Dobson expressed his hope that the relevance of the insights drawn from this study would exceed the particularity of his participant's experience in the same way that a work of art creates an experience of meaning for its respondents as it does for its creator.

As can be seen from the above review, the aim of these types of research on teacher knowledge studies to date is to make explicit teachers' knowledge in and for their practices in order to understand

and improve teaching and teachers' lives (see Beattie, 1995b; Dobson, 2005; Elbaz, 1981, 1983; Clandinin, 1985, 1989; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, 2000; Craig, 1995; Tsang, 2004). My journey through the personal practical knowledge literature has been both particularly informative and it has indeed increased my understanding of the phenomena in question.

### **3.2.2 Expectations of Teaching**

Research on the initial expectations of teaching which beginning teachers hold, from the time they graduate until they enter their first classroom, is rather scarce, according to Kyriacou and Kunc (2007). In fact, they claim that “surprisingly little attention has been paid specifically to their initial expectations of teaching” (p. 1248). Kyriacou and Kunc report a three year study<sup>1</sup> whose aim was to explore the expectations of beginning teachers. Some of the expectations of the teachers prior to their first post were for example the following: Most of them were absolutely certain that their job would be socially worthwhile; that they would be excited about their students' achievement and that they expected some portion of the job to involve difficult times; they were uncertain whether they would have enough time to do a reasonable job and whether their teacher education had prepared them for the job. Kyriacou and Kunc found there were both feelings of excitement and fear; they were confident about themselves and that they would enjoy the work, and they were afraid that they would not be able to deliver what would be expected of them and worried about being faced with potential criticism. These conclusions should not be surprising considering that these student teachers are at the beginning stages of their chosen career, and it is likely that they have these feelings in common with other people in similar situation.

Furthermore, when examining the research literature the expectations of the beginning teachers' seem to be closely linked to the reasons why they wanted to become teachers in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup>This is a study conducted by a research team from the University of York, where over 300 student teachers in their final year of training completed a questionnaire and a sample of 28 of them were then tracked through their first two years in post by e-mail communication.

Beginning teachers' expectations at the outset of their teaching career have been characterized as an amalgamation of anticipation, excitement and apprehension. They have now finished their initial teacher training and cannot wait to meet their first group of students. They look forward to the task ahead; they are eager to show what they have learned during their teacher education and what they are able to do. And at the same time there is an underlying feeling of anxiety (Bluestein, n.d., Johnson & Birkiland, 2003; Steingrimsdóttir, 2005). Moreover, beginning teachers seem to be excited to realize their dream, their vision of the good teacher they all long to become. They want to be competent and creative in their classrooms, they want to be flexible and entertaining, and they envision themselves as enjoying their job, respected by parents and looked upon as a valuable addition by the school staff (Bluestein, n.d.).

Some of the key findings in a six-year longitudinal study<sup>2</sup> of teachers' experiences of initial teacher training (ITT) and early professional development in England (Hobson, Malderez, Tracey, Homer, Ashby, Mitchell and McIntyre, 2009), report that at the end of the ITT, most of the students teachers felt confident that their ITT had prepared them to be effective teachers; that they would establish good relationship with students; and that they would bring about student learning. Although, in contrast some were skeptical about the value of theoretical courses in their ITT, while others felt the balance between theoretical and practical courses were acceptable, and their worries were related for example to student behavior and possible workload. Two Icelandic studies report similar findings, that is, the participants felt that on the whole their teacher education program had prepared them quite well, especially the pedagogical courses, and simultaneously, many of them were quite skeptical about the value of theoretical courses (Ingvarsdóttir, 2007; Jónsdóttir, 2005). These findings, which relate for example to the student teachers' expecta-

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<sup>2</sup>This study, which is a part of a large-scale project: Becoming a Teacher (BaT), is aimed at examining beginner teachers' perceptions and experiences of support during their initial teacher preparation (ITP), and first four years in post as qualified teachers. The BaT project was a six-year (2003-2009) longitudinal study of beginning teachers' experiences of initial teacher preparation, induction and early professional development, carried out by a research team from the University of Nottingham.

tions of teaching, show that they look forward to similar things as mentioned above and have similar concerns about teaching.

Additionally, much of the motivation for entering teaching and the expectations of novices, have to do with attitudes and values such as a sense of calling, the courage to challenge the prevalent knowledge and conventional wisdom, and a passion for social justice, according to Nieto (2009). She has found that the hope of changing students' lives, empathy for students, love of subject matter, to name but few things she cites, are also influential issues. By contrast, Nieto claims that beginning teachers have never expressed to her that the reason they wanted to become teachers or to stay in the classroom were related to such things as teaching students how to take tests or learning to follow rubrics or templates. Why people want to become teachers is largely grounded on solid and morally defensible reasons, argues Soder (2004). He is convinced that what he calls 'would-be' teachers know all the negative aspects of teaching, such as that it will not make them rich or provide them high status in society; instead they go into teaching because of "its own moral grounding, its own demands, its own rewards" (p. 15), having the sense that they are morally responsible to and for those they teach and that they want to teach no matter what. Similarly, however more poetical, Ewing and Manuel (2005) say that early career teachers tend to describe their expectations and visions of teaching in a way that remind us of "the archetypal journeys and odysseys of classical mythology" (p. 6). They add that these teachers have "a genuine commitment to their chosen profession and initially held well-articulated beliefs about their vocations as educators" (p. 7). It will be interesting to see if the expectations of the participants in my research are in concert with the above findings.

### **3.2.3 The Reality of Teaching – Difficult Times**

There is abundant research literature that report on the beginning teachers' sense of difficulty and tribulation; panic and doubts, being stressed-out, discouragement and exhaustion during their first year of teaching (see e.g. Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Fullan, 2001; Goodlad, 2004; Gordon & Maxey, 2000; Halford, 1999; Ingvarsdóttir, 2009; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Marti & Huberman,

1989; Moir, 1999), and even their first years of teaching. Becoming a teacher all of a sudden and not being a 'teacher-to-be' any more, as Goodlad (2004) highlights, is a time of serious disconnectedness for every beginning teacher and adds that for some “it is the realization of a dream, for some others a nightmare become real” (p. 39). The transition from student teacher to a full-time professional or 'teacher-in-charge' as Rogers and Babinski (1999) prefer to call it, has proved to be “so painful a period in the professional lives of new teachers that it has its own name: reality shock” (p. 38). Earlier, Huberman (1989, 1992) identified the survival theme which, according to him, has to do with reality shock, and he lists several issues which beginning teachers find hard to confront, among which is the complexity and simultaneity of instructional management, “the preoccupation with self ('Am I up to this challenge?'), the gulf between professional ideals and the daily grind of classroom life, [and] the fragmentation of tasks” (p. 123). Accordingly, the first year is a painful year and the beginning teachers meet with variety of difficulties, most of which are quite unexpected (Ingvarsdóttir, 2009). In brief, it seems that first year teachers typically describe their profession as overwhelming.

In his large-scale study with middle- and high-school teachers in Switzerland, Huberman (1993) drew on extensive interviews with 160 participants when he outlined several phases in what he calls the professional life cycle of teachers, each of them being potentially difficult, and characterized by different challenges. The most difficult phases Huberman describes are the beginning years of teaching of what he calls the survivors of painful beginnings, which is marked by “exhaustion, over-investment, tensions and the uncertainties of trial and error in the classroom, difficult pupils and...feelings of isolation from colleagues” (p. 35). Moreover, it is well known that particularly those novices who are the most talented leave in the greatest numbers (Gonzales & Sosa, 1993), i.e. because the situation does neither value them nor allow them as much success as they had anticipated. Striking a similar chord, Ewing and Manuel (2005) report a study which claims that “[O]n average, those teachers who decided to leave had higher graduate test scores” (p. 5). Regardless of “the good intention and high expectations of these beginners, 40 to 50 percent of them will drop out of teaching within the first seven years..., most within the

first two years” (Gordon & Maxey, 2000, p. 1), but Ewing and Manuel (2005) give out a smaller number of newly-recruited teachers, or one third of them, who resign or 'burn-out' [sic] in their first three to five years of teaching. Gordon and Maxey name six environmental difficulties which are “grounded in the culture of the teaching profession and the conditions of the school as a workplace” (p. 2) that could explain this: Difficult work assignments, unclear expectations, inadequate resources, isolation, role conflict and reality shock. Deficit staff-room culture or “[R]ocking the boat in the early days is avoided” (p. 7), that is to follow what has always been done, can also be added to this list (Ewing and Manuel, 2005). Gordon and Maxey add that some of those who persevere or survive as habitually phrased, will initially undergo negative experiences to the extent that they may never reach their full potential as teachers. If that is the case, I find that it is of upmost importance to find out if the first year or years for beginning teachers in Iceland also proves to be as painful a period – and to chart what it is that new teachers in this country are up against when they enter their new profession; when the so-called reality hits them!

Furthermore there are observers who go as far as claiming that education can be dubbed as “the profession that eats it young” (Halford, 1999, p. 14)! Halford says that the needs of new professionals in education are not met with to the same extent as for example in medicine and law, where the needs of their new professionals are more fully recognized. Moreover, Nieto (2009), who is also critical of the conditions beginning teachers are faced with, writes that “[t]oo many teachers are leaving the profession because the ideals that brought them to teaching are fast disappearing” (p. 13), and further, Feiman-Nemser (2001) describes this as the 'sink or swim' [sic] induction, which encourages beginning teachers to stick to whatever practice which will “enable them to survive whether or not they represent 'best' practice in that situation” (p. 1014). These are indeed critical observations of the realities of the novice teachers.

When probing still further the nature of the difficulties beginning teachers are in fact subjected to during their first year or years of teaching they include for example; role overload and anxiety, larger classes, extensive workload and excessive amount of so called paperwork, extracurricular duties, challenging relationships with



students, their parents and or with colleagues in their schools (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Hobson, et al., 2009). Besides, there are myriad of complexities, many unpredictable, which make their lives complicated. Goodlad (2004) observes for example, that beginning teachers may be technically able to make the hundreds of decisions they have to every day and yet still remain overpowered by the dynamics of the classroom social environment. And they may have been considered extremely talented in human relations in their teacher education program but still be too sensitive to the parents once in their classrooms and perhaps irritated by the demands of some them. These are examples of contradictions many novices experience.

Additionally, difficulties which have to do with teaching assignments tend to be on this long list of issues which contribute to the beginning teacher's feeling of the work being stressful, unrewarding and not satisfactory. It is unquestionably essential to a new teacher's success and satisfaction, Johnson (2006) points out, to have appropriate and fair teaching assignments. She even says that routinely novices are assigned to teach outside their area of expertise and that it is “a matter of considerable concern that so many students have teachers who are unprepared for the subjects they teach” (p. 5). Out-of-field teaching, as Johnson calls it, is likely to make the teachers feel unsuccessful and unsatisfied on the job, and they may choose to quit as a result. Eberhard, Reinhardt-Mondragon and Stottlemeyer (2000) conducted a study where the target population were new teachers in South Texas with three or less years of experience. What these new teachers found most difficult was student behavior, other duties than teaching, the lack of acceptance and support from administration, the salary and they also mention inappropriate teaching assignments. The magnitude of paperwork, special education requirements, and class size was also noted as being of concern, though not as difficult as the previously mentioned issues. Also of interest from the findings of this research, is the main reason these new teachers gave for wanting to quit, namely that their experiences of teaching did not meet with their expectations. So I would assume, that on the basis of whether the beginning teacher's expectations they hold dearest are being fulfilled, or derogated, the decision as to whether so stay or leave their profession will be made.

Those researchers, like Feiman-Nemser (2001), who favor reform-oriented models which emphasize teaching as more listening on behalf of teachers as they elicit student thinking and student to do more asking, see “the continuum for learning to teach oriented around this vision of teaching and around an expanded view of professional practice that includes teachers working together for educational change” (p. 1015). In order for that to happen Goodlad (2004) suggests that beginning teachers receive mentoring which is a part of the same school culture, because the difficulties and dilemmas, the circumstances and happenings, call out for what he calls sage counseling of someone who knows the situation. He says that mentoring which is organized by a formula from the school district is “doomed to failure” (p. 41) which must be viewed as a very critical observation of the prevailing arrangement of new teachers' inductions.

As was made abundantly clear above, a vast majority of beginning teachers seem to encounter difficulties from the day they set foot in the classroom. Could this mean that the initial teacher education programs are at fault, or are the beginning teachers unrealistic in their expectations? As “teacher candidates have long rated knowledge about classroom management as one of the most crucial topics to be learned in preservice teacher education” (LePage, Darling-Hammond & Akar, 2005, p. 327), how do they deal with that once they are in front of a whole class? How do they tackle the challenges of the job; how are they coping? What other tasks do they rate as crucial topics to be learned in teacher education as well? How does the teacher education come into the picture? What do beginning teachers need to know and be able to do? The above deliberations raise questions such as whether this is also the case in Iceland. Questions like what it is that predominates when new teachers in Iceland decide whether or not to stay in teaching, – and even more importantly, if they too feel that the schools' culture made them abandon the visions and beliefs they developed during their teacher education program. It is important to examine if these issues are truly universal issues; if the same applies to Icelandic novices in teaching as elsewhere.

### 3.2.4 Supporting and Retaining Beginning Teachers

From what has been said above one might be tempted to assume that the beginning teachers' experience of teaching is only difficult, but of course that is not the case. The long-term research project which Johnson and Kardos at Harvard Graduate School of Education<sup>3</sup> have been conducting, concerns, among other things, the recruitment of new teachers, how to support them in their classrooms and how to retain them in teaching. A number of articles from various aspects of this research project have been published, among which is research that also tells of positive experience, but they are more or less stories of how they were received in their new work places (Johnson & Kardos, 2002), meaning that they were warmly welcomed in their schools, they were introduced to their colleagues and given sufficient information about the classes that they would teach. In addition, the majority of the newly qualified teachers in the BaT-study (Hobson, et al., 2009) indicated that they were enjoying teaching in their first year as they experienced good relationship with students and colleagues. But is that enough? What then? How do the beginning teachers tackle the challenges of the job? How do they manage all the tasks of teaching? Will they receive mentoring from veteran teachers? Will they be given good enough support? Johnson and Kardos (2002) assert that that was not always the case and therefore it is interesting to see to what degree this holds among Icelandic novices.

Johnson and Kardos (2002, Kardos & Johnson, 2007) talk about the importance of a school's professional culture and how that may or may not support beginning teachers. They describe three types of cultures that can be created in schools: the veteran-oriented one, where the methods and norms of teaching practice are determined by and meant to serve veteran teachers; the novice-oriented one, where youth, inexperience and idealism existed but little professional guidance about how to teach; and the integrated-oriented professional culture, where there was an ongoing professional exchange across experience levels and where teamwork and camaraderie distinguished the work settings. Integrated professional cultures, they note, is a school culture

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<sup>3</sup>Johnson and Kardos's research is a part of a five year research project at Harvard Graduate School of Education and is called The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, see homepage <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/index.htm>

where new teachers are recognized as novices and offered extra assistance. Their conclusion is that new teachers flourish in an integrated professional culture that encourages teacher collaboration across experience levels, where the new teachers seemed to be better assisted and thus more able to serve their students. Additionally, in their literature review on induction and mentoring, Long, McKenzie-Robblee, Schaefer, Steeves, Wnuk, Pinnegar and Clandinin (2012) repeatedly came across writings that pointed to the significance of the school culture in the workplaces of the early career teachers. School cultures which seemed to be most successful in retaining novice teachers, they said, were supportive of the integrated approach. Feiman-Nemser (2012) reaches similar conclusion and proposes that “these integrated professional environments not only reduces the problem of teacher isolation, but also fosters learning with and from colleagues and promotes a sense of collective responsibility” (p. 15). It will be interesting to see if this present research will bring to light what kind of professional culture meets the participants, even though that is not under scrutiny per se.

On a similar note, Shank (2005) emphasizes the importance of collaborative culture, as it can have tremendous influence on the beginning teachers' learning as well as on their feelings of wellbeing. Shank describes a set of structural conditions in a high school she studied, which provide teachers, novices and veteran teachers alike, with what is called common space, common time and common work. 10 to 12 teachers in co-teaching teams, cross-curricular grade-level teams and content-area teams share a workspace. Additionally, and which I find of special interest, teachers who team teach a common group of students are allotted more than 15 hours a week for planning the curriculum and jointly assessing student work, which allows for working together, actively talking and for collaborative problem solving. This kind of collaborative culture, where the novice teacher has the opportunity of attaining immediate support and assistance from a team of teachers, must make the difficult transition into teaching more successful.

Ways in which to support beginning teachers are widely mentioned in the research literature (e.g. Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Keiffer-Barone & Ware, 2001; Long, et al., 2012; Olebe, Jackson &

Danielson, 1999; Rogers & Babinski, 1999) and the above-mentioned Harvard research project suggests that the key to retaining new teachers is support and training at the school site, because that is where they must find success and satisfaction. It is in these schools and classrooms where they will decide whether or not to continue to teach. “Clever incentives may attract new teachers, but only improving the culture and working conditions of schools will keep them” (Johnson, et al., 2001, p. 1). Birkeland and Johnson (2002) talked to 50 beginning teachers, in their first to third year of teaching, about what kept them in the swim. The short answer was: schools that support their work. They say that their “study demonstrates that new teachers achieve success and find satisfaction primarily at the school site; unless their experiences with students and colleagues are rewarding, they will likely transfer to another school or leave teaching altogether” (p. 14). Birkeland and Johnson identified four key issues which gave the novices a feeling of efficacy in their teaching, which at the same time were the most important factors:

- Offer new teachers novice status;
- Create a supportive professional culture;
- Provide curricular guidance and resources; and
- Create schoolwide conditions that support student learning (p. 19).

Birkeland and Johnson's main conclusion was that in order to attract and retain new teachers, extensive interventions were needed: “It is at the school that new teachers meet the daily challenges of their work, hoping to achieve success with students –and it is the school that ultimately can provide the most effective support for new teachers” (p. 21). However, it is not enough that the schools improve in order to retain beginning teachers. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) claim, that the educational authorities, the policymakers, have to face the retaining problem too, by for example understanding how laws and regulations influence the schools, and what needs to be changed in order to support schools and their teachers.

Teachers leave the profession for various reasons. Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) identified, through examining several studies, four key reasons as to why teachers leave the profession within the first few years, two of which were, on the one hand workload; the workload is

too heavy, the work is too pressurized and stressful, and there is too much administration to do. And on the other, disruptive pupils; some pupils' constant misbehavior makes the work too difficult. Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) found that their own study was in line with the studies they reported, and the four major components which influence their participants' commitment towards teaching turned out to be

school management (and in particular the degree to which senior staff in the school are seen to be supportive); time pressures (and in particular a feeling that there is not time enough to do the work demanded to an acceptable standard); pupil behaviour (and in particular the degree the teacher is able to experience and enjoy pupils' successes as against a feeling that pupils are badly behaved and disaffected); and having a happy private life (and in particular a concern about the extent to which workload encroaches unacceptably into too much of the time for their private life) (p. 1253).

Kyriacou and Kunc suggest that it would be of value to study how beginning teachers "reconstruct their identity as teachers and how they balance their assessments of positive and negative experiences" (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007, p. 1254). In fact, they use an interesting metaphor to describe those beginning teachers' experiences who 'hang in' teaching, which was the analogue to marriage and divorce: "Entering teaching is like a marriage and leaving it is like a divorce. On the one hand, there are those who work hard at their marriage to sustain it and who react to failed expectations by seeking out new sources of satisfaction. On the other hand, there are those who just say 'I have had enough of this, I want to get out!'" (p. 1252). They are not alone in the use of the metaphor of marriage, Goodlad (2004) compares good partnering with good marriage; both is hard work. Here, Goodland is referring to school-university partnering where each partner has to be receptive to the other's needs as each one has something the other lacks or needs. He sees it as being "potentially powerful positive symbiosis" (p. 37) in supporting beginning teachers. Even though Goodlad has partnership of school-university in mind when using this metaphor, he is doing so for the purpose of explaining that all good work is hard work; thus becoming a good teacher is hard

work. It will be interesting to see whether there will be similar findings from the present research.

Feiman-Nemser (2003) also talks about learning to teach. In her research on novice teachers, *The New Teacher Induction Study*, she studied for example what new teachers need to learn which they could not learn in advance or outside the contexts of teaching. The main conclusion is that with such a large learning agenda there is no wonder that the first year or even years of teaching are characterized as a period of survival and intense discovery. It is well-known that “new teachers need three or four years to achieve competence and several more to reach proficiency” (p. 27). This in fact applies to my own experience during the early years of my teaching. A longitudinal research such as mine on beginning teachers in Iceland will hopefully cast further light on this issue.

### **3.3 Professional Learning of the Beginning Teachers**

Quite early on in my teaching career I participated in various developmental projects in my school which had a leading role as an experimental school, being part of the Iceland University of Education at that time as well as being considered one of the most progressive schools in Iceland. In spite of various learning opportunities it took me many years to learn to teach the way I wanted to. For many years I worked on the image of the teacher I wanted to become, re-creating my identity. Learning to teach and the shaping of my professional identity was painful. It is fair to say that it was not until the seventh year of my teaching that I felt I was as close to being the teacher I intended to become as one could hope for. At last I felt incredibly good as a teacher; I felt I was home – literally! It was revitalizing and finally a reason to rejoice. From then on I felt my skills as a teacher moving gradually upwards.

In retrospect, as I now reflect back over my first years of teaching I cannot help but wonder whether it usually takes this long to learn to teach – or rather – to teach well! And I cannot help but wonder whether my case can be categorized with those beginning teachers who experience extreme situations as described earlier, which results in delayed progress? Or am I an exception? Relating to this context, I

will now examine literature on the professional learning of the beginning teachers.

### **3.3.1 Supporting Beginning Teachers beyond the First Year**

Much of the research on beginning teachers focuses on how to support them their first or second year of teaching, but it seems that for the teachers who remain in the classroom beyond that time, the challenges continue to exist. Therefore it must be necessary to attend to their needs as well. Several studies which aim at researching the challenges of retention and development beyond the first year are to be found, for example the above mentioned large-scale study (The BaT study) of teachers from their initial teacher preparation to their fourth year of teaching. This research reports of several factors that beginning teachers felt were especially supportive. Among things they valued was “support which was readily available and easily accessible, and supporters who were pro-active” (Hobson, 2009, p. 309), in other words, they approached the novices to see what they might need. Other factors mentioned were supporters who helped the novice in dealing with problematic student behavior; who talked to them about their emotional as well as their practical needs, that is, who were interested both in their personal and professional development; who were willing to listen to them and stand by them; who rendered them capable of performing tasks, that is trusting them to be independent; and supporters who made it possible for them to access training and additional professional development. Finally, the second, third and fourth year teachers who said that they had a mentor beyond their first year were more likely to value the overall support they received more.

The majority of the beginning teachers in Hobson's (2009) longitudinal study had been generally positive about the support they were given during their first year in post. But, the support they received “declined steadily throughout the period between their initial ITP [initial teacher preparation] and Induction to the end of their fourth year in post” (p. 311). This might suggest that beginning teachers are not viewed as beginners after their first year in teaching and hence not in need of support from there on. Some of Hobson's suggestions for support for beginning teachers include effective psychological or emotional support, helping beginning teachers



develop effective strategies for managing their workloads and student behavior. Furthermore, ensuring adequate time for mentors and beginning teachers to work together through for example timetabling; to ensure that they also have access to peer support networks, and to ensure that beginning teachers receive support beyond the first year. One last possible implication Hobson says his findings call for, and the one which I find of special interest in light of this research, is to ensure that the novices receive individually tailored support and continuous professional development beyond the first year of teaching.

The aim of yet another longitudinal study of teachers in their first three years of teaching experience (Eberhard, et al., 2000), was to determine the problematic aspects of teaching that influence the beginning teachers decision in regards to whether they continue teaching or leave the profession. They claim that when new teachers are given the opportunity to observe model teachers and work with effective mentors, especially if it extends well into the second and third year of teaching, they are more likely to remain in the profession. Goodlad (2004) strikes a similar chord and argues that schools need to look more thoroughly to the first five years of teachers' work, or continue to suffer the consequences for neglecting the beginning teachers' careers these first crucial and decisive years. Furthermore, Lovett and Cameron (2011) insist that there is a call for “the teaching profession to look after its own to keep its own” (p. 88), and they add that this means that schools must nurture and treasure the professional knowledge and expertise of the early-career teachers. Interestingly, the abovementioned research arrives at comparable conclusions: that it is not enough to attend solely to the very first year of teaching, the following two to three, even five years have to be under inspection or supervision as well if the beginning teachers are to reach their full potential. Given that my research span also stretches a five year period, it will be interesting to see whether the results are similar regarding the early years of teaching.

One of the conclusions of Eberhard's (et al., 2000) study, and interesting in the light of my research, was that the new teachers should receive support beyond the first year of teaching, echoing what was mentioned above. They outline three stages teachers go through the first to three years of teaching: The survival stage the first year, the

maintenance stage the second year and to the impact/effectiveness stage the third year. They insist that beginning teachers should be offered mentoring that would progress through these three stages. The authors of this report state that “if the mentor program ends after the first year, the second year teacher at the maintenance level does not have a guide for reaching the impact stage by the third or fourth year. If the teacher does not reach the impact stage by the fifth year, he or she only has a 50% statistical chance of remaining in the profession” (p. 66). They recommend an induction program for at least two years, but three years if possible, which centers on providing mentoring through each of the stages from survival to effectiveness.

The wide-ranging and extensive Harvard project on the next generation of teachers, repeatedly mentioned above, refers to teachers with 4-10 years of teaching experience as second stage teachers (Second-stage Teachers (SSTs), 2009). This part of the project focused for example on examining the job engagement of 12 teachers, who Kirkpatrick (2007) claims are “an important yet infrequently studied subgroup of teachers” (p. 2). She found that isolation returned to many teachers who persisted beyond the end of their induction program, and that “[I]nformal reports suggest that their work is often characterized by limited interactions with other teachers, sparse feedback and little reward and recognition” (p. 5). Notwithstanding, many teachers felt the experience had brought them confidence and competence which subsequently provided them with greater flexibility about how to distribute their time, thus making it possible for them to decide how much time they would invest in their teaching. Some of the teachers would spend more time in their classroom practice, while others would distribute their time differently and energy between classroom teaching and other required duties, and still others would invest little extra time and energy in their practice as they recognized their ability to draw on their current knowledge and skills. Kirkpatrick pointed out that the

teachers in this study made decisions about how and whether to invest in their classroom teaching in contexts that were largely laissez-faire and provided little guidance for them. The choices these teachers made have important

implications for their ongoing development and retention in teaching (p. 3).

Kirkpatrick argues that as “higher levels of teacher engagement might lead to higher levels of engagement by students” (p. 5), it is of vital importance to acquire knowledge on how teachers feel about and invest in their work, that is, the teachers' engagement in their job. She defines teacher's job engagement “as her interest in, enthusiasm for and investment in teaching” (p. 8). One of Kirkpatrick's conclusions, which I find to be of particular relevance to my research, is the necessity for schools to recognize that second-stage teachers continue to need support and guidance in order to facilitate both improvement of their practice and retention of their inspiration. Earlier, Feiman-Nemser (2001) had emphasized this need for continual growth and development throughout the career. Further, Feiman-Nemser talks about the lack of connective tissue which could hold together different phases of learning to teach and remarks that the problems of preservice preparation, induction, and professional development have been studied. She is indeed very critical in this regard and insists that the

typical preservice program is a collection of unrelated courses and field experiences. Most induction programs have no curriculum, and mentoring is a highly individualistic process. Professional development consists of discrete and disconnected events. Nor do we have anything that resembles a coordinated system. Universities regard preservice preparation as their purview. Schools take responsibility for new teacher induction. Professional development is everybody's and nobody's responsibility (p. 37).

The need for serious professional learning opportunities is apparent, she says, and that now is the time to tackle the problem. However, she adds building professional learning opportunities depends on partnerships of schools, unions, and universities, and that each has a critical role. Feiman-Nemser raises, what I find an extremely important question, when she asks how this work could be “extended through the induction years, and how could induction become part of a larger vision and plan for professional development” (38). It will be interesting to find out whether this will turn out to be relevant in the Icelandic context.

Above I report studies which emphasize that collaborative professional culture is essential for the novice teachers' successful learning and their feelings of wellbeing. Similarly, Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) point out that long standing collaborative, in-school professional learning, which takes place on the job, where teachers work together and take part in continuous conversations to examine their practice and their student performance seems to be more effective; a model which they refer to as the professional learning community. Further, they claim that "[I]n ongoing opportunities for collegial work, teachers learn about, try out, and reflect on new practices in their specific context, sharing their individual knowledge and expertise" (p. 49). Even though Darling-Hammond and Richardson do not refer specifically to beginning teachers, it must be just as imperative for them to be able to participate in such learning their first years of teaching.

Nieto (2009) speculates how teachers can go from being fearful of the trials and tribulations they face each day; from merely surviving, into the direction of embracing the challenges that indeed are ahead; to becoming successful on the job. She has arrived at the conclusion in her research that "previous experiences as well as values, dispositions, and beliefs fuel teachers' determination to remain in the profession" (p. 8-9). In order to keep good teachers in the classrooms, Nieto argues for the need to form strong collaborative relationships among teachers who work together as allies, where they can continue to learn about themselves and who they are as teachers, and who are open and willing to learn about their students and their students' communities. This suggests that such emotional and professional support from allies could determine whether new teachers will remain in teaching, and what kind of teachers they will ultimately become.

All the above suggestions need to be considered carefully and it must be examined closely if, and how they can be of use to support beginning teachers in Iceland.

### **3.3.2 Learning to Teach - A Lifelong Endeavor**

It is evident from reviewing research on teachers' learning that a newly graduated teacher is far from having completed her or his education. It is now generally accepted that learning to teach is a

lifelong endeavor (e.g. Bullough, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Huberman, 1989,1992; Ingvarsdóttir, 2002). In Berliner's (2001) detailed discussion on research concerning teachers' acquisition of expertise in teaching he points out that “[t]he time for development of expertise differs in every field, but a reasonable estimate for expertise to develop in teaching, if it ever does, appears to be 5 or more years” (p. 479). This I found especially interesting given the fact that the research relationship with my participants remained for a period of five years. In this article, Berliner refers to Glaser’s two dozen propositions about expertise that are defensible, which I will not sketch out in detail at this point. Additionally, he outlines the 13 prototypical features of expertise in various fields as well as in teaching. As they will most likely be relevant for my research I will lay them out here. They are:

- better use of knowledge;
- extensive pedagogical content knowledge, including deep representations of subject matter knowledge;
- better problem solving strategies;
- better adaptation and modification of goals for diverse learners, better skills for improvisation;
- better decision making;
- more challenging objectives;
- better classroom climate;
- better perception of classroom events, better ability to read the cues from students;
- greater sensitivity to context;
- better monitoring of learning and providing feedback to students;
- more frequent testing of hypotheses;
- greater respect for students; and
- display of more passion for teaching (Berliner, 2001, p. 469-470).

However, his main conclusion was that there is “no basis to believe there are differences in the sophistication of the cognitive processes used by teachers and experts in other fields” (p. 471), which must be viewed as good news for those who have been maintaining that teaching is of course a genuine profession supported by its own field of study and thus its own field of expertise (Berliner, 2001). Berliner discusses three variables which are the major influence in the

development of accomplished, exemplary, or expert teachers, which are talent, deliberate practice and that of context, and adds that “[i]t is probably the power of context followed by deliberate practice, more than talent, which influences a teacher’s level of competency” (p. 466), because the working conditions of teachers at the schools in which they find themselves are powerful influences on the development of expertise. Moreover, Berliner claims that “[r]egardless of talent, as experience is gained and reflected on in learning to teach, play chess, or engage in medical diagnosis, some individuals get better at what they do” (p. 478) than others, but that involves extensive deliberate practice, not just practice he says, and introduces a developmental model he had adapted from Dreyfus and Dreyfus which describes how expertise in teaching develops. This model specifies behavior characteristic of five different stages of development.

According to this model (Berliner, 1994), teachers move from being a *novice* (stage for learning e.g. the objective facts and features of situations and for gaining experience), to an *advanced beginner* (stage where experience is affecting behavior but the advanced beginner may still have no sense of what is important), to a *competent performer* (stage where e.g. conscious choices are made about what to do and can determine what is and what is not important), then on to become *proficient* (stage where the wealth of experience brings about holistic way of viewing the situation at hand); and finally to an *expert stage* (stage with an intuitive grasp of the situation, where experts seem to sense ways to make an appropriate response and to talk and walk in an apparently effortless manner without deliberation or reflective thinking). Only a very small proportion of teachers, he says, do however move onto the last two stages. Glaser (1996) on the other hand, described a progression of the development of expertise in terms of three interactive phases: The externally supported stage, the transitional stage and the self-regulatory stage. The novice teacher moves from being supported by for example veteran teachers during their initial learning while acquiring skills needed, to a decrease in support with guided practice during the second stage while self-monitoring and self-regulation techniques are learned; and on to the third stage where the conditions for deliberate practice are set for increasingly self-controlled, self-monitored, and self-reinforced

learning to take place. These models strengthen the understanding of how teachers develop in their learning to teach, how they move from one phase in this development to the next, and even become experts in teaching, as described by Berliner.

In a longitudinal study carried out by Newell, Tallman and Letcher (2009) one early-career teacher was examined, and her transition from graduation from her teacher education program to the teaching of English literature in an urban high school was followed to the end of her fifth year. The goal of this case study, which is part of a self-study tradition in teacher education, was to build an empirically based and theoretically convincing portrait of a teacher's development and learning over time. Newell (et al., 2009), argued that studying teachers' development longitudinally gives an insight into and an understanding of how an early career teacher moves in her teaching practice from one year to the next during the initial teaching years. Moreover, such a study makes it possible to examine how beginning teachers develop their understanding of subject matter, how they learn to teach those subjects and what they learn from their colleagues. All this is related as it since it calls for collaboration with other people, with students and colleagues, with concepts such as instructional scaffolding and with practical resources like curriculum materials and teaching guides developed by others. They insist that this socio-cultural perspective “runs counter to the individualistic perspective embodied in the traditional theories of transfer and development” (p. 120).

What these researchers suggest, is that the developmental progress of a beginning teacher is both vertical and horizontal as opposed to Berliner's (2001) notion which assumes that it progresses only vertically, in five phases as mentioned above, from a novice to an expert. An example of a vertical development is progress which is dependent on or built upon previous teaching experience of the teacher. A horizontal development, in contrast, is grounded in the new set of relationships the teacher develops, it is part of social organizations such as the teacher education program or the school within which the teacher works, and last but not least, it captures the teacher's effort to learn how to teach in different settings or simultaneously at different grade levels within the school. It is Newell's (et al., 2009) belief that “assuming that individual teachers

can or should transfer practices from university (as students) to school (as teachers) has yielded not only inadequate explanations for development but largely misleading results as well” (p. 121). Their study showed that this teacher's development was influenced by the values, experiences, and practices of other teachers in her nearest professional communities and in contexts outside of the department. But this teacher often had to create her own opportunities and often with teachers who had “limited teaching experience or who were unaware or resistant to constructivist principles for teaching and learning” (p. 122). What is more, her pedagogical knowledge and practices developed for instance out of her involvement in this longitudinal research project. I find of special interest in view of my research their claim that “longitudinal studies are necessary to better understand the dynamics and phases of teachers’ developmental cycles in order to offer the teaching profession tools for education” (p. 122). That is my intention as well.

Kelly (2006) outlines his argument for using the term *teacher learning* instead of *teacher development*, which he finds insufficient for understanding the complexity of teacher learning, since it does not provide for a distinction between teacher knowing and teacher identity. What he means by teacher learning is “the process by which teachers move towards expertise” (p. 506) which is the focus of his article. This article is a response to Evans' (2002) discussion on what constitutes teacher development which she interprets as “a process, which may be on-going or which may have occurred and is completed” (p. 130). However, it is not completed in a finite way, on the contrary teachers may have developed in some way, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. This is the cognitive approach to teacher learning according to Kelly, which he says currently dominates considerations of teacher learning. Further, the term *teacher development* is a component of the cognitive approach, and in his view this term does not “provide for a distinction between teacher knowing and teacher identity” (p. 505).

Kelly grounds his discussion in *the social theory of learning* to teach in regard to which there are four areas identified as central elements: teacher knowledge, teacher knowing, teaching practices, and teacher identity. His arguments for taking a socio-cultural



perspective on teacher learning are three: First, he finds that collaborative approaches to critically reflective practice and teacher research must be embraced, which means that they should be “a part of a discourse where providers and practitioners learn from each other, considering such perspectives alongside those creating, reflecting on and sharing teacher knowledge” (p. 517). Second, Kelly stresses that possibilities for developing teachers' knowledge-in-practice in order to allow for teacher expertise “to grow within a complex web of distributed knowing and collaborative learning” (p. 517) is possible by facilitating opportunities for teachers and students to learn alongside each other, and third, in Kelly's view it is of great importance to support the development of “robust reflective, discursive, collaborative teacher identities” (p. 517), because he thinks that it encourages teachers to be aware of issues of identity and all action possibilities as well as in the attitudes they have and decisions they take in their working lives. I find Kelly's arguments for his choice of terms very interesting as well as convincing, especially regarding the four abovementioned elements because my research is a longitudinal study where I hope that the participants will learn from the (hopefully) robust reflection practices which the research collaboration may bring about, and thus benefit from the participation itself.

Not surprisingly, Clandinin and Huber (2005) talk about teachers' knowing and about teachers as knowers even though they speak from within a different research tradition than Kelly: “Teachers teach what they know. Teachers teach who they are. Teachers teach what each situation, each encounter, pulls out of their knowing” (p. 43) and they add that these ideas are part of more than 20 years of a research program that has defined teachers as knowers of themselves, children, situations, subject matter, of teaching as well as learning. The research puzzle for Clandinin and Huber in an eighteen month long inquiry in four classrooms, with four teachers and their students and families in an urban elementary school in Western Canada, was the diversity of the children, which is what schools today are increasingly faced with, more than ever before. Their research interest was in “knowing diversity as it is lived, told, retold and relived in stories” (p. 45), that is, they wanted to understand more about how teachers come to “live lives which make them attentive to children of diversity” (p. 46),

rather than with a formalistic category of diversity based on culture, economics, religions, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, or family structures. Their central conclusion is that by listening closely to the stories these teachers told of their experiences of learning to teach children of diversity helped the researchers see how the personal lives of the teachers and their professional lives were interconnected: "Who they are becoming as people is intertwined with who they are becoming as teachers" (p. 56). In making sense of who they were, their childhood and school experiences proved to be profoundly influential factors.

What I found most notable in their findings was that it was "most often in moments of tension that the possibility of a shift in a story to live by [was] possible" (p. 57). Such tension made the old story to live by unstable, and indeed, as I understand it, these were the moments when they could become most attentive to the inconsistencies in who they were because this seemed to be in concert with ideas on how people in general learn. This made me realise that these are of course equally significant learning moments. These are the moments when "we are most able to awaken to other possibilities" (p. 57). Additionally, it may be that it is not until "we look back at our practices that we realize that who we are as a teacher has shifted" (p. 58). Beattie (2007) phrases these "moments of tension" somewhat differently in her discussion on the importance of realizing that connections are at the very heart of the teaching and learning:

The ongoing struggle to make connections is central to the learning process, as is an acknowledgement of the inevitability of losing the connection. Failure is an inevitable and frequently occurring part of the process in lives that are always works in progress: it is imperilment, temporal and subject to continuous reconstruction. However, it is only when we succeed in making connections that we learn at a level that is transformative both of our knowledge and or ourselves (p. 8).

Beattie insists that we learn to see things in new ways when we make new connections. It will be exciting to see how the above claims of both Clandinin and Huber, and Beattie will figure into my research. However, to me this interconnectedness of the personal lives of the

teachers and their professional lives is not by the same token eye-opening but it rather affirms my own experience as well as my experience working with teachers for many years. Moreover, that is what I may also see emerging with my participants in my longitudinal research.

I began this discussion on learning to teach by saying that it is a lifelong endeavor. By the same token it seems likely that (the shaping of) professional identity is not a static condition but to the contrary evolves over time. I will now turn to examining research on the shaping of the professional identity.

### **3.3.3 Teacher Identity**

In all likelihood, newly graduated teachers carry with them into their first workplace the professional identities which presumably were being shaped and constructed during their years of their teacher education program. Most likely it is composed of two main “ingredients”; their personal practical knowledge coupled with experiences from their periods of student teaching. In my experience the novices' professional identity is fragile, impressionable and easily manipulated and what defines their professional identity can be influenced by social interactions, situations and actions in practice. Estola, Erkkilä and Syrjälä (2003) consider identity as “primarily a moral horizon, a position from which the teacher views the world and that gives a meaning to teaching as a profession” (p. 240).

Teacher identity probably develops through one's whole professional life. Kelly (2006) points out for example that identities are in a state of constant evolution. Goodson and Cole (1994) agree with Kelly and maintain that in the ways in which teachers carry out their lives in the classroom, that is the shaping of their identities, is an ongoing process, and Beattie, Dobson, Thornton and Hegge (2007) talk about lifelong learning practices. Kelly (2006) argues that in “their movement from novice to expert, people adopt different stances towards the tasks in which they engage, and so they change identity” (p. 513), and as people move from one stage to another they build these identities. Furthermore, he insists that what teachers do, think or say in a given situation help define how they see themselves, as well as how they believe others perceive them, which then again in turn helps them define their identities as teachers.

This discussion draws attention to what can be defined as professional identity. Goodson and Cole (1994) consider teachers for instance “as persons and professionals whose lives and work are influenced and made meaningful by factors and conditions inside and outside the classroom and school” (p. 88), and in addition Bullough and Baughman (1996) claim that “[T]he story of one's quest to become a teacher is embedded in the story of one's life” (p. 389). Moreover, the “kind of teacher we are reflects the kind of life that we lead” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 27). Therefore it seems, one could argue, that professional identity is a continuous process which combines the personal and the professional sides of being and becoming a teacher.

Before going any further into this discussion I feel obliged to point out that teachers' professional identity did not seem to emerge as a separate research area until in the last decade of the 20th century, according to Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) who reviewed over 20 such studies. They divided the studies into three categories: First, where the focus was on teachers' professional identity formation, second, studies which identified the characteristics of teachers' professional identity, and into the third category fell studies where teachers' professional identity was (re)presented by teachers' stories. What I consider particularly interesting in their findings regarding the first category, because I feel they tie in with the focus in this present research, was that professional identity formation is a process involving many knowledge sources like i.e. knowledge of teaching, relationships and subject matter, which is often presented as a struggle; and that the development of professional identity was contextually dependent. The findings in the second category which I found applicable within the context my research is that the characteristics of teacher identity was linked to the status of the subject area or the age of the students, accepting that there are low-status subjects in schools as well as low-status teaching like teaching in the primary school. Finally, in the third category, the main findings concerning the stories of teachers' professional identity show that in order to become a professional there has to take place a process of interaction between how teachers value themselves and what is found relevant by others in the profession; and that the main influences on

teachers' professional identities is the prescribed curriculum, their working conditions, what motivates them, and what matters most to them, as well as the dilemmas and tensions they experience.

Beijaard (et al., 2004) conclusions correspond with Kelly's (2006) insofar that “teacher development never stops and can be best seen as a process of lifelong learning” (p. 122), as do Beattie (et al., 2007). For Beijaard (et al., 2004) the shaping of professional identity is not only an answer to the question, *Who am I at this moment?* – but also an answer to the question *Who do I want to become?* In the context of my research the latter question is of particular interest to me by virtue of its intersection with one of my research questions, namely, how beginning teachers work with their images of the teacher they initially wanted to become.

In their book *Shaping a Professional Identity. Stories of Educational Practice*, which is the culmination of a 20-year research collaboration with teachers into questions of teacher knowledge, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) claim that they had developed the term “stories to live by” to help them understand how knowledge, context, and identity are interlinked. Beijaard (et al., 2004) saw this link in the abovementioned review of studies on teachers' identities but Connelly and Clandinin wanted to dig deeper in their attempt to extract precisely how it is linked. In their research and collaboration with teachers they began to consider questions of teacher identity when addressing teachers' personal practical knowledge: how it is composed and lived amidst their professional landscape and within the multiple storied contexts in which teachers live. Consequentially, the phrase or term *stories to live by* refers to identity, and assumes meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context. In this sense teachers are understood as living storied lives on storied landscapes, landscapes both in and out of schools, landscapes both past and present. “Who people are is intricately interwoven with the lives they live and with the contexts in which they compose them” (Clandinin & Huber, 2005, p. 44). This, they claim, enables them to search for practitioners' ways of speaking about what matters to them in their stories to live by.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996), teachers' professional identity is shaped in practice, in their classrooms behind

closed doors with their students, as well as outside the classrooms in professional, communal places with others. These are two fundamentally different places on the landscape, they say. Teachers spend time in both of these places, but by means of the fact that “[t]eachers and classrooms are so intricately linked in the professional literature ... it is easy to forget that [they] spend many hours a week outside of their classroom” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5), and spending time with people in other professional places often disturb teachers, they further claim. If they were to understand teachers, Clandinin and Connelly maintain, it would call for an understanding of “the relationship between how teachers live in their classrooms and how teachers live in those other professional, communal places” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5). This results in a split existence which is central to the disturbance teachers feel and which creates a moral dilemma for them. This dilemma is “created by moving in and out of the classroom on the professional knowledge landscape” (p. 5) and the out-of-classroom experiences disturb teachers. Teachers speak another language in the out-of-classroom part of the professional knowledge landscape than when they tell of what matters most to them, which are stories of children and classroom events. In the former they use a language of abstraction, it is a rhetoric of conclusions, it is impersonal, situation independent, objective, and it is “morally laden” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 14). In the latter they use the language of story, which is personal, depends on context and is moral as well, but it is a morality that is in line with “the teachers' self-authoring of classroom stories” (p. 14). If teachers use the terms and concept of their expert field in the out-of-classroom places they are considered as expert professionals. However, if they tell stories of the “events of the classroom as expressions of their knowledge, they are portrayed as uncertain, tentative, nonexpert characters” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 15). Guðjónsson (2004) discusses teacher talk in his article *Teacher Education and Teacher Talk*. There he writes that language is a tool and the way teachers think and talk shapes their work. He asserts that “new words and talk can open up new worlds and give us new opportunities, even possibilities of improving our teaching” (p. 160). This claim of Clandinin and Connelly, that teachers use different language depending on their audience, and of

Guðjónsson, that new words may open up new worlds in teaching, are both intriguing as well as challenging aspects.

Secret stories, cover stories and sacred stories, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) contend, take place on the aforesaid professional knowledge landscape which is positioned at the boundary of theory and practice in teachers' lives. Additionally, they make explicit in-classroom stories (teacher stories) and out-of-classroom stories (stories of teachers). These are terms which have emerged from Clandinin and Connelly's research and writings about teachers and teaching. They discuss this set of terms in their book *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes*, and in their article *Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes: Teacher Stories–Stories of Teachers–School Stories–Stories of Schools* (1996). I must admit I find their discussion both intriguing and illustrative, especially viewed in the context of my research as these terms and their discussion gave me a deeper understanding of the role of story in narrative inquiry or inquiry into narrative, which they emphasize is equally correct.

So, this is how I understand Clandinin and Connelly's set of terms: *Secret stories* are teacher stories of in-classroom practice where teachers are free to live their stories and if told, they are for the most part shared with other teachers in other secret places. *Cover stories* are stories of out-of-classroom places on the landscape, lived and told by teachers (and administrators) where they often portray themselves differently to their in-classroom stories, especially if they are not acceptable within their school for whatever reasons, in order to fit the cover story of that school. Cover stories provide teachers with means to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories if the latter stories are marginalized by whatever dominant, current story of the school. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) stress that they seek to avoid talking about secret stories or cover stories as necessarily falling into the categories of good or bad. Finally, *the sacred stories* is the theory-driven outlook of practice which theoreticians, policy makers as well as practitioners share of what is right for children and teachers at any given time. They are pushed down the conduit, as Clandinin and Connelly phrase it, into the out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape where teachers, they say, make well known references along the line of “what will they throw down on us next”

(1996, p. 25), meaning that the sacred stories are the various implementations strategies from the outside often imposed on schools and teachers: They are “an implied prescriptions for teachers' actions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 14). This might explain why much talked about teachers' resistance against school change could simply be an effort to maintain a story to live by in a rapidly changing world.

In their travels through the professional knowledge landscape, in an effort to understand teachers' knowledge, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) began to notice that “teachers seemed to be trying to answer different questions. Their questions were ones of identity. They were questions of “Who am I in my story of teaching?; 'Who am I in my place in the school?' ... and so on” (p. 3). Akin to Beijaard (et al., 2004), who saw identity as an answer to the recurrent question: “Who am I at this moment?” (p. 108), Clandinin and Connelly found that teachers seemed more concerned to ask questions of Who am I in this situation, rather than What do I know in this situation. When a teacher's identity, the story a teacher lives out in her classroom place on the landscape, is in conflict with the way in which she is storied (or represented) on the out-of-classroom place she sustains a cover story outside her classroom in order for her to continue to live a certain story inside her classroom (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), as already discussed. This means that the tension between the secret story and the cover story is likely to create a difficult dilemma to which a teacher in such a situation must try and find a solution. Similarly, Beijaard (et al., 2004) found that as teachers have to make sense of changeable and sometimes opposing perspectives, expectations and roles that they have to cope with and adapt to, their professional identity formation is often presented as a struggle. This is of particular interest for this present research as it is to be expected that my participants will find themselves in such a situation at one point or the other during their first five years of teaching.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) claim that “institutional stories are crucial influences on teachers' identity” (p. 93) and that each teacher responds differently to that institutional setting. What constitutes a teacher's identity is how that teacher views the relationship of the out-of-classroom place to the in-classroom place, whether it commingles or not. However, Connelly and Clandinin suggest that there is not “an



inevitable conflict between conduit-prescribed curriculum and teacher identity” (p. 93), which indicates that teachers' identities may blend on the professional knowledge landscape and eventually combine into one. Much in the same way Goodson and Cole (1994) found that teachers' “developing sense of new professional identity were contextually dependent on their developing notions of professional community” (p. 102), and insist that in order for teachers to have opportunities to realize their full professional potential and become empowered they need to have access to professional knowledge beyond just the personal, practical, and pedagogical. Goodson and Cole's agenda for their research was one of rehabilitating the teachers' voices which they claim research paradigms as social constructs had unwittingly or not silenced teachers' voices (p. 103). Moreover, they claim that the teacher is potentially the central change agent in restructuring schooling (e.g. Beijaard, et al., 2004; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Kelly, 2006). It is in this notion that I can see how their paths of passion for changing school landscapes cross, those of Connelly and Clandinin and Goodson and Cole. A research on the experiences of teachers their first five years of teaching, such as this one is aimed at furthering that knowledge; the knowledge of how teachers' identities are shaped and possibly re-shaped during these initial years on the school landscape. And by adding to our understandings of how teachers stories to live by can change so that they can realize their (full) professional potential, we can hopefully add to teachers' understandings of the world of school in order for them to change it.

As I laid out at the beginning of this chapter the literature review is divided into two main sections for the purpose of establishing how my research questions, and thus my research, can be located within the two distinct research areas which are reported here: Experiences of Beginning Teachers, and Professional Learning of Beginning Teachers. That said, I reiterate my research questions:

1) How do beginning teachers experience their first five years of teaching in Iceland?

- What are their expectations, concerns and dilemmas, joys and difficulties, successes and failures – and how do they deal with it all?

- How do they develop their embodied knowledge of creating and managing relationships with students, colleagues and parents, and creating classroom community?

2) How do beginning teachers work with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become?

- How do they create and re-create their identity as teachers?
- How does their personal practical knowledge develop through their first five years of experience in teaching?

### 3.4 Summary

The research on teacher education suggested that as we cannot teach everything in the teacher education programs, the most important thing we can teach the prospective teachers is the value of lifelong learning. The term personal practical knowledge is a key term in narrative inquiry and reviewing the relative research added to the understanding of the effect it has on shaping our values and attitudes towards teaching and learning. Student teachers bring with them the personal practical knowledge from their own schooling and as one of the aims of this research is to facilitate change it is important to fully establish this relationship. The literature revealed that expectations of beginning teachers were typically tied in with the reasons they wanted to become teachers and that they experienced a mixed feeling of anticipation, excitement and apprehension.

The literature on the so-called reality of teaching, has identified it as a reality shock for many first year teachers because it often turned out to be marked with severe difficulties and tribulations. The abundant research on the necessity of supporting beginning teachers manifests research findings that report how extremely difficult the first year can be for teachers, thus it will be interesting to view that in the light of how the participants in this research will deal with their first year. Support beyond the first year was also examined and the main conclusion was that challenges continue to exist and therefore there is a need for support well beyond the first year as may come into light in this longitudinal research. The literature in the area of learning to teach emphasizes that it is a lifelong endeavor, and research on shaping and developing professional identity indicates that it is

important to acknowledge that it is shaped by the past, lived out in the present and has intentions toward the future. It is not static and it will change in accordance with the professional landscape the beginning teachers find themselves working in. These issues will be probed in this present research and it will be interesting to see how a longitudinal research as this one can add to the pre-existing knowledge. In the next chapter the methodological background of this research will be examined and outlined.



## **Chapter 4 – Methodological Background**

The main purpose of this chapter is first, to cast light on research methodology in general and second, to describe the research methodology and methods of my research with beginning teachers. Although, at the outset qualitative research will be briefly addressed and the theoretical and philosophical foundations of such research methodology will be portrayed. The convenience of dividing research methodology or approach into four main components in order to make the use of concepts easier and to better understand the research process will be underlined. Each of those four components, as described by Crotty (1998): the epistemology, the theoretical perspective, the research methodology and the methods, will be addressed, but first there is a brief look at the nature of qualitative research.

### **4.1 Qualitative Research**

The term qualitative research is described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 10-11). Creswell (1998) discusses definitions of qualitative research and suggests the following:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

This emphasis on the connection between the researcher and the informant, or the other as e.g. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) prefer to call the informant, can be widely found as well as this delicate role of the researcher, and furthermore, that a study should be conducted in a natural setting (p. xi-xiv). Flick (2005) adds that qualitative research “is of specific relevance to the study of social relations, owing to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds” (p. 2), and that this

pluralization requires a new sensitivity to the experiential/empirical study of issues in question. Later, Creswell (2007) added the emphasis on the process [sic] of research to his earlier definition; i.e. that the final written report or presentation should include “the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it ... [should] signal a call for action” (p. 37). It is not least this last note that attracted my attention since I believe that one of the central aims of educational research should be school reform.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) maintain that qualitative research is a craft and the researcher is a craftsperson, and that qualitative methods have not been as refined and standardized as quantitative research approaches. Thus they hold that qualitative researchers are flexible in how they go about conducting their studies and can even be their own methodologists. They argue that there are guidelines to be followed, but never rules. Even though I do not accept their proposition in whole I feel that it is precisely this flexibility, which they offer, that makes qualitative research so interesting and a fascinating way to explore the lives of humans, their ideas and relations; in short, human interaction.

## **4.2 Theoretical Background**

According to Crotty (1998), there has been much talk of the philosophical underpinnings of the methodologies and methods in social research but how they relate to more theoretical elements is often left unclear. He says that the array of methodologies and methods may often cause bewilderment rather than act as pathways to orderly research. Furthermore, the terminology is far from consistent in the research literature and the same term is often used in a number of different, sometimes even contradictory ways. Crotty proposes one straightforward way of using terms and approaching what is involved in the process of social research. He points out that it is clearly not the only way to use these terms nor is it the only way to analyze and understand the research process, but rather, scaffolding. This scaffolding has four elements and its purpose is to provide researchers with a sense of stability and direction “as they go on to do their own building” (p. 2), which they can then do after their own fashion that suit their particular research objectives. These elements are:

epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. The main purpose of these four elements is to help ensure the soundness of a research and make its outcomes convincing. What is more, it helps justify the use of methodologies and methods because it entails a thorough analysis of the process and highlights the theoretical assumptions that support it and determine the status of its findings. In the attempt to do just that I will use Crotty's scaffolding for the discussion of the methodologies and methods of this research on beginning teachers.

Crotty is right when he claims that different research literature uses different terms when discussing theoretical underpinnings of research. Creswell (1998, 2007) talks for example about five philosophical assumptions among which ontology and epistemology can be found. Flick (2005), on the other hand just mentions that there are various research approaches which are different in their theoretical assumptions and that they differ in the methodological focus. Hence, theory is defined differently by various researchers (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Flick, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

When a study is under way, Crotty (1998) believes it of great importance to seek answers to two fundamental questions: First, what methodologies and methods will be used and second how is that choice justified. The answer to these questions leads to assumptions about the reality which is presupposed by the work and concurrently to asking about the theoretical perspective. This also leads to the researchers' understanding of what human knowledge is and what kind of knowledge they think will be achieved by a particular research. These are epistemological issues, he says. Crotty begins his account by discussing the methods and closes it with the epistemology because this is what is typically done in social research: "We typically start with a real-life issue that needs to be addressed, a problem that needs to be solved, a question that needs to be answered. We plan our research in terms of that issue or problem or question" (p. 13). And that is, of course, also the case in my situation. I started my quest with a real-life issue I felt needed to be addressed, but in spite of that, in the following description of the theoretical background used in my research I intend to do the reverse, i.e. I will begin with the epistemology and conclude with the methods.

### **4.3 The Epistemology**

Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It seems to me then that epistemology is the study of what is meant by knowledge and what it means to know something as opposed to merely having an opinion which may not have substance in knowledge.

Crotty (1998) insists that there is a wide range of epistemologies, i.e. that there exist several stances towards the nature of knowledge. He describes three of them: objectivism, subjectivism and constructionism. These three stances he refers to, as well as others that exist, imply a profound difference in how research is done and how the findings are presented. Constructionism, which is the epistemology that qualitative researchers tend to bring into play, Crotty claims, looks at meaning as existing in and out of engagement with the realities in our world, that is, there is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed and further, it is clear that in this understanding of knowledge, different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in the relation to the same phenomenon. In this view of things, Crotty says, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning. Bearing this in mind my research is rooted in constructionism as knowledge will not be discovered but constructed in the interaction between people and created by them in conjunction with their environment. That is to say, knowledge will be constructed by the participants of my research and me and thus built up and created by us.

### **4.4 The Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective is a way to understand and explain society and the human world (Crotty, 1998). It is the philosophical stance that lies behind the methodology. The theoretical perspective creates the context for the process and is the ground that the logic and criteria rests on. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) say that the research topic, how it is studied and how it is interpreted, depends on the theoretical perspective.

Theoretical perspectives appear to be abundant (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). According to Taylor



and Bogdan (1998), the phenomenological perspective is central to their understanding of qualitative methodology. Crotty (1998), on the other hand, lists several theoretical perspectives without labelling them as suitable for either qualitative or quantitative research. Creswell (1998) talks as well about theoretical perspectives or rather five philosophical assumptions, within which researchers may elect to use one or more to frame their study. Further, Creswell (2007) claims that these philosophical assumptions all mark qualitative studies. However, even though he does not make a special note of it, those assumptions also mark quantitative studies; it is what they are that makes the difference. Creswell holds that these philosophical assumptions consist of a stance toward the epistemology; i.e. how the researcher knows what she or he knows, meaning e.g. that the researcher tries to get as close as possible to the participants of the study. That is what I do in my study; I knock on the participants doors and ask of them to share their lives as teachers with me over an extended period of time.

I tend to agree with Taylor and Bogdan (1998) when they claim that novice, as well as experienced qualitative researchers, can find the array of theoretical perspectives available within the qualitative tradition confusing. Apparently two or more theoretical perspectives very often overlap in one and the same research. In my research that is the case. It appears that it is for the most part a phenomenological study, but symbolic interactionism is also taken into account as well as postmodernism, which will now be discussed in more detail.

As mentioned earlier Taylor and Bogdan (1998) hold that the phenomenological perspective is central in qualitative research and that is also my understanding. My research is phenomenological in the sense that emphasis is put on the everyday lived experience of the participants and that the researcher is open to their experience and seeks to understand the reality in terms of how that reality appears to them. The researcher is supposed to put his or her own previous knowledge aside as it is insignificant because the main importance revolves around the researcher attempting to see things or the phenomena from the participants' perspective, from other people's points of view (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). It should be noted here, that one of the central aims of this

research is to understand the experiences of the novice teachers and how they perceive that experience.

Symbolic interactionism is also used in this research since that theoretical perspective places primary importance on the social meaning people attach to the world around them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Another purpose of this research is to examine how the new teachers react to what they encounter in their new workplace and observe with them how they can comprehend that experience.

Additionally, the theoretical perspective of this research could be called postmodern in the sense that the knowledge is constructed in the conversations, it is also constructed in the narrative, in the language, the context and it is interrelational. Thus one can claim that the knowledge is taken apart, as it were, like a building; its underlying structure is examined and then deconstructed by using and mixing together literary, journalistic, fictional, factual and ethnographic writing. From this perspective the writings are narratives and are based on literary devices such as metaphors (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This relates to the fact that one of the main objectives of my research is to properly probe into how the beginning teachers work with the image of the teacher they initially intended to become; before they started their teaching career. By the means of following them for five years and through intensive talks with them in painstaking detail regarding this issue, it is my purpose to construe knowledge that can support new teachers in working with and developing their image towards their goal.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stress the importance that the researcher realizes that no research can be values-free. Our values determine the topic of choice, how we understand and interpret our data and how we present our findings. Of course, qualitative researchers must attempt to understand all viewpoints, they say, but eventually each must decide their standpoint otherwise the existing points of view will not be challenged. The reason Taylor and Bogdan find it necessary to emphasize this is the criticism from e.g. critical ethnography and feminist research, who claim that it is the attitude that all perspectives are valuable in the sense that there is something to be learned from them, which makes them apolitical and therefore maintain the status quo. It is my sincere intention, by doing this research

with novice teachers, to challenge prevailing views, and hopefully change what I along with my participants, feel needs to be changed.

#### 4.5 The Research Methodology – The Research Design

The research methodology addresses the researcher's planning or the strategy of his or her research, i.e. what the researcher intends to do in the research and with the research. The methodology guides the researcher in choosing methods; it shapes the use of methods that have been chosen and links them to the desired results. In other words this is the research design (Crotty, 1998). When a study is designed it usually follows a traditional research approach of presenting a problem, asking a question or questions, collecting data to answer the question(s), analyzing the data and answering the question(s) (Creswell, 1998, 2007).

The methodology that guides my choice of methods is linked to the theoretical perspectives which my research with beginning teachers is grounded in. At this time my research seems to be both phenomenological and a case study. It is phenomenological in the sense that it focuses on the participants' everyday lived experiences and what meaning they make of phenomena and ideas, their everyday lives (in their workplace and classrooms). Along with searching for all possible meaning the researcher “also sets aside all judgments, **bracketing** [sic] his or her experiences ... and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). My research questions are aimed at seeking the meaning that the participants make of their experience to better understand the central underlying meaning of that experience.

My research can also be seen as a case study. A case study is an exploration of a case (or multiple cases), it is thoroughly examined, the research is carried out over a period of time and effort is made to collect detailed data which entail multiple sources of information, rich in context (Creswell, 1998, 2007). The experience of the participants in my study is thoroughly examined over the period of five years and it is fair to say that the data which is gathered is rich in context.

The philosophical position of this study is the philosophy of narrative inquiry which shapes the major research methodology and has guided me in choosing methods. Narrative inquiry is

simultaneously a research methodology and a method of study; it “is both a phenomenon and method”, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) put it, and later e.g. Pinnegar and Daynes (2006). This research methodology is in its “infancy” and still “under development” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), hence, I feel obliged to inquire into this relatively new methodology in education and in the social sciences. Following is a closer look at this method of inquiry.

#### **4.6 Why Narrative Inquiry**

It is my intention to draw on narrative inquiry. Narrative as a research genre is a branch of interpretative research (Guðmundsdóttir, 2001). It is the latest arrival in the mainstream of the interpretative family of research in humanities and particularly in educational sciences (Shabani Varaki, 2007). That is the theory through which I intend to examine my research. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988), narrative inquiry is the study of “how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (p. 24). They add that narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. Consequently, the most valuable way of looking more closely at people is through the stories they tell of their lives (Freeman, 1997). I can still remember when I had to tell stories of my teaching for the first time. In my fifth year of teaching I was asked to give a talk to teachers in a workshop. The workshop was on integrating the curriculum and creativity in the classroom. When preparing for this workshop I needed to look through this part of my teaching and evaluate it. At that time I did not realize that by having to decide what was good enough, interesting enough and successful enough to report in a workshop I was indeed reflecting on my own teaching and thus making my own values as a teacher explicit.

This workshop and a number of others that followed, as well as numerous in-service training courses for teachers, helped me make meaning of my experience as a teacher as well as creating a purpose for what I was doing and thus develop my teaching. By endlessly telling and retelling stories about my teaching I began to understand my intentions and beliefs as a teacher which provided me with the ability to carry on. As a teacher in courses on pedagogy at the Iceland

University of Education since 1988, I told stories of my teaching and made connections to theories on teaching and learning – soon realizing that this indeed changed *my* way of thinking about my teaching! When I was studying for my master's degree at the Ontario Institute for the Studies of Education (OISE), narrative inquiry came my way with the notion of personal practical knowledge. I felt that I was finally able to put my experience into the context of a theory. It gave me language through which I could express my experience. It made me realize how my experiential stories had reorganized my personal practical knowledge. This term, personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 1986), is closely linked to the narrative approach and will be discussed later.

In Casey's (1995) report on new narrative research in education there is an account of how teachers are now being perceived as persons capable of theorizing their own practices. She claims that positivist research techniques had previously washed out all distinctions among teachers but with the introduction of narrative research there came reports of studies which aimed specifically at exploring these distinctions among teachers, their experiences and explanations. The use of narrative inquiry as an approach in my research is a way to help my participants organize their experiences in order for them to make sense of them and therefore initiate a kind of dialogue about becoming the teacher one intended. Fenstermacher (1997) insists that

one of the truly valuable contributions of narrative inquiry in education is the revelation of the intentions and beliefs of teachers. Through narrative, we begin to understand the actor's reasons for action, and are thereby encouraged to make sense of these actions through the eyes of the actor (p. 123).

My participants' experiences will contribute to a collective enterprise of meaning-making about the complexities of practice. Gudmundsdóttir (2001) notes that as a research approach it mirrors how we, as social beings, make sense of complex social situations every day of our lives. That is what I hope to accomplish by analyzing my data through the lense of the narrative inquiry approach to research.

#### **4.7 The Term Narrative Inquiry**

Before I turn to some definitions of narrative inquiry I want to first examine the term narrative. Polkinhorne (1988) claims that the most inclusive meaning of the term refers to any spoken or written presentation. But he finds this use of narrative too generalized and he himself prefers the more specific meaning of the word, i.e. “the kind of organizational scheme expressed in story form” (p. 13), and adds that as he uses the term story it is equivalent to narrative. We create narrative descriptions, he says, for ourselves and for others about past actions, and we develop storied accounts that give sense to the behavior of others. Thus, narrative research is “the study of stories” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 1).

To me it seems that Chase (2005) uses the term narrative in a more inclusive meaning than as understood by Polkinhorne. She asserts that the terms used to describe the empirical data under study, have flexible meanings but a narrative “may be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation” (p. 652). She adds that a narrative can be a short story about a particular event, an extended story about a significant aspect of somebody’s life, or a narrative of someone’s entire life, from birth to the present day.

On similar note, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) insist that the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. Likewise, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) maintain that people are storytellers by nature, that stories provide coherence and continuity to people’s experience and have a central role in our communication with others. Therefore, as I understand it, narrative is innate in humans; each one of us makes use of a narrative of our own which enables us to construe what we are and where we are headed. Consequently, narrative inquiry is then the study of narratives, and to be more precise, narrative inquiry in education is the study of the meaning teachers make of the experiences in their classrooms.

When discussing the new narrative research in education, and what it is, Casey (1995) explains that she uses the term *narrative* research [sic] as an overarching category for variety of contemporary research practices. She lists as much as 19 different research practices which she says can be included in narrative research, among which is the collection and analysis of autobiographies, personal narratives, narrative interviews, life histories and ethnobiographies. The above mentioned Chase (2005) discusses as well more specific terms used by researchers to describe extensive autobiographical narrative, such as *life history*, *life story*, *personal narratives*, *oral history* and *testimonio*. These terms will, however, not be discussed in more detail here because they are not relevant in this context as I do not intend to use them to describe my data.

Fifteen years later, Spector-Mersel (2010) holds that the term narrative has become extremely widespread, and that “*diversity* [sic] appears to be the name of the game [which may] put in question its mere existence as an identifiable field“ (p. 205). She argues, however, that as narrative approach has been shaped during the last three decades, it is far beyond being just a subtype under the umbrella of qualitative inquiry, and asserts her position of narrative research, claiming that “the core of narrative inquiry combines both a philosophical stance towards the nature of social reality and our relationship with it, and the mode in which it should be studied” (p. 206). To me it seems that Spector-Mersel's claim and the claim of Connelly and Clandinin that narrative inquiry “is both a phenomenon and method” (1990, p. 2), and simultaneously a research methodology and a method of study, are in harmony with one another.

#### **4.8 What is Narrative Research – Examples of Definitions**

In spite of plentiful reports of qualitative studies that use the terms narrative and narrative research, both published and electronic ones, definitions of this term seem to be quite rare. Having said that I am not suggesting that this could be due to unclear ideas of the advocates for this approach in regard to what narrative research entails. Rather, I tend to find Lieblich's et al. (1998) explanation for this situation quite logical, namely, that “the use and application of this research method

seems to have preceded the formalization of a philosophy and methodology parallel to the practice” (p.1). Lieblich et al. (1998) express the view that the future development of the field of narrative research requires a deliberate investment of effort in the elucidation of working rules for such studies. The main aim of their book was to address that need. According to their definition narrative research

refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story ... or in a different manner (field notes of an anthropologist ...). It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question. It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality (p. 2-3).

Their definition centers on the possible materials, whereas Doyle and Carter (2003) claim that the use of narrative as a theoretical perspective within which to understand teacher development has gained considerable momentum in the last decade. They say that at its core “a narrative perspective holds that human beings have a universal predisposition to 'story' [sic] their experience, that is, to impose a narrative interpretation on information and experience” (p.1).

Doyle and Carter add that a story carries information about how things work and what meanings events have; stories are told by someone to someone who then recounts those events. They talk about the use of narrative to make sense of the world, that story is a fundamental way of human knowing, thus striking similar chords in relation to the understanding of the narrative as accounted for earlier. What is more, Riessman (1993) declares that “narratives of personal experience ... are ubiquitous in everyday life ... telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity” (p. 2-3).

In the 2005 edition of *TheSage Handbook of Qualitative Research* is a chapter on Narrative Inquiry written by Chase. She addresses it as contemporary narrative inquiry and stresses that it is a particular type of qualitative inquiry which concerns retrospective meaning making and defines it as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars



as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). The word interdisciplinary called my attention because this was the first time I came across it in the literature examined for this thesis. It has a sound of creativity around it and suggests that the researcher does not have to stick to the rigor of the tradition. Once again I found an element within this field of inquiry that appealed to the way in which I am interested in carrying out research. Narrative research is also described as distinctly interdisciplinary by Casey (1995), as it includes elements of literary, historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and cultural studies. She adds that the professions have “discovered” [sic] narrative, similar to Polkinhorne (2007) who says that the study of story (narrative research) and the “storying” [sic] process is undertaken by various academic disciplines.

As mentioned above definitions of narrative research are rare but even fewer definitions can be found which pertain specifically to the field of education. Connelly and Clandinin claim to have been the first to use the term narrative inquiry in the educational research field, in an article published in *Educational Researcher* (1990). Their conceptualization of narrative inquiry arises from a Deweyan notion that life is education (Clandinin, et al., 2007). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) offered this definition of narrative inquiry. They wrote

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomena. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as a phenomena under study (p. 477).

Here they are making the case that even though the methodology is new to social sciences, it has “intellectual roots in the humanities and other fields under the broad heading of narratology” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). But it is in their book *Narrative Inquiry. Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer a definition of narrative inquiry or the characteristics that make up a kind of working concept, as they put it, which is the definition I will use as a basic working concept in the present research:

Narrative inquiry is a cooperation between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20).

The cooperation in my research is vital since I am entering a very personal space where I ask my participants to express their sense of wellbeing as beginning teachers, their sense of accomplishment as well as their sense of failure. I want to delve into the beginning teachers' experiences, asking them to tell me their personal stories as teachers. As a teacher myself I understand how intensely personal teaching is and given the fact that I had a drastic experience myself as a novice teacher I feel that I will be very capable to see beyond the mere words my participants express, keeping of course in mind the possibility of my personal bias. At the same time I understand the importance for me as an inquirer to move between the intimacy with field participants and a reflective stance (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). Furthermore, I feel that this method would be valuable in terms of giving the young teachers in my study a voice in order for them to explain their teaching and their experiences as novice teachers. Thus, it can also be expected that the participants in my research realize what kind of teachers they are so that through their participation in this study, by telling and retelling their stories, their professionalism will consequently develop.

### 4.9 The Historical Background of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative approach is not new. To my surprise it dates all the way back to the late 18th and early 19th century. According to Guðmundsdóttir (2001), there was an active discussion about teaching in Central and Northern Europe during this time; about the schools and education or school practice as she prefers. This discussion took place in the printed media of that time and the contributors were teachers as well as priests, farmers, novelists and poets. The teachers wrote narrative descriptions of what they were doing in their classrooms as they felt urged to tell others about their experiences. Teacher training colleges had been established by 1850 with the professionalization of teacher educators. In order for legitimizing education as a “scholarly discipline” [sic] the teacher educators had to distance themselves from the narrative discussions practiced by teachers, the consequence being that the teacher’s voice in the official discussion fell silent (Guðmundsdóttir, 2001). She adds that teachers continued however to publish un-interruptedly in their own professional journals to this day, but the discussion remained un-official.

Teachers’ voices are emerging again today in the official discourse, Guðmundsdóttir continues, as teacher educators and researchers are re-discovering the fact that narrative research lends itself to the description and analysis of practice. The interest in narrative coincides with the researchers’ interest in teaching and school practice, which make the teachers’ voices heard once more “in the scientific discourse about school practice. This has become possible because interpretative research has been accepted as a legitimate way of conducting research in educational settings” (Guðmundsdóttir, 2001, p. 4). This does not only apply to educational research as it seems to be the case in all fields of social science research (Casey, 1995; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Guðmundsdóttir, 2001; Lieblich, et al., 1998; Polkinhorne, 1988, 2007; Riessman, 1993, Spector-Mersel, 2010). Chase makes a note of an article by Labov and Waletzky written in 1967 which she claims is the groundbreaking presentation “of the idea that ordinary people’s oral narratives of everyday experiences are worthy of study in themselves” (Chase, 2005, p. 655). She points out that this form of discourse serves special social function, it matches the temporal

sequence of reported events and it encourages people to think about how they evaluate their experience, or as Labov and Waletzky (1967/1997) themselves put it: "We therefore distinguish two functions of narrative: (a) referential and (b) evaluative" (p. 4). In a special issue of the *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, dedicated to three decades of narrative analysis, Bruner (1997) also discusses the evaluative function of the narrative and points out that it is through evaluation that "we are able to see the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of the action" (p. 64) which people take and it is through evaluation that people introduce the perspective of their stories. I find this of special interest as it seems to be in accordance with the emphasis in Connelly and Clandinin's writings.

Polkinhorne (1988) discusses narrative inquiry as a research strategy and explains that he has viewed his discipline, psychology, as a unified enterprise. He had supported the ideal of the integration of its scientific and professional aspects, but insists that the findings of academic research had not been of much help in his work as clinician. He expresses his concern for the loss of faith in the ability of the traditional research model adopted from the natural sciences, in helping to solve human and social problems. As the general claim for research on classroom practice is school improvement I believe that Polkinhorne's concerns are relevant in this discussion. As a researcher (and a practitioner of psychotherapy), Polkinhorne found the traditional research model limited when applied in the study of human beings and set out to examine what kind of knowledge practitioners' use in their practice on the assumption that they had developed a way of understanding what was helpful in their practice. The common wisdom has been, Polkinhorne notes,

that the development of research strategies is the province of the academy, who then passed on the results to the practitioners. I decided to turn this wisdom around and look at what could be learned from the practitioners about how research should be done. The idea was that the practitioners, perhaps, are better commonsense epistemologists than academics (p. x).

Polkinhorne found that practitioners in his field work with narrative knowledge, they listen to people's stories and use narrative explanations to understand why people behave the way they do. And as people use narratives to understand the human world he felt that it gave him research strategies to work with this kind of knowledge. The narrative approach to research opens up a realm for understanding human beings that will, he believes, and I share his belief, make social research significantly more successful and useful. Polkinhorne's conclusion is that in social science research, narrative inquiry is increasingly legitimized as a qualitative research design. Since Polkinhorne wrote his book in 1988, the interest in the narrative approach to research has grown considerably as can be seen in the ever growing writings on this research approach. In 1995, for example, it was reported that the published literature and electronic sites, reports, and data-basis pointed out that the use of narrative research had grown tremendously the previous 15 years (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Fourteen years have passed since then, and the popularization of the narrative idea has resulted in the narrative framework becoming significantly blurred according to Spector-Mersel (2010), who suggests that it is high time for recognizing the narrative paradigm. In my view her arguments for this claim is strong indeed because I have found, like Spector-Mersel, that when reviewing the literature narrative research sometimes seems to mean many things and "seen as an easy kind of research, disregarding its complexities" (p. 219), which, I believe, it most certainly is not.

Riessman (1993) notes that using narratives in qualitative research is not new, as e.g. sociologists in the Chicago School tradition used informants' stories in their research. But as she points out, their accounts paid more attention to the events the informants created about the events in question, not their stories. Lieblich et al. (1998) describe at length cases where narrative research has been employed to study diverse problems within the social sciences, in both basic and applied research. Narrative inquiry in the social sciences is flourishing these days, insists Chase (2005), but it is 'a field in the making'. What she means is that this field is rich but diffused; there are multiple methodologies in various stages of development and plenty of opportunities for exploring new ideas, methods and questions. This is

exactly what I find so attractive with this research method, there seems to be plenty of room for creativity and creative thinking.

The human sciences have taken a “narrative turn” [sic] in light of the fact that it has been embraced in e.g. history, anthropology, psychology, sociology and sociolinguistics, according to Riessman (1993). She adds that the professions too have discovered narrative, such as medicine, nursing, psychiatry, social work and education. On a similar note, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim that educational researchers of many different persuasions use narrative and that the same is true for researchers in other social science fields, who look across their fields to bring in new ways of thinking about changing phenomena and changing inquiry. Concurrently, both individual and groups of narrative researchers are struggling to make various aspects of their work coherent and consistent, Casey (1995) points out, as theories, methodologies and politics of narrative research are in a process of being defined and redefined. She emphasizes that “the difference between conventional positivist research and emerging narrative studies ... is a fundamental reconstruction of the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research” (p. 231). Narrative researchers were reconsidering their social relations with research participants realizing the need to respect their telling, to see them as subjects creating their own history rather than as objects of research.

Clandinin and Connelly who have written extensively on narrative research and analysis in education, discuss their journey to narrative in their book *Narrative Inquiry. Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (2000) and mention historical influences that have helped shape their views. They begin with their foremost influence, John Dewey, as the preeminent thinker in education and his writings on the nature of experience, emphasizing that experience is a key term in narrative inquiry. Furthermore, for Dewey, continuity is one criterion of experience, and in view of this, the term became another key term in their thinking about education, continuity referring to the process whereby experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences; there is always a history, it is always changing, and it is always heading somewhere. Another influence was MacIntyre's work and the notion of narrative unity, to name but two. Clandinin and Connelly felt that narrative unity gave them a way to think

in more detailed and informative ways about the general construct of continuity in individuals' lives. Continuity became for them a narrative construction that opened up a floodgate of ideas and possibilities.

We have been pursuing this work under the heading of *narrative inquiry* with a rough sense of narrative as both phenomena under study *and* method of study. We see teaching and teacher knowledge as expressions of embodied individual and social stories, and we think narratively as we enter into research relationships with teachers, create *field texts*<sup>4</sup> and write storied accounts of educational lives (p. 4).

It was in fact Connelly and Clandinin who established the educational importance of narrative inquiry as a research methodology that brings “theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived” (1990, p. 3). As they explain, their intention was not to contribute to the long tradition of narrative in the humanities, nor to bridge the gap between the humanities and the social sciences in educational studies, but to outline the possibilities for narrative inquiry within educational studies.

In spite of this relatively long history of the use of narrative in qualitative research, still today, narrative inquiry is considered a new methodology in education and in the social sciences according to Connelly and Clandinin in the latest edition of the *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (2006) where they author a chapter on Narrative Inquiry. It is a field still in its infancy, they continue, the “criteria for 'good' narrative inquiry are under development” (p. 477-478) and each inquirer needs to develop the criteria suitable to their work. They turn to Schwab for the term “fluid inquiry” [sic] to describe the period narrative inquiry is in at present, which means that this is what research fields exhibit when longstanding assumptions and norms of a field are reexamined, as indeed happens periodically.

Narrative inquiry came my way during my coursework at OISE, as noted earlier, for example through the writings of Connelly and Clandinin. I can identify with them when they say that narrative

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<sup>4</sup>They explain that field texts is their term for data collected in the field.

became a way of understanding experience; my excitement and interest in narrative has its origins in my interest in experience. In retrospect this too gave me way to think about and express my embodied and social stories as a teacher for almost two decades and helped me write storied accounts of my educational life.

#### **4.10 Critical Issues Concerning Narrative Inquiry**

In the following section I intend to explore some criticism concerning narrative inquiry. As mentioned earlier, narrative inquiry is not new but as a research method in the field of qualitative research methods it is relatively recent and is still in “the making” so to speak. Consequently, critical voices can be heard, to which is wise to listen. Some of them speak of the problem of truth, others find it a problem that the researcher may view the actual process as being therapeutic for themselves, and still others talk about a problem some novice researcher may face which is to dismiss the fact that the nature of narrative inquiry is overly personal and interpersonal. These issues or concerns will now be discussed a bit further.

Doyle (1997), for example, discusses criticism on narrative inquiry, and examines the problems of “truth” [sic] in the use of narratives to study teaching where he firstly argues, that teaching can only be known through story, secondly, that story gives rise to provisional models that teachers can use to address local situations and thirdly, that policy is a storied process grounded in the cherished narratives of a society, and thus story is central to fostering school improvement.

According to Doyle (1997), critics of narrative inquiry in research on education argue that narrative researchers claim to know something when they in fact cannot reveal the grounds on which they build that claim. From the epistemological stance, Doyle notes, that there is the emphasis on the knowledge issue as the focus is on “the extent to which narratives presented by individuals, whether as teachers or as researchers, can be 'tested' or 'warranted' [sic]” (p. 94). He points out that as the scientific community has traditionally regarded universal “truths” [sic] as the most important outcome of inquiry, the narrative inquiry is a problem in the eye of the critics because, as they maintain, it is more about politics or perhaps pedagogy than it is about research. The information gathered using narrative approach they argue, is not



reliable, it is not trustworthy. Doyle, on the other hand, insists that this stance seems to presuppose what he calls the standard model of universality and control in the relationship between research and school practice. This model, which outlines what is true about learning or teaching or development is especially familiar, Doyle says, to those who study teaching in order to determine indicators of teaching effectiveness, a program of inquiry around which the field of teaching research was constructed. Doyle finds the logic of this model of teacher effectiveness compelling, as it indicates that the qualities of good teaching can be discovered through finding out which teachers are better than others. Armed with such research, as he puts it, supervisors and evaluators can make decisions that have a warranty. What I find extremely interesting in Doyle's (1997) argument is that "the recent surge of interest in narrative in research on teaching is a clear reaction to the behavioral, experimental, and atomistic presuppositions of effectiveness studies in which teaching was decomposed into discrete variables and indicators of effectiveness" (p. 94). I heartily agree with Doyle that the precise measurement of specific behaviors and the use of controlled conditions to verify scientific laws seem to squeeze the life out of teaching and even more seriously so, it seems to suppress or silence the voices of the teachers themselves, those who know most about the phenomena of teaching.

This division between the objective truth on one hand, and the vividness of the narrative approach on the other, Doyle (1997) asserts, seems to lead to the claim that all inquiry and especially all interpretation is simply a form of narrative. In this view, he adds, scientific findings or theories are seen to be stories which result in the deconstruction of special claims to scientific objectivity and authority. By Doyle's account, truth is an outcome of the interaction of theory, observation, interpretation and scrutiny by an expert community. To quote Doyle (1997) again: "In large part the turn to narrative in research on teaching and teacher education is an effort to bring the richness of this particular way of knowing to the complex world of classrooms" (p. 96). Doyle's conclusion is that truth is a floating value arrived at jointly by the research community. The problem of truth does not hold to the same degree as perhaps in other research communities. The problem or perhaps issue of truth is dealt with by

negotiating the claim to know, through an agreement they develop. Doyle wraps up his argument by stating that such agreements must be firmly grounded in an understanding of the enterprise of teaching and the work of teachers. I find Doyle's reasoning for the place of truth in narrative research convincing as my intention is to bring the richness of my participants' voices to the attention of the research community, those who organize teacher education, practitioners in the field and the educational authorities in Iceland.

Another criticism concerns the term *inquiry* itself, and the fact that in narrative inquiry it has not become a major topic of investigation. Conle (2000) points this out, and the fact that the nature of this inquiry has not yet been thoroughly described. She adds that what may fuel the doubts of the critics is that candidates doing a narrative thesis are so taken by the process, and what they have learned through the process, that they may view it as therapeutic, but are not as interested in characterizing its inquiry qualities in abstract and formal terms. She suggests that the frequent references of educators to the use of narrative in the practice and research of psychology may also add to the misunderstanding of it in educational research, leading to it being dismissed as therapy which lacks the rigor expected in research. As the research tradition in social sciences has tended to keep emotion and intellect apart I believe that it may take some time and effort to carve out a niche for this new methodology within the research community.

Novice narrative researchers are reminded by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to listen closely to their critics, one criticism being the possibility to dismiss the fact that narrative inquiry is overly personal and interpersonal. To dismiss that is to risk the danger of narcissism and solipsism, as they put it. Yet another criticism is the danger of what they call the "Hollywood plot" [sic] meaning that everything works out well in the end. Participants can of course be very critical of something or other and the researcher may be tempted to smooth things out. This tendency to create clean, unconditional plots is called a "narrative smoothing" [sic] which is a process that continuously occurs in narrative when researcher compose research texts, Clandinin and Connelly claim. What the researcher must do is to make "a series of judgments about how to balance the smoothing contained in the plot with what is obscure in the smoothing"

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 181-182). They argue that to admit narrative smoothing is to open another door for the reader. They insist that it is a question of being equally alert to the stories not told as to those that are told, or as I understand it, the context in which the event takes place. They call this awareness *wakefulness* [sic] a language they chose over criticism, which, they declare, is best fostered where diversity is cherished, where wondering about other possibilities is encouraged, where questions about the inquiry during the research process and while reviewing the research texts is encouraged. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that “We need to be awake to criticism but not necessarily accepting of it” (p. 183), meaning that there is a need to be thoughtful and wakeful about all inquiry decisions as it is a kind of inquiry that necessitates ongoing reflection; an inquiry that requires particular kinds of wakefulness. I feel that I can identify with this emphasis on wakefulness, as it is expressed in the writings of Connelly and Clandinin, and I feel that it is in the spirit of this kind of research, or rather inquiry, that I believe I have been doing my research with beginning teachers from the outset.

#### **4.11 Key Terms in Narrative Inquiry**

In this section I intent to explore some key terms that pertain to narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contemplate what the terms for narrative inquiry are, in fact, they even claim that they are so many “that there is even a dictionary of narratology” (p. 49). My intension here is not to plow through such a dictionary but to follow in Clandinin and Connelly’s footsteps and use the terms which have emerged from their concern for experience, and in particular the experience of teachers. Their purpose for using these terms is “to think through the doing of narrative inquiry” (p. 49-50). Consequently the terms that I intend to specifically probe are *experience*, *personal practical knowledge*, *meaning* and *three-dimensional inquiry space*.

##### **4.11.1 Experience**

First there is the term experience, which is a word commonly used and carries a diversity of complex meanings. Here I intend to explore it in conjunction with education. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that experience is a key term for social scientists. For them, education and

educational studies are a form of experience, thus experience is what they study and narrative is the best way, they say, of representing and understanding experience. They insist that their thinking about narrative inquiry is closely connected with Dewey's theory of experience, but his work is their "imaginative touchstone" [sic] for reminding them that the answer to the question, "Why narrative? is, Because experience" (p. 50). This requires me to revisit Dewey's writing on experience for which I am thankful. In his book *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) discusses the necessity to realize that "every experience lives on in further experiences" (p. 27), hence it is important to understand what experience is. His theory is that experience arises from the interaction of two principles: continuity and interaction. Dewey (1916) explains that the nature of experience can only be understood by noting that

it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. ... When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. ... Mere activity does not constitute experience. ... Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something (p. 139).

He adds that it is not experience when a child merely sticks his finger into a flame; it is experience when the movement is connected with the pain which he undergoes in consequence. In short, each experience a person has is a function of the interaction between her or his past experiences and the present situation and will influence future experiences. Even though Dewey is talking about experience in connection with education from the students' expressions, how they learn, his ideas of experience are useful in the context of the narrative inquiry as he provides a frame for thinking about experience being reducible to the extent that one can peer into it. Connelly and Clandinin's interest is in "lived experiences – that is, in lives and how

they are lived” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxii). It should be claimed, therefore, that experience is meaningful.

#### 4.11.2 Meaning

When reviewing the literature for definitions of narrative inquiry I came across Polkinhorne’s (1988) discussion on *the realm of meaning*.<sup>5</sup> As meaning is central in the terminology of narrative inquiry I wanted to explore it further. According to Polkinhorne, experience is meaningful and this meaningfulness both generates and informs human behavior. In order for a researcher to understand the behavior or experience of his or her informants as they themselves describe it, one has to explore the meaning systems that shape the experience. Polkinhorne notes that the basic structure by which human experience is made meaningful is narrative, and that narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. As narrative is one of the operations of the realm of meaning an understanding of this realm will aid in the understanding of narrative.

Polkinhorne (1988) points out that the question, “What does that mean?”, asks how something is related or connected to something else and that it is this connection or relationship among events that constitutes their meaning. More importantly, he points out that meaning is produced not only by individuals; cultures maintain a system of language and pass on knowledge of these connections. A member of a culture requires a general knowledge of its full range of accumulated meanings; they are not static but are in constant flux where new contributions are continuously added, and old ones become inactive. A narrative meaning therefore

functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units. It provides a framework for understanding the past

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<sup>5</sup>Polkinhorne discusses further the realms of human existence which he says consists of a stratified system of differently organized realms of reality – the material realm, the organic realm, and the mental realm. Narrative meaning is one of the processes of the mental realm and its function is to organize elements of awareness into meaningful episodes (p. 1).

events of one's life and for planning future actions (Polkinhorne, 1988, p.11).

What is vital to meaning making is the context within which the experience or the story takes place. Phillion and Connelly (2004) discuss the question of context and emphasize the need to place the story in a narrative context, or in other words, "thinking of the story temporally, in interaction and in place" (p. 460). They refer to this as a three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry and claim that an exploration of this narrative context enriches the understanding of participants lives and events, or as I understand it; their stories.

#### **4.11.3 Three-dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space**

Another term which is also central in the terminology of narrative inquiry in Connelly and Clandinin's writings is what they call the *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, which they claim is their research framework. As noted earlier Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have chosen to use terms that derive from the "Deweyan view of experience" (p. 49), which lead them into examining the "directions" [sic] their research framework allows their inquiry to travel, which is inward, outward, backward, forward and situated within place, as they put it. This, they insist, is closely associated with Dewey's notion of situation, continuity and interaction. Their terms are *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation), and these are the set of terms that creates the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space which Connelly and Clandinin insist directs their thinking about narrative inquiry. They claim that by using this set of terms to explore the narrative context it enriches the understanding of the participants' lives and events as they unfold in classrooms and schools, or when put in the context of my research on beginning teachers; in the interviews over a period of time. What they mean is that by positioning an event in the matrix of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space it not only enriches the interpretative potential of a story but also reduces the certainty of any particular reading of a story (Phillion & Connelly, 2004). Moreover, the more the researcher knows about the context of an event there is less certainty regarding the reading of it. They acknowledge that there is a kind of irony in the fact that "knowledge

and certainty are inversely related” (p. 460). To put it simply, what might appear to be a straightforward task to perform seen from the eye of a bystander or in the educational setting; for example a new teacher in a school, is much more complex as a rich array of contextual knowledge unfolds when it is positioned in a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.

Six years later, Connelly and Clandinin wrote a book chapter called *Narrative Inquiry* (2006) where they specify the dimensions of an inquiry space. There they seem to have replaced the term three-dimensional narrative inquiry space for what they identify as three *commonplaces* of narrative inquiry; that is *temporality*, *sociality* and *place*. Narrative inquiry shares common features with other forms of qualitative inquiry they say, and in order for them to sort through these similarities and clarify the idea of narrative inquiry they “borrowed the notion of commonplaces from Schwab’s (1962) writing on curriculum” (p. 479), which he again borrowed from Aristotelian topics. And they emphasize that what makes narrative research into narrative *inquiry* is the exploration of all the three commonplaces simultaneously. Again, in an article written by Clandinin et al. (2007) this shift in the use of terms can also be found. Although, in neither of these writings, the argument for this shift in the use of terms is mentioned.

#### 4.11.4 Personal Practical Knowledge

As can be seen from above, narrative approach has been around for a long time but what is new, Guðmundsdóttir (2001) argues, is the marriage of several traditions within research on school practice, such as narrative descriptions of school practice, research on teacher thinking, practical knowledge, teacher-research and action-research. This, she says, makes up what is now called the narrative research tradition in the study of school practice. Moreover, narrative research first re-appeared within the teacher-thinking research tradition that developed in the early 1980s called “personal practical knowledge” [sic]. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) use the term *personal practical knowledge* to emphasize the teacher’s knowledge of a classroom. It is designed, they insist, to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. They offer this definition of the term: “Personal practical

knowledge is a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing life's educational situations" (p. 59). This is a more dense and refined definition than an earlier version from 1982, where Connelly and Dienes (1982) defined personal practical knowledge as

a comprehensive view teachers have of themselves, their situations, and their role within a situation. It is composed of theoretical knowledge elements, elements of understanding of the teacher's practical curriculum situation, and of personal beliefs and values concerning what can and should be done in the teacher's circumstances (pp. 183-4).

I find this last definition very useful, as it captures the core, and the need to focus on both theoretical and personal elements of knowledge. What is also very important about this notion of the teacher's personal beliefs and values is to realize the impact it has on her or his practices in the classroom. Connelly and Clandinin (1986) claim that they invented the term *personal practical knowledge* and they did that to "mark the boundaries of [their] inquiry into teaching" (p. 296). They then explain how they envisioned this term and arrive at the conclusion that the term personal practical knowledge defines their "interest in understanding teaching acts in terms of personalized concrete accounts of people knowing" (p. 297). They stress that their interest is to "reimagine the epistemology of teaching and, thereby, offer an alternative way of viewing classrooms" (p. 297), and add that they consider this way of viewing the classroom as a narrative perspective. This is very helpful for me as I intend to gain an understanding of beginning teachers' journey to become the teachers they initially intended to become. Furthermore, I can still remember the relief I felt when this term, personal practical knowledge came my way at OISE because I had for quite some time felt that school improvement travelled by the speed of the snail, which had made me extremely frustrated. Like Beattie (1995a), "[A]s a practicing teacher, I was strongly attracted to the spirit of this research" (p. 39), and simultaneously to the spirit of this term, which I felt included a way of thinking about the teacher knowledge of the classroom, from where that knowledge originates and how it is composed. Ultimately, the



personal practical knowledge gave me an understanding I had not possessed before.

In the above section I have made an attempt to probe into some key terms of narrative inquiry, placing emphasis on Connelly and Clandinin's understanding of them, as they have emerged from their concern for experience. In summary, by understanding how we, as humans, make meanings of our experiences by telling stories, it may provide us with knowledge which can be used to increase the power and control we have over our own actions, thus giving us "a tool" to change them. This has important implications for my research as I want to understand what meanings my participants impart upon their experiences as teachers by using the narrative inquiry approach and thus gain "a tool" myself to use for example in teacher education. Hence preservice teachers in Iceland might "come to understand more fully our school landscapes and ourselves as shaping and shaped by these landscapes" (Clandinin et al., 2007, pp. 33-34). That might eventually even change some school landscapes in this country.

#### **4.12 Doing Narrative Inquiry - The Research Design**

Narrative inquiry is a kind of inquiry "that requires particular kinds of wakefulness" (Clandinin, et al., 2007, p. 21). In these words of Clandinin, I somehow sense the challenge seafarers may have felt before they set out to sail into unknown oceans, at the time when I decided to turn to narrative inquiry as my main research focus. The search for source material, in order for me to get the whole picture, so to speak, created uncertainty for me, i.e. what it is, where it comes from, how it has developed, what its status is in the academia, and so forth.

As a teacher myself in the compulsory school system for 25 years I felt I could identify with the need for wakefulness in teacher research; the researcher must be alert to that special kind of situation a teacher is in within the classroom having to tend to 25 or more students at the same time. As mentioned earlier, researchers have not always treated teachers, their knowledge about and the complexity of their work in fairness; all too often they seem to have been judged rather harshly.

Conducting a study using narrative inquiry methodology one has to think like a narrative inquirer, insist Connelly and Clandinin (2006).

A narrative inquirer has to “adopt a particular view of experience as phenomena under study” (p. 477). Narrative inquiry has aspects in common with other types of qualitative inquiry such as the emphasis on the social in ethnography and the use of story in phenomenology. But as mentioned above what makes a narrative inquiry is the simultaneous exploration of what Connelly and Clandinin call the three commonplaces: the temporality, sociality and place – which they say specifies dimensions of an inquiry space; they are the “places” [sic] to direct one’s attention when doing a narrative inquiry. This means that events under study are in temporal transition, narrative inquirers “do not describe an event, person, or object as such, but rather describe them with a past, a present, and a future. Narrative inquirers would not say 'a person is such and such way'. They would, rather, say that a particular person had a certain kind of history, associated with particular present behaviors or actions that might seem to be projecting in particular ways into the future” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). They insist that they cannot overemphasize the importance of this idea of a commonplace in narrative inquiry since in their experience researchers tend to describe things as they are rather than giving a temporal picture of them in transition.

How do Connelly and Clandinin then envision these three commonplaces in a narrative inquiry? I will now give a brief account of how they explain them in their writings from 2006. First, there is temporality. In narrative inquiry there is no such thing as being independent of time as is the case in many forms of qualitative inquiry. What is meant by temporality is that it is not enough to thoroughly describe a happening in a given classroom. To think narratively one needs to know the temporal history, that is, to know what happened for example the day before and the day before that, in order to understand the meaning of the experience of what happened to, or in connection with the people involved.

Second, sociality. In narrative inquiry the personal conditions are a concern of the inquirers and at the same time they are concerned with the social conditions and this constitutes the sociality space. What is meant by sociality is first, that they are concerned with the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the persons involved, and second, they are concerned with the existential

conditions, such as the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and anything else that forms the individual's external context.

Third, there is the place. In narrative inquiry the place or places where the inquiry or events take place is of importance as all events take place somewhere and that can be troubling for many researchers as they often wish to escape the limitations of place in the interest of generalizability. What is meant by place being important or even crucial in a study is the impact a location can have on the experiences of the participants. For instance, when a teacher tells about a happening in her or his classroom, the narrative inquirer must be attentive to the likelihood that in the telling is included an experience or experiences of another classroom the teacher has taught in or has been educated in.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) imagined the commonplaces “in the spirit of check points for a novice inquirer” (p. 479), they are places to direct one's attention in conducting a narrative inquiry. To include these three commonplaces in a narrative inquiry is to ask questions concerning temporality, sociality and place and to explore them simultaneously.

In order to design a narrative inquiry study one requires more than learning proper techniques of data gathering. The researcher has to learn to “think narratively from the outset as studies are designed” Connelly and Clandinin insist (2006, p. 481; Clandinin, et al., 2007), hence there are several considerations that the researcher has to bear in mind. Some of them are the same or similar as to other forms of qualitative research, but others are crucial to narrative inquiry even though they are not necessarily unique to that form of inquiry. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) reveal seven considerations on one hand, and eight (Clandinin, et al., 2007) such considerations on the other hand, which I find very helpful for a fuller understanding of what narrative inquiry entails. These considerations, or list of elements that one needs to bear in mind when designing a narrative inquiry, may be thought of, they propose, as a set of questions to ask oneself at each phase of the inquiry. I describe the considerations in some detail in a table (see Appendix I), but in so doing I teased out from two of the above writings what I found to be of substance in each of them and combine them into one, and not necessarily in the same

order as theirs. As can be seen this list is very useful when thinking about how to “undertake, live through, and write about our narrative inquiries in research texts” (Clandinin, et al., 2007, p. 24).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) emphasize that the most “profound differences in kinds of narrative inquiry are captured in a distinction between living and telling” (p. 478), or “between stories *collected* [sic] through observation and those *produced* [sic] during interview” as Spector-Mersel (2010, p. 213) prefers it. It is telling (produced) when participants (and the researcher) tell aspects of their lives. Most often it is done in interviews but there are other methods such as personal journals, artifacts, conversations and chronologies. These tellings create a variety of data or *field texts* as Connelly and Clandinin prefer to call the data, because they are created in the field. The field texts are neither found nor discovered, but created by the participants and the researcher in order to represent aspects of experiences in the field. The narratives constructed from these tellings are then seen as textual grounds for people to retell their living, to actively interpret their lives as told in different ways, to imagine different possibilities, – and even perhaps to change their lives; that is to relive it, meaning to live out the new person. The interview is then the primary working methodology in narrative inquiry focused on telling, and so it is in my research.

There are of course various kinds of field texts a narrative inquirer can use Clandinin and Connelly propose (2000). They have explored the use of teachers stories; autobiographical writing; journal writing; field notes; letters; conversations; research interviews; family stories; documents; photographs; memory boxes, and other personal-family-social artifacts; and life experiences – all of which can make valuable field texts. Researchers must bear in mind that field texts are imbued with interpretation, warn Clandinin and Connelly, therefore there is no objective representation of research experience as is sometimes believed. For one thing, researchers are repeatedly telling themselves and others stories of their research purposes, and secondly, they deliberately select or reject some aspects that turn up in the field texts, hence it is important to be aware that selectivity takes place, both in the sense of what is said and noticed in the field texts, as what is not said and not noticed. My experiences as a beginning teacher many

years ago, certainly informs my research interest and thus my interpretation of field texts.

Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story, but telling stories is not enough Connelly and Clandinin insist (2006). Even though collecting, analyzing and interpreting stories is a part of narrative inquiry it is further “in the living and telling of experiences that [the inquirers] locate what represents [their] sense of [their] experiences as narrative inquirers” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). What narrative inquirers need to do is to move to the retelling and reliving of stories, that is to inquiry into stories. Additionally, it is “understood that practitioners gain special insights and create new knowledge and understandings when they engage in systematic inquiry into their practices” (Beattie, 2007, p. 174), thus enabling them to co-create new scripts, as Beattie puts it, or new stories for themselves to live by. It seems that stories appeal to teachers and teacher educators and that they feel comfortable with research that attends to stories (Clandinin, et al., 2007). This is something that has to be taken into consideration, Clandinin (et al., 2007) propose, as stories, “ripe with possibility for inquiry, surround and envelope us as teachers and teacher educators. They are the woven fabric of school landscapes” (p. 33). By moving from telling stories of our teaching practices to narratively inquiring into our teaching practices, opportunities are created for teachers and teacher educators to come to understand our school landscapes more fully, as they put it, and ourselves “as shaping and shaped by these landscapes, and thus, to shift our practices in relation to teaching and learning ... Perhaps we can even change school landscapes” (Clandinin, et al., 2007, pp. 33-34). One of the purposes of my research and learning to do narrative inquiry is, hopefully, to change some school landscapes.

I would like to close this coverage on the theoretical background with the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000): “Narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation” (p. 189). And that is exactly what I hope to achieve with my participants in this research.

#### **4.13 Working with My Method**

In this last part of this chapter I describe the setting. The philosophical position of this study is the philosophy of narrative inquiry, which has shaped the research methodology and the research methods used.

##### **4.13.1 Selection of Participants**

It was my intention from the outset to find five possible candidates to participate in a research on the experiences of beginning teachers. By having them five I figured that it would both be a manageable number of people to converse with as well as it could give a good and rather diverse picture of the early career teachers' experiences. Given that I wanted the research to be a telling study (see above) the rationale for the selection of participants was that they would be

- 'known' for their enthusiasm in teaching and learning
- both females and males
- talkative; conversational

Being a teacher educator in The Iceland University of Education I had an easy access to student teachers. In the spring of 2002, I made a list of 15 possible candidates and the first five who I contacted jumped at what they called an opportunity to make a difference as beginning teachers. They welcomed the possibility of participation, and considered it an opportunity to discuss and reflect on their teaching. Therefore I did not need to move down that list to select other student teachers. I finally ended up with writing the stories of three participants as will be explained later.

##### **4.13.2 Confidentiality and the Right to Privacy**

All general ethical procedures have been followed throughout the research process. I have adhered to Glesne's suggestion (2006) when she insists that it is the participants right "to expect that when they give you permission to observe and interview, you will protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity" (p.138). It should be noted that this research does not fall under the Personal Protection Act no 77/2000 (Lög um persónuvernd, 2000) about sensitive personal information or information which reveals the participant's identity, because after the research had been carefully explained to each of the

participant they made informed decision to participate in it. Further, informed consent was again sought from each of them at the beginning of the first interview. Moreover, before the field observations, written consent was obtained from the principals of the beginning teachers' schools (see Appendix II). Great care has been taken to protect the anonymity of the participants by means of giving them, and the schools, pseudonyms and by making sure that nothing in the conclusions or discussions is in any way traceable to the participants. The interviews have been taped and transcribed verbatim, and each tape will be destroyed at the completion of the research. In so doing, an attempt is made to prevent that taking part in this research will in any way harm anyone who contributes to it.

There are issues however, that can cause some ethical concerns. Teaching is a very personal enterprise and as a researcher I knock on my participants doors and ask them permission to share their lives as teachers with me, not just for a short period of time but for a number of years! What is more, they have been able to read the research text and they may not have liked what they have read. Guðmundsdóttir (2001) has pointed out the role of the researcher as a moral agent in search of a better school practice. It is not my intention to be a mere messenger, writing down the words and actions of my participants. Our role as researcher, Guðmundsdóttir adds, assigns us considerable interpretative authority because it is our job to analyze and interpret what we observe, providing we preserve what we consider the appropriate moral aspect of the situation. As noted earlier, that is indeed my intention.

#### **4.13.3 Possible Limitations of this Research**

When data is analyzed it is extremely important to be aware of one's own bias as a researcher. I am a specialist in pedagogy and curriculum and instruction, and the participants in my research know that as well. They all know who I am because they have taken one of my courses, an induction course about pedagogy (curriculum and instruction), the biggest course on pedagogy in their teacher education program, and they are acquainted with what I represent, that is, my philosophy regarding teaching and learning.

Additionally, some of them know me quite well as I teach subject pedagogy in Social Studies Teaching, which is one of the subject areas student teachers can major in. Besides, I offer an elective course on being a classroom and a homeroom teacher and classroom management, which some of them attended. Furthermore, I have given various workshops in some of the schools where these beginning teachers work and I have been an advisor on school development programs in some of them as well. Even though absolute confidentiality was promised in this research as is routinely done, one must consider the possibility that this knowledge might have colored some answers of the participants or what and even how they expressed their views, thoughts or experiences. Even the slightest possibility of this happening must be borne in mind as the data is analyzed and interpreted.

Participating in a longitudinal research as this one creates a relationship of trust where the participants are more likely to feel safe in expressing openly whatever they are grappling with each year. Such a research relationship may therefore result in data which goes deeper and gives more insights into the experiences of the participants. Therefore it is of vital importance that the researcher is sensitive to the participants and takes great care not to belie their tellings.

#### **4.13.5 Collecting, Organizing, Analyzing and Interpreting the Data**

I have already noted that this is a telling research which means that data was collected, or rather, field texts were created as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) prefer to call it, and composed by means of interviews. Before the actual study began I conducted a pilot study with one participant during her first year of teaching, in order to test questions and to get the feel of where they would or could lead our conversations. Subsequently, I designed interview guides (see Appendix III) for each phase of the interviews, but it should be noted that they served as a memo or check-lists rather than a set list, and were not followed in detail. The interview guides were constructed with the research questions in mind. As the interviews typically took the form of conversations and discussions above anything else, further questions were added spontaneously to probe issues as they arose, “carefully attending to the unexpected and unusual participant



responses, ... [knowing that it] is the interviewer's task to empower participants by acknowledging that they are the only ones who have access to their experienced meaning" (Polkinghorne, 2007). As a researcher I was well aware that my task was to reduce or bridge the distance between what my participants said about their experienced meaning and the experienced meaning itself; returning several times to them over the period of five years.

Originally, the research was intended to be a study with beginning teachers. However, I found a gap in the literature on the development of early career teachers beyond two to three years and in order to bridge that gap and gain some understanding of what happened in years three to five and how teachers' development related to what happened in the early years, I decided to follow them through five years. The first phase of the research, or what I prefer, the first meeting with each of my participant, was shortly before they began their teaching in their first school as graduated teachers. The second set of meetings took place in November that first year and the third set took place towards the end of their first year. So all in all, I met them three times during their first year of teaching. Thereafter I met them after their second and third year of teaching, and our final meeting took place at the end of their fifth year of teaching. The participants chose the places for each meeting: It was in their classrooms, in a meeting room in their schools, in my office in the IUE, in a common place in the IUE, and also in their homes. All the interviews, which lasted from one to two hours each, were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, I visited them in their classrooms in their third year of teaching, observed their teaching and interaction with their students, spoke briefly with some of their students, gathered field notes and took pictures in their classrooms. This data collection was for the most part to deepen my understanding of each participant and to get a sense of how they lived out their practice in their classrooms.

While there were five participants in this research, the experiences of three of them are reported in this thesis. The reason is that by coincidence three of them started their teaching within the same school, two of which were team-teaching two classes in the same grade. These two teachers had such similar experiences, especially during their first two years that I felt reporting both of them would not

add to the findings of this present research. The third teacher moved to Sweden during the fourth year and when she moved back, she became a kindergarten teacher which is outside of the realm of the research. The three remaining teachers taught in all three sections of the basic school, one in the youngest section, one in the middle section and one in the teenage section. That was a coincidence as well, but a positive one for my research, because it meant that I could gather data from these three varying places within the basic school. Two of these teachers were females and one male. Still another positive coincidence.

When the interviews had been transcribed verbatim, I simultaneously read the transcripts and listened to the tapes from each participant, in order to investigate patterns. I identified the major themes that emerged from this investigation. Although these themes were common for all three participants the development of each individual was qualitatively different. I then coded the transcripts using themes that emerged from the data. The use of these codes helped identify variations in their experiences. The major themes that emerged were the following:

- Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual
- Becoming a Teacher
- Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years – Dealing with Challenges in the Realities
- Validating Self as a Teacher
- Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences
- Re-Creating Story of Self as Teacher

I use these themes to organize the structure of each chapter. There is a separate chapter for the narratives of each participant, because I wanted each story to speak for itself without juxtaposing it with the others. Before I wrote the final narratives, I wrote interim narratives which each of my participant reviewed, commented on, and endorsed (see Appendix IV - A letter to the participants regarding the interim narratives), because my intention was to share the “control over the various aspects of the inquiry with them” (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 217). The interim narratives, which are texts situated in the spaces between field texts and the final texts, are typically texts that the narrative inquirer can experiment with (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). During that phase I had the idea of opening the final narratives of each

of my participant with a poem which would embrace descriptions of their features and the core of their characteristics, as I saw them during our longstanding research relationship. I felt that by interweaving various genres, it would render a more vivid picture of each of them.

Moving from the field texts to the research texts, i.e. moving from the data to the interim narratives and then to the final narratives, and in order for me to create a coherent syntheses from these texts, I had to repeatedly unravel each thread back and forth, up and down, in and out of our conversations, being mindful of writing within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This was done in my attempt to provide a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of the past, present and future of the participants' lives, sometimes taking poetic license in order to achieve the desired effect. But I always took great care not to distort the meaning, the attitudes or the wording of my participants. In order to underline this, I did all the translations into English myself (see further 4.14 A Note on Writing in English as a Second Language). The purpose of writing the research text in this manner, that is of representing the findings of the research in the form of stories, is first and foremost to allow the voices of my participants to be heard like they resonated in our five years of conversations. Further, Polkinghorne holds that narrative research is the study of stories (2007), and in "a narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy, the centrality of story and the arts is acknowledged" (Beattie, 2009), hence I present my findings as stories. Moreover, I have aimed at writing in non-technical, everyday forms of speech, in the hope that my text will become more accessible or perhaps more user friendly and therefore more interesting for the intended audience, which is one of the features of the arts-based research method, advocated by Eisner, as well as using vernacular language, also advocated by Eisner (Barone and Eisner, 1995, 1997). The intended audience for the outcome of this research is for the Icelandic and international research community as such but not least for teacher educators, student teachers, practicing teachers and school leaders, as well as the educational authorities.

#### **4.13.7 The Construction of the Final Narratives – the Teachers' Stories**

As mention above, I use the themes to organize the structure of the chapters for each of the three participants. When the time came to write the final narratives, or rather the teachers' stories, I divided each chapter into theme-stories and each theme-story into sub-stories which reveal variations from the major themes for each participant. The titles for each sub-story derive from the content of each story: They can be descriptive of each participant or their character traits, or quotes from their stories (see Appendix V – The Framework for the Finding Chapters – The Stories). All the teachers' stories are told in the first person except the childhood stories, which are told in the third person. The purpose of presenting the childhood stories in the third person is to provide distance in both time and space. Each story is intended to stand alone if need be, in order to facilitate the use of them as curriculum material in e.g. teacher education or in professional development courses for practicing teachers.

Early on I decided to leave out hesitations and gambits in my participants' speech, for example, you know, you see, hmm, etc., because I felt that this would disturb the flow of the written stories. Moreover, each theme-story is followed by my analysis or comments, and my discussion on how the themes play out in practice. In my analysis, I chose not to include quotes from the existing literature as I felt it would slow down the flow of the narrative. I felt the proper place for viewing the findings from my participants in the light of the existing literature would be in a separate chapter, *the discussion chapter*, where I concurrently discuss the participants' experiences and the meanings they have made of them.

The three finding chapters are the result of combining all the different stories each participant shared with me, into a synthesis. The material for the stories has cumulated for five years through our numerous conversations, story-telling and discussions about their visions, ideas, our collaborative meaning making and their decision making in each situation. We have talked at length, and in detail about their concerns and dilemmas, joys and difficulties, successes as well as their failures, and they have told me stories entrenched with their understandings of the realities in their chosen field and the meaning

they make of them. Therefore, the final narratives are charged with detailed and thick descriptions and have been composed or put together from the participants' tellings and re-tellings. Each story is intended to provide elaborated understandings of the themes, which then tie in with my research questions.

Human beings are storytelling animals who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. We create narrative descriptions or stories for ourselves and for others, and each one of us has a narrative of our own which enables us to construe what we are and where we are headed (e.g. Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2007; Elbaz, 1991; Lieblich, et al., 1998; Polkinhorne, 1988, 2007; Spector-Mersel, 2010). The purpose for using stories to present the meaning the participants in this research made of their experiences in their classrooms was to come closer to understanding 'experience'. Therefore the stories are in effect as comprehensive and detailed as they are, and this is the intention, because I want them to show how the participants tackled and solved the problems at hand. I want to illustrate their development of thinking, their line of thinking, and their meaning making in each given situation over a long period of time. The stories are meant to make their learning and development more explicit, they are intended to go deeper and give clearer picture of how and what happened in each given situation.

The framework for my final narratives is instigated by Mary Beattie and the research expands on it. Each of the participants reviewed drafts of their final narratives, or rather their stories, they offered their comments and gave their consent for the final version of them (see Appendix VI - A letter to the participants regarding the final narratives). Some of the comments on their final narratives can be found in Appendix VII (see Appendix VII – Comments from a participant after having read the stories).

#### **4.14 A Note on Writing in English as a Second Language**

Native English speaking readers of this thesis are asked to note that I am writing in a second language. Even though I am considered to be a rather good writer of English, this is quite an undertaking! The study

is carried out in Iceland, with Icelandic participants, therefore all the data collected was in Icelandic. I translated all the data used for the stories myself as well as the direct quotes. I would like to emphasize here that every precaution was taken to be true to the nuances of my participants' meanings and their wording, i.e. the nuances of their individual way of speaking Icelandic. To guarantee a smooth transition into English I consulted an individual capable of comparing the texts. When the interviews had been transcribed and major themes identified, i.e. when writing the interim narratives, I began by putting the stories together in Icelandic and then I translated them into English. Writing in a foreign language means that it is difficult to play with writing styles and nuances. A good example is the difference between saying 'it is notable that...' and 'it is interesting to note that...', the former being more authoritative than the latter I was told. To me they sound the same.

I do hope, with the help provided by my supervisor, the doctoral committee members and critical friends, who have read, edited and commented on my texts, that there are not many problems of this type in the thesis. Yet, if they do occur, they are all mine and mine only. I kindly ask the native English speaking reader for patience and consideration in that regard.

#### **4.15 Summary**

In this chapter I have located this present research within the theoretical framework of constructionism and phenomenology, and the theoretical perspective of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is concurrently a research methodology and a method of study, which has guided me in choosing methods. For that reason I have given a comprehensive account of why I arrived at narrative inquiry, what the term itself can embrace, examples of definitions were discussed and the historical background described. Further, critical issues concerning narrative inquiry were examined and four key terms: *experience*, *meaning*, *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space* and *personal practical knowledge*, were explored. Moreover, conducting a study using narrative inquiry was mapped out, along with listing considerations for engaging in narrative research. Finally, I described how I worked with my method; such as how I chose the participants;

noting possible limitations and outlining ethical considerations. I explained how I collected, organized and worked with my data, how I worked collaboratively to construct the narratives that represent my participants and why their stories are as comprehensive and detailed as in effect. I have underlined how narrative inquiry functions as an appropriate and complementary method for my investigation into the experiences of beginning teachers their first five years of teaching and how they have worked with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become.

Following are the three chapters that represent the nature and processes of becoming a teacher and of teacher learning. They are stories that contain insights into these learning processes from the perspective of three beginning teachers their first five years of teaching. Each chapter begins with a poem which is intended to provide an image of the respective participant.





## Chapter 5 – Hanna's Stories

*Hanna*

*Slender, brown-haired, cheeks that dimple*

*Laughing, enthusiastic face*

*Eyes deep blue, and sparkling*

*With determination*

*Hanna alike Astarte*

*Who exemplifies the spirit of*

*Survival in life's battles*

*Approached her battlefield*

*Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed*

### 5.1 Introduction

*"I want to be a successful teacher ... who makes a difference in my students' lives ... I want to touch their souls" (H1a), 11-12).*

This chapter is about Hanna. It tells stories about her origins as an individual. The telling travels back to her childhood to shed light on her experiences both from schooling and her personal life. As will be shown, these experiences as well as later ones, are the basis on which Hanna's understanding of the circumstances she found herself in each time are grounded. Through our research relationship of five years she identified and explored her experiences, their contexts and the meaning she could make of them, as well as the learning achieved through the development of her professional practice.

In the fifth year of our research relationship we discussed metaphors of teaching. Hanna describes her metaphor of teaching as a garden in growth. In the early years of her teaching career that garden was an infertile ground or like a desert. At that time she was far from growing what she intended to grow and the garden was difficult to

cultivate. Little by little, with labor and patience, the garden changed as the soil became more fertile and a variety of plants settled in. Hanna's garden was in a landscape similar to Vestfirðir in the North-West of Iceland; a magnificent and rugged terrain. It is beautiful but never easy to get anything to grow there. The paths in Hanna's garden were of various kinds, some very challenging and at times even exhausting to walk. The stories from her garden tell of the routes she traversed for the first five years of her journey. Most of the routes were rugged. Frequently she went astray and felt she was completely lost in the landscape of the garden, but there were cairns along the route that put her back on the track she wanted to tread. They were the energizers that kept her going. The stories Hanna told at the end of her fifth year of teaching have been recreated here. They depict a passionate, self-confident teacher who has made peace with herself in spite of her struggling beginning. Hanna's garden was indeed infertile at the outset of her teaching but instead of giving up on trying to cultivate it, she found her own ways to do so. In so doing she has developed and expanded the vision of the teacher she wanted to become as she learned new practices and re-constructed her personal practical knowledge of teaching.

When Hanna graduated from Kennó<sup>6</sup> she started teaching at The Moor School, a grade 1–10 basic school (see p. 24). This is a relatively small school, with student numbers declining and it is situated in one of the so-called socially stable middle class neighborhoods in Reykjavik. It has a reputation of being a traditional school with a steady work force, the average age of the teachers in their fifties. Just before Hanna started teaching there she made this comment about her workplace:

The pedagogic development in Kennó is perhaps more rapid than out there, in the schools, it must be. There are these new ideas and the research, and there are obviously different things going on here [in the IUE] than in some deep-rooted, old school, with experienced teachers, who

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<sup>6</sup>*Kennó* is the nickname for Kennaraháskólinn: The Icelandic University of Education (IUE).

know what they are doing and are totally convinced of it (H1a), 10).

Hanna knew that her school was known as a traditional school. She said that in her teacher education program she was introduced to diverse and multiple possibilities in teaching and learning which she was very enthusiastic about using, but she was aware that it would take some time for her to integrate them into her own teaching. Hanna was confident that it would happen, and she was determined to use these teaching methods. However, she realized that she would probably have to combine them with the more traditional ones, as these were the teaching methods mainly practiced in The Moor School. Hanna truly looked forward to cultivating her garden in her own unique ways.

The telling begins with two stories from Hanna's childhood whose purpose is to offer insight into her experiences both from schooling and her personal life. These are followed by the six themes, or theme stories, which emerged from the data. Within each theme story there are series of stories from the time Hanna decided to become a teacher until the end of her fifth year of teaching; a process through which she created and re-created the story of herself as a teacher. These stories include experiences from her early years when she was dealing with the challenges of validating herself as a teacher, through developing new practices which would help students to learn. These stories also show how Hanna managed to create new relationships with students, colleagues and parents. The closing stories depict how Hanna understands herself as a teacher at the end of the fifth year of her teaching, and how she has re-constructed her identity through the development of her professional practice. Each theme story concludes with my analysis and interpretation of how the stories within each theme story illuminate, and provide insights into the topic or issue for which it was chosen. The only exception from this is in the second theme story, *5.4 Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years*, where there are four different sub-stories, two of which are analyzed together and the second two separately because of their dissimilar contents. Hanna reviewed drafts of this chapter, and offered her comments on each draft. She verified that the stories presented an authentic portrait of her development as a teacher. She granted her consent for the final

version of her stories as they are told here. Therefore, the stories and the meanings presented here have been created collaboratively by the researcher (Lilja) and the research participant (Hanna).

Now allow me to take you back in time to visit Hanna's stories from her childhood.

## **5.2 Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual**

These two stories from Hanna's childhood provide insights into her experiences in her schooling and her personal life. They tell of a girl who longed to be active and independent and to show initiative in her learning. They tell of a girl who learned from her own experience the importance of a constructive atmosphere where the students are active in their learning.

### **Fear**

She just sat there petrified, gazing at an imaginary spot on the floor, knowing what would happen next. One of his anger outbursts loomed in the air. They were never directed at her personally as she was a good student. Still she always dreaded his lessons because of his temper. He was very strict and she always had these butterflies in her stomach before she went into his classroom. All of a sudden there was a kick under her classmate's table! She jumped in her seat in spite of knowing that a kick under a table or a chair was usually followed by his temper outbursts. He was her teacher for years, – he and his wife. They ran the small country school. The annual celebrations were the beams of light in that school. When that time of the year approached she wriggled with excitement. A play was staged, there were lines to be learnt and rehearsed and there were songs to sing. She always got a big role in those plays and she made sure to immerse herself in every odd job there was to be carried out in preparation for these events. Those were the days when she loved school. Those were the days she was alive and active, doing interesting things. When she entered a bigger country school in grade eight her experience and talents in acting, singing and speaking in front of an audience provided access to her peers. She became part of the inner social circles and social activities in her school. One of her favorite subjects was home economics. She

was brought up in the kitchen of her farm home, she started cooking at a very young age and she loved it. It made her feel very independent and competent in the kitchen and she wanted to demonstrate this in the school kitchen as well. Her home economics' teacher was extremely accurate and pedantic in her teaching. The students were to follow each recipe to the letter. But she wanted to show initiative. Once when baking in class she decided not to use the teacher's recipe but rather her own so that she could be more creative. Reluctantly, the teacher permitted her to do this. They were to bake sweet rolls. At the end of the class the teacher put samples of sweet rolls from each student on the table to compare them and the teacher counted the rings on them. There was one ring less on her sweet rolls and the teacher made some disapproving remarks. She did not bear a grudge towards that teacher. Instead she realized that the teacher was rather ridiculous and just a bit silly. Later she had a teacher who encouraged and fostered her initiative, a teacher who prompted her creativity and found her to be a great student. This teacher was her homeroom teacher, a young woman, who taught most of the academic school subjects. This young teacher talked to the students like equals, they looked up to her and knew that they could always turn to her with their concerns. This teacher put all her effort into teaching and she was not afraid to be herself. She earned her students' respect entirely. In her classroom she experienced the importance of a good relationship with a teacher.

### **A Girl from a Farm**

Hanna was brought up on a farm with five brothers and sisters. She was the second youngest in the family. Her parents were more lenient with her than her older siblings, but on the whole her upbringing was fairly traditional. The farmhouse was a lively household with lots of people. Her mother was a lover of literature, Icelandic language and history and she passed this love on to Hanna. She encouraged Hanna in these areas and helped her with her homework. Her mother told Hanna that mathematics was not within her area of interest or ability, so that she could not help her with her homework in Math. She passed that attitude on to Hanna as well. This made Hanna believe that Math was so much more difficult than the rest of the subjects.

Hanna attended a small country school during grades 1-7 and then moved to a somewhat bigger school further away for grades 8-10. She loved that school. In her old school there were so few students that she never had a girlfriend of her own age; now she finally did. This new school opened up a world of social life she had not known before. She participated in every afterschool activity the school offered, including drama, and made a number of friends. Hanna enjoyed having all these new friends and she loved organizing extracurricular activities with her teachers as well as her peers, and she began to understand how this collaborative atmosphere made a difference in the way she felt about her school and her learning. Hanna flourished, socially as well as academically. In grade 10, Hanna met this marvelous homeroom teacher. This teacher told them stories, talked to them, treated them as equals. She was in no way perfect, she would make mistakes, but she talked about this to them. The students' respect for her was sincere, because she gave so much of herself. And Hanna, the teenager, just looked at this young woman, her teacher –and thought: 'Wow, she's cool'. This teacher became her role model.

**Comments:** These two childhood stories tell of both painful and pleasant experiences in Hanna's childhood that influenced her understandings. They tell of a girl who is alive and active, who wants to participate and has a desire to belong, preferably to a big group of people. Hanna's experiences of being afraid in school, sometimes even every single day, affected the kind of teacher she would become. The meaning that she made of these experiences is to place emphasis on a constructive, creative and friendly classroom environment in her own teaching. Hanna's story of her baking class tells how important it is to her to be able to show initiative and be creative, and as a teacher, she wanted her students to be alive and active. Hanna's teaching was also influenced by the teacher who made a big difference in her life as a learner, who became her role-model. Hanna's memories of that teacher, became the paradigmatic image of a good teacher in Hanna's mind, thus this image construes parts of her personal practical knowledge from her schooling. Additionally, Hanna's mother passed on to Hanna her love for the mother tongue and literature and her dislike for mathematics. This experience influenced Hanna's choice of

Icelandic and Social Studies as her main subjects in her teacher education program, and they influenced her biases against Math and her feelings towards her abilities as a Math teacher. Therefore, these experiences became parts of the personal knowledge that Hanna brought from her home and upbringing to her teaching.

Further, these stories show the importance of relationships in Hanna's life; relationships with her peers and with her teachers who encouraged her to show initiative in extracurricular activities and also in her academic work.

All these experiences became important parts of Hanna's personal practical knowledge which she brought with her from both her personal life and her schooling to her teacher education and later to her own teaching. They colored the values, attitudes and perspectives that she carried with her to her teacher education program and to her teaching practices during her first five years of teaching. Making this connection is very important as it is the ground on which a teacher can build further development of her or his teaching.

Having heard Hanna's childhood stories it is time to get a closer look at her teacher stories. In the next passage we hear stories about career decisions and visions of the future.

### **5.3 Becoming a Teacher: Being Full of the Joys of Spring**

This part of the chapter present two stories which show what mattered to Hanna as a learner and the experiences which eventually brought her to The Iceland University of Education (The IUE), and to the beginnings of her understandings of the kind of teacher she wants to become at that time in her life.

#### **5.3.1 Deciding to Become a Teacher**

Relationships are central to Hanna's life and influential in her decision to become a teacher. However, becoming a teacher was not on Hanna's mind after her *stúdentspróf* [final exam from grammar school]. Instead she was determined to study psychology in the University of Iceland. This is how she explained that before she entered her first classroom:

I felt that psychology really appealed to me, but quite soon I realized that this was not what I had expected. I just didn't thrive at the University, that is in the university as such. Since I had been in Kvennó,<sup>7</sup> which has this good, friendly and constructive atmosphere, I didn't thrive at the University. When you are *there* you are nobody, nothing, zero! I felt incredibly bad there. As you know, both my secondary school and Kvennó are rather small schools, where everybody knew each other, where every student actually matters. They were both organized so that each student belonged to a certain class, and they remained in that same class for the whole time they stayed in the school. I simply wasn't used to being nobody, a zero in the circles I was involved in. Then somebody told me about the IUE, that it was a particularly good university, and that there was this constructive atmosphere and classes, which was something I really sought after.

After that I began contemplating this possibility, that teaching could be something that might appeal to me, especially teaching teenagers. That made me reflect back on my own schooling as a teenager, how the teachers were working with us, and that being a teacher might perhaps be exciting, and that it might appeal to me. So I decided to drop psychology, and enroll in the IUE. Once I had made this decision I kind of began to envision myself as a teacher, what it would be like to be a teacher and that perhaps my teachers had been doing exciting things, – and perhaps that was something I might want to do as well. The more I thought about it, the more it appealed to me to become a teacher, and that I might want to work with kids, especially teenagers and share my knowledge. I think there was this desire dormant within me to become somebody's role model. I find that quite exciting, that someone might look at me as a role model, so that I would have effect on somebody. Like the way I think about my old favorite teacher, that in future somebody will think this way about me. I find that very desirable.

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<sup>7</sup>*Kvennó* is the nickname for Kvennaskólinn, which is an upper secondary school (grammar-school) in Reykjavík.



During my teacher education I gradually got a clear vision of what teaching should be about and the mere thought about becoming a teacher really excited me. In my mind, teaching is obviously about being honest and truthful and self-consistent, and you have to have a zest or passion for what you are doing, so that it works for the kids. And you have to have positive attitudes and to be of service in this role. That's the main goal, whatever you're teaching and whatever you're doing, whether it is speaking to parents or to students or doing extracurricular activities.

My idea of an ordinary school day is that it should always be highly enjoyable and interesting and that I'll always be engaged in something exciting and that my students and I will be alive and active, and that I will not fall into some kind of boring routine with my students! This is what I hope for. But of course I do realize it's one's own creation how each day turns out. It must be. And yea, yea, I know for sure that it will also be extremely difficult, and that it won't always be as I had decided at the university – to become some super-teacher, one who's got answers to everything! And I'm prepared to face that some days, probably many days, will be unbelievably difficult, and that I won't be able to cope with something, that there will be some situations where I won't have any answers. And the kids, that I won't reach the kids. And the parents, that they will be dissatisfied. And by thinking about this, I'm perhaps safeguarding myself and preparing myself that things will not always be like that. I really loved my practice teaching. I left every lesson happy, but we were pretty much wrapped up in cotton wool out there. Anyhow, I was full of ideas on how to organize the teaching during my practice teaching, I was eager to try all the new methods I was learning about in my curriculum and instruction courses (pedagogical content courses) at the IUE. I really liked being there. I was enthusiastic about becoming a teacher, and I involved myself eagerly in university life, socially as well as academically as I'd done during my secondary and upper secondary school years.

The courses that I liked best were courses like educational drama, creative arts and all the other practical courses. They've really come in handy in whatever I've been doing my practice teaching. Like for example Teaching Social Studies, that course is extremely practical in

term of pedagogy, and it makes you feel a bit safe. All these courses emphasize multiple teaching methods and the goal of reaching all students, which is, of course, very important. I felt that this was the red thread you had to be open to, and awake towards. Yes, and never fall into a routine where you forget what's happening around you. That's the main thing. But of course there were courses that were not necessary, like courses on which we spent unmeasured time during the first year which were of no practical value; like for example *Icelandic Culture and Society* and some *Foundation*-something courses which leave nothing useful behind. Sure, they are alright, but they could be smaller or elective. Especially since there were so many practical courses during our last term which were elective, but which really should have been core courses as their content was so useful. Many of us were talking about this and we couldn't understand why they couldn't be core courses. However, I intend to use what I've learnt in my teacher education when I become a teacher, and I think that I will be a good teacher. One who is fair but also one who's a bit impatient, 'cause I've this limited amount of patience. I might get better at that, though! I think I'll be agreeable to be around as a teacher. I've always emphasized humor in all relationships and I think I'll continue to do that. (H 1a), 5-7, 9,13)

In this conversation, which took place shortly before Hanna started teaching, she said that she was confident that the humor will carry over into her teaching, and even though she has heard the phrase: 'don't smile until Christmas', she thought that she would look a bit silly biting her cheeks with an effort not to smile. A wholehearted laughter followed which said more than many words. It was obvious that Hanna was really enthusiastic regarding what was ahead, and she was looking forward to spreading her wings.

### **5.3.2 The vision of the teacher Hanna wants to become**

At the onset of Hanna's teaching career, before she even entered her first classroom she believed that becoming a teacher involved a great responsibility which made her feel a bit apprehensive, not towards her students to-be, but rather towards how she would be able to handle it all. The following is the story which reflects her thinking when explaining this:

I find that it is really worthy to be a teacher, to be able to call myself a teacher. I feel it's a vast responsibility, in relation to the students, the parents and yes, sometimes I think, to the society as a whole. This is going to be something remarkable and grand! When I tell people that I'm a teacher, it always awakens interest: 'oh, well are you a teacher, how interesting' whether it is of negative or a positive nature, they find it interesting. The teacher I want to become, if I will be a teacher for many years, is a successful teacher. I have this clear idea. I have this dream that the kids, or rather the people I have taught will think something like this: 'Hanna? Now that was a really good teacher!' I want them to look up to me, and not think of me as a comedian, but as a real person. I may become a role-model for some, and I would hope that some would want to seek advice from me some day, that they feel my advice might be of value. I am mainly hoping that I'll manage that. I would find that incredibly important. In short, I want to make a difference in my students' lives; I want to touch their souls (H1a), 11-12).

Hanna does not anticipate any problems in her relationships with the students: "I think that communicating with students will be rather easy. That's the least of my worries even though I didn't always think so, but by experience from student teaching I think that I will deal with that rather well" (H1a), 12).

**Comments:** Becoming a teacher was a possibility that had not even entered Hanna's mind until she heard about how friendly a university the IUE was; she had heard that it was a place with a warm atmosphere that placed an emphasis on creating a community among students and teachers, which Hanna felt was so important. As the former story shows, while studying psychology Hanna experienced a lack of collegiality, relationships with others and a sense of community. This negative experience influenced her decision to become a teacher and to develop a vision of becoming a relational teacher like her role model, the teacher in grade ten. That story also shows that Hanna's own pleasant experience of her teenage schooling gave her expectations that were unfulfilled in the psychology program. Hanna's first priority was to find a friendly university, and then to check out whether there was a program of studies that could be of interest. As a teenager Hanna experienced being part of a small,

constructive, friendly community. Hanna draws on her positive experiences with her favorite teacher to create her own image of the teacher she wants to become. Hanna's awareness of the connection between her role model and the character traits of the teacher she wants to become enable her to see how she can develop her practices so that she can become a role model for her students. Again her main source for realizing what being successful as a teacher consisted of was her favorite teacher and the influence she had on her. This connection with Hanna's experience and the image of her favorite teacher are in evidence in her stories regarding her career decision.

Hanna's expectations of teaching are in harmony with what she values in life. She values being positive, active, engaged, having humor and fostering relationships. These themes echo throughout her own childhood stories and are the threads that make up the tapestry of her personal practical knowledge from her childhood schooling. Hanna accepts the responsibilities of creating a classroom that will be based on the values she espouses in life. She is creating a professional knowledge of teaching that is firmly grounded in her personal values and a personal practical knowledge that is true to the person she is and the teacher she wants to become. Already Hanna has developed this sense that it is mainly her own doing how her teaching will transpire.

The latter story shows the extent to which Hanna wants to become a teacher who will make a difference in her students' lives. She wants to touch their souls. Hanna's practices are grounded in the attitudes of care, the possibilities of teaching for example in the spirit of constructivism and the ideology of progressive education, which she encountered in her teacher education program. These ideas are consistent with the practices of her favorite teacher which Hanna experienced first as a learner and then became a part of her vision as a teacher. Thus these ideas became an integral part of her personal practical knowledge she brought with her into teaching.

Further, Hanna's story shows that her strong sense of responsibility made her feel that she was starting a grand journey or a mission. As someone who sees herself as a people person, she is fearless and full of energy and sets out on her journey into the land of adventures. Hanna knows that the first year of teaching usually is very difficult, but at the outset of her career she does not seem to really

believe that it will be so in her case. She in fact mitigates possible difficulties which may lie ahead by saying “yea, yea, I know for sure that it will also be extremely difficult”. Even though her head tells her that it might be difficult, her heart tells her otherwise. As she begins her first year Hanna believes that her ideals, her good humor, positive attitudes and her determination to succeed will guide her safely through possibly rough seas. Hanna goes forward with her teaching career full of the joys of spring.

In the next section of this chapter four stories are used to present the experiences of the early years of her teaching and the ways in which she dealt with challenges as well.

#### **5.4 Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years – Dealing with Challenges in the Realities**

The stories here presented are grounded in Hanna’s experiences in her first and second years of teaching. Hanna was teaching grade five, alongside her friend Vala from her teacher education program, who was also a beginning teacher in her first year. Before she started her first teaching job, Hanna was really looking forward to the relationship dimension of teaching, because she loved working with people. She was also looking forward to trying out all the exciting and different teaching methods she had learned during her teacher education program. The road ahead was rugged, and at times she felt her situation was hopeless.

##### **5.4.1 Making Way through Rugged Paths and not Being Shoed for the Road**

At the outset of Hanna’s journey towards realizing her vision of the teacher she wanted to become, she travelled paths most of which were quite rocky. She experienced her share of difficulties right from the first day of school during her first year of teaching. “I’m not very optimistic right now” Hanna said by mid-year. The following story presents her experiences and the meaning she made of them:

I don't like myself as a teacher now. Sometimes I even think that I'm totally hopeless as a teacher, like I'm not doing anything for the kids [she sighs], but sometimes I think that I'm great! I'm okay though, but extremely tired, always. In fact I'm more tired than I thought I would

be, as my teaching is more wide-ranging than I expected. I find it extremely difficult to gain an overview over the general setup, to have everything sorted out, and in general to get the hang of things. Well, to be honest, the first weeks were even more difficult than I had anticipated. I was really shocked to begin with! My class was unbelievably unruly, even more than I'd thought possible, and I felt I couldn't handle the kids. It really was a hopeless situation sometimes. I felt desperate because I was totally thrown into the deep end. This was *the reality* of teaching and I felt that everything was difficult, and sometimes I even felt that the kids were like monsters! What also came as a total surprise to me were the relationships amongst the kids. They were just 10 years old and their language was so horribly bad that I would never have imagined it! They're so incredibly cruel to one another as a group as well. So I'm not very optimistic that things could go well now, but then again, about four weeks into the school year, things were already starting to get better. By that I mean; there are good days sort of in between. And I think I've succeeded in obtaining trust from most of my students. Mind you, the very first week of teaching I began by being really nice, but within quotation marks, if I can phrase it like that, as I was not too *nice* anyway. The kids were excited to have a new, young teacher but already in the second week they tried everything in the book in order to test my limits. Perhaps it was a mistake to start out by sort of taking it easy, instead of starting with fireworks, because I was instantly thrown on my back! For example, as soon as I sat down or something, they were all over the place, and just shouting and screaming, and I really had to try my upmost to obtain silence. And they were *constantly* interrupting me when I was speaking.

There were several students who behaved in a really provocative manner, yet without being literally rude. Talking to them individually didn't work. I felt *that nothing at all* really affected them, that they just couldn't care less what I did or did not do. When I sensed that my students didn't care whether they were sent to the principal, didn't care if someone was upset or whatever, it made me feel extremely frustrated because then I felt that I had absolutely no idea what to do. I mean, what option do you have then? It was a constant power struggle, which was very difficult to deal with, and it was a problem

having to be such a bore! And it was terribly tiresome and tedious always having to be the bogeyman. But mind you, one day after I had become extraordinarily angry because of one of their upheavals, I experienced a kind of a turn-around in their behavior. They really sensed that they had gone too far and there was a dead silence for the first time! Finally I felt that there was something that got to them, that *I* had somehow got through to them and that was a good feeling. Well, obviously I needed some time to be able to become angry enough, to be able to wear the extreme firm face and to be able to stand on my ground, because if I didn't, they were all over me! And as you can imagine, what matters most when the situation is like..., when one has obtained good control of the class is to..., or at least a reasonable control, or a better control than one had in the beginning, not that I'm saying that it's perfect, anyway, it is much better than it was..., is to sustain that. That's what matters most to me now, – or rather make it better and better, so that the group will become more harmonious, and that all of us will become harmonious, in order to make things the way they're supposed to be.

What I've tried to do to manage the children's behavior is discussing it with them, both individually and in the whole group. I involve them in making the rules for the classroom, and I use eye-contact a lot. I have deliberately avoided shouting and screaming as they just become very tired, besides how straining it is for me to be constantly shouting and screaming. However, I must admit that it has not always been possible for me to avoid this, because screaming and shouting sometimes was my only option. What I also found to be effective was to cut in immediately when I detected that something was just about to happen, as everything could easily get out of hand so quickly if one doesn't! In spite of *knowing* that, I haven't even been close to managing them the way I would have wanted to. It wasn't until towards the end of my first year that I felt I'd reached the point where I could say that my students' behavior had changed somewhat to the better. By that time, I knew how to manage them, not at all times though, and how to get them to the level where I wanted them to be, and I found that very comfortable. I knew them and what they were capable of, and they knew me. I knew that they were comfortable with me, there was no

one who was anxious, or something. And they could all confide in me if they were for example worried about something.

Still another thing really surprised me, which was at the same time extremely frustrating, and that were all the meetings. As you know, one is always pushed for time in this job, and well, I don't know how it is in other schools, but I must tell you that all these staff meetings in this school really amaze me. They are twice a week, which I feel is a total waste of time, and it really adds to my overall frustrations. I find that massive time is spent in these meetings on discussing trifling matters. There is so much talk, but nothing is actually said. I'm so often irritated and annoyed because I constantly lack time. I can use this time to work and prepare, and then you need perhaps to spend over an hour discussing, God knows what, – the coffee machine, cost of photo-copying or something, – something which less time should be spent on discussing anyway. Like when there is Professional Development-day, half the time is spent on meetings like that. This came as a surprise and as a shock to me! Anyhow, it rarely happens that professional discussions take place in these meetings, just these trifling matters. I would, for instance, like to discuss the educational policy of the school, or educational principles. Instead, issues on the agenda are such as the situation in the canteen, where the kids are supposed to eat silently. I mean, that's simply unnatural. This is their time off, they are dining together, for crying out loud. It's just the same with us grown-ups, like having lunch in the staff-room, it's never quiet there! Of course it's okay to have a meeting when necessary, and these things naturally need to be discussed, but I'm just surprised of how often such meetings are, and how often trivial matters occupy the agenda. (H1b), 1, 3, 5, 6-9, 10-11, H1c), 5-6)

### 5.4.2 It is Difficult Planning Interesting Lessons

“There is never enough time to plan interesting lessons” (H1b), 4) Hanna said when discussing how things were going at the end of her first year. The realities of her teaching clashed with her vision where her lessons would be enjoyable and interesting. She wanted to have fun and laugh with her students but that was not happening. Hanna found it extremely distressing to find that she was merely coping



rather than realizing her vision. This is the story she told me about lesson planning at that time:

No, honestly, I was not happy with the direction my lesson planning was going this first year. I felt that I didn't have enough time to do what needed to be done, and that somehow I didn't really know how to handle this situation. My own lack of imagination has been the main hindrance. I had no resources to fall back on, I was simply very often out of ideas to make the lessons really interesting. Sometimes, I even felt that my mind was totally *frozen*! Incredibly often I had to work at night, and I felt that I never had sufficient breathing space for planning my teaching. Like at school, when I was not teaching my class, I was almost always doing substitute teaching. Of course it was up to me to do this or not, but one just got the impression that it was expected of you. I simply found that this shortage of time, as well as general fatigue, created a situation where I couldn't give everything I had to plan interesting lessons. The fact is, the students have these set textbooks, and very often I was just letting them do loads of traditional seat-work and yes, relying a lot on the textbook, which doesn't demand a great deal of planning. Then obviously one knows that the kids are not getting anything out of this like they possibly could.

Honestly, very often I felt guilty not being able to do more, not being able to plan interesting lessons, or that I would use teaching methods I would never have imagined myself using out of my own choice. As you know, my friend from the IUE, Vala, was teaching the other grade five class and we worked very closely together – or that's what we intended to do. We used the same tasks and assignments, and our program was more or less the same, but there wasn't much time to really plan the lessons together and develop our teaching. Mostly, we met informally after classes, but not on a regular basis, because one needed to simply catch one's breath after the lessons each day. It was not really until towards the end of my first year that we managed to find time for mutual planning meetings. We found one hour on Mondays, that was the time we reserved just for us, but to tell the truth, sometimes this hour got messed up too, as one was often called to do some substitute teaching.

Now, at the end of the first year, I find that the time spent on preparing lessons is the same as earlier in the year, but what has changed is that I've managed to make more efficient use of it. My main worries regarding teaching, however has now turned from not getting the general hang of things, to not being able to go deep enough into the things I'm teaching. Not having been able to motivate somebody with this material. Not being able to ascertain myself that they have understood me, that I've actually caught their attention. To be of some use to them. That's what I find most important. I feel that the main problem now, at the end of my first year, is to be able to attend to the needs of all, and that worries me a lot. I find that very distressing. In my class there are very different individuals and their learning abilities vary a great deal. I just find it very difficult to keep things in perspective, to ascertain whether I'm being helpful to everybody or... Very often I get the feeling that somebody isn't getting any assistance at all. I'm not very optimistic that I'll succeed there, unfortunately (H1b), 1,4,10 1c), 1-2).

**Comments:** One of Hanna's aim as a teacher was for all her students to flourish, instead she found herself shaping them all into the same mold: "...simply because otherwise I won't be able to catch up. Because I'm so new I'm not able to get the hang of the other stuff right now. If you see what I mean" (H1b), 1). The former story is about learning to create relationships with students, i.e. management skills and teaching students to manage themselves and it shows the emotional carousel that Hanna experienced in her first year of teaching in her attempts to work through these difficulties. Her struggling beginning took her along paths she did not know existed; travelling along them made her a teacher she did not want to be. She stumbled along them to the best of her ability.

Hanna's development as a teacher did not turn out the way she had hoped. She was unable to realize her vision in the way she wanted to. The tension between the vision and reality was overwhelming to her and it went totally against her nature having to be a bore and the bogeyman, as she wanted to have fun and laugh with her students. She wanted teaching and learning to be enjoyable and interesting. She wanted to be able to manage more, and to plan the lessons better, but that was definitely not happening at that time in her teaching. She was

merely coping, falling back on instructional methods she knew so well, as a student, from her own schooling. These were methods which she found did not fit her vision of teaching and learning. It made her feel bad about herself as a teacher. Here we can see that she fell back on traditional teaching methods even though she had experienced the teaching of her favorite teacher in grade ten and knew its effects on her own learning. However, as she had mostly experienced traditional teaching methods during her 14 years of compulsory and high-school schooling, they formed the practical part of her personal practical knowledge of teaching from her own schooling, and these were the teaching methods she fell back on in the turmoil of the severe difficulties during the first year. The tentative new understandings she had gained from her favorite teacher and during her teacher education program were overwhelmed by the circumstances.

The unpleasant surprises Hanna experienced during her first year tuned her enthusiasm down. She was aware of her inability to manage all the students at a time in her classroom. She was not very optimistic when discussing this several weeks into her teaching. In order to monitor her students' behavior she was managing them in ways which were very much against her vision. This was not how she had foreseen the relationships with her students. The students turned out to be much more than a handful to manage which also made her doubt her communication skills. In the attempt to explain what matters most in order to gain control of the class, Hanna mitigates what she says, and partly excuses the situation in her classroom by going from good control to saying that it is much better than it was in the beginning even though it is not perfect. This shows how extremely concerned she is regarding the behavior of her students. It is obviously a long-term goal in her mind at that moment to obtain good control of her class. Hanna's desire for her students to feel that they can confide in her is a further point of interest. That is something she had mentioned in connection with her favorite teacher and role model. This is a good example of her wish to become such a teacher for her students and the emphasis she places on relationships as well. These are additional threads in the tapestry of her personal practical knowledge from childhood schooling.

Hanna's experience of lesson planning and of creating relationships with students was one of her disappointments and frustrations. She was low-spirited, not knowing whether or not she was getting across to her students in their learning. She was trying to justify why she was not doing what she was determined to do. Clearly, her main learning experience this first year was to discover how difficult it is to plan interesting lessons, and how difficult it was to apply these innovative and creative teaching methods as they had not yet become part of the practical part of her personal practical knowledge. Another very important learning experience for Hanna was to realize that it was not enough to get "the general hang of things". The next step for Hanna in her development as a teacher was realizing that she wanted to be able to go deep enough into the material she was teaching. She was not there yet, but she was gaining a new understanding of what it meant to be able to motivate students, to be sure that they understood her, to attend to the needs of all.

Hanna's first year of teaching presented her with challenges of learning to create constructive relationships with students and of teaching them to relate to each other in ways that showed respect and care. During this time she also learned about the difficulties of being a staff member in a school and of collaborating with other teachers in staff meetings where she wanted to focus on issues that she thought were important rather than on trivial issues. This indicates that during her first year Hanna was beginning to form the opinion of some of her colleagues that they were not the professionals she had hoped to work with. It made her feel that she did not belong. All this worked against her in her attempts to join her vision of the teacher she wanted to become and the reality of the classroom.

When school was over after her first year Hanna still did not think of herself as a great teacher, but "I think that I know I will do good things in the future. I'm sort of promising, you know." And then she adds with hearty laughter: "I think of myself as a rising star!" (H1c), 7) Hanna expressed the hope that once she had obtained adequate management skills, then she would be able to use her time and energy for something else, such as planning the lessons properly.

In our conversation at the end of her first year Hanna expressed feelings, hopes and desires which reveal a truly exhausted beginning

teacher. But it was not a beaten one, as she was determined to continue teaching the class the second year. It may be said that she lost her way time and again while making her way through the rugged paths, frequently feeling she was not shod for the road. However, Hanna did not “lose sight of the goal” (H2, 16). It shows her perseverance that she continued steadily, despite serious problems and difficulties.

### **5.4.3 Dealing with Difficult Parents**

Dealing with difficult parents was one of Hanna's major learning experiences during the second year of teaching, and her major concern as well. That year turned out to be almost as tough as her first year of teaching as she was struggling with students' behavior problems on a daily basis. Before she started teaching Hanna had expressed worries regarding communicating with parents. Back then, when she had really been trying to picture in her mind what possibly might turn out to be most difficult for her during her first year of teaching, she said that she was most anxious about the relationships with parents: “I don't think I will be very successful to begin with but I think it will then go well because I know that I connect with people easily, I make a good impression, you know, and people can trust me. There is a bit of fright within me with regard to this, but I think that holds for most people” (H1a), 12). Hanna's ongoing struggle with behavior problems made her decide to really try to come to grips with it in her second year of teaching that class by communicating with parents. She decided that when a child's conduct was out of line, she would always let the respective parent know. Hanna tells of her difficulties with getting the support of parents as she tried to deal with students' behavior problems in the classroom. Here is Hanna's story about her relationships with the parents at that time:

I must say that I felt that I had not even begun to deal with the behavior problems before, but now this was to be my priority. This meant lots of phone calls to certain homes, lots of e-mails and, last but not least, lots of meetings with these parents. The three most difficult children in my class during the first year continued to pose serious problems, and their parents turned against me! They blamed the school and me, and it was always the other kids and other parents who were to blame. This was, of course, a difficult class on the whole, but I

felt it wouldn't be a big deal to cope with kids who behaved badly, if I had the support of the parents. Then I would know that we were sort of on the same team, and everyone helping each other out, but when I lost the parents – that was hopeless.

In those meetings these parents revealed their resentments with remarks such as, I was too young to know, and that as I was pregnant I was unable to cope! Yes, that's what one of the dads actually said right to my face: 'Well, you are pregnant, aren't you?', meaning that this was the reason why I couldn't handle the behavior problems in the classroom. They had prejudices against me. These were extremely busy people, and tired, and they knew exactly what I was referring to regarding the behavior of their children, because the situation was precisely the same at home. They felt that I had contacted them all too often, and as it was not dealt with at home, it always got more and more irritating for them, and then it was like a balloon burst! I, the beginning teacher, pregnant and all, much younger than them, was bugging them all the time, perhaps reminding them of their incompetence as parents! It was really interesting to experience this kind of male chauvinism. When this situation came up, having the parents against you, the behavior of their children escalated, because it had obviously been talked about at home. Then it became totally hopeless to deal with these students. Perhaps my inexperience had contributed to how bad I really felt about this. Then again, I might have been able to tackle this differently if I'd been more experienced. Mind you, I thought it was better to be straightforward and honest about these things, even though it meant more difficulty for me, because otherwise it would just hit back later.

I would also like to mention that what really helped me in dealing with these three parents in the meetings, was my principal. She told me to be positive and also to talk about the bright sides of these kids, and to take good care not to become defensive. I always made sure to have the principal with me, or somebody else to help me through these meetings. It turned out to be very sensible to have her with me, because she always backed me up. The fact that these three students behaved just the same even with veteran teachers, made it easier for me; for my self-image as a teacher. Besides, all the other parents

appreciated it when I contacted them, because they wanted to know what was happening with their children, and the parents really showed their gratitude for what I was doing for their children (H2, 2-3).

**Comments:** Before Hanna started teaching she said that she was anxious concerning the relationships with parents. However, she sounded as if she was in fact not convinced that it would be so difficult for her. Difficult parents often seem to be a major fear agent for prospective teachers, it is something much talked about among them and they expect that they will all come up against it. Hanna may have mentioned this at that time just to be on the safe side, because if things would not turn out well for her, she could always say that this is what she had in fact anticipated.

Hanna's words show that her efforts to improve her relationships with students involved getting support from parents. Her success with most of the parents was marred by the conflict she experienced with the parents of the three badly behaved students. It clearly offended her professionalism and hurt her deeply when accused of being neurotic because of her pregnancy. Hanna turned to the principal for support and with her help, Hanna came to realize that she had developed her abilities to create relationships with most of the students and their parents. The three badly behaved students acted this way with veteran teachers as well. Hanna's relationships with the principal enabled her to see herself in a new way and encouraged her to try new ways of responding to parents. It gave her a new understanding of herself as a competent and confident teacher.

Hanna might have been able to avoid these conflicts with the parents by sweeping the problems under the carpet, but she chose not to, she did not want the easy way out. It would have been so much easier for her to turn a blind eye on it, but that is not "how I function. I knew that I was doing the right thing by addressing the problems, even though that meant running up against these difficult parents" (H2, 3). This distressing experience of dealing with difficult parents turned into a valuable learning experience for Hanna as she did not allow it to break her. The meaning she made of it, and thus added a brick to her personal practical knowledge, was to realize how important it is to act confidently in the parent relationships but at the same time to be friendly and inviting.

#### **5.4.4. Not Having an Official Mentor**

Hanna was never assigned a formal mentor (see cpt. 2). However, as the principal of the school was on leave in the term when she started teaching, she was fortunate to have the support of the substitute principal, as well as the substitute vice-principal, and they turned out to be her major support during the first struggling months. Hanna liked them and valued the relationships she had with them. Hanna tells her mentoring story:

The substitute principal and the substitute vice-principal were absolutely terrific, they sort of took me in their arms and supported me 100%. They were always asking how things were going, and came into the classroom, and familiarized themselves with problems of individual students that I was dealing with, and were sort of at home in everything. I must say I really appreciated that the doors to their offices were open at all times and I knew I was always welcome there no matter what. Informal relationships like that are extremely important to me. Then when the regular principal returned from her leave after Christmas it was something of a shock for me because she was so different from them and rather formal. There was not much support I got from her. It wasn't until my second year that I felt I really came to terms with my principal, because then I experienced how she would always back me up when dissatisfied parents contacted her. I particularly felt this at the time, because her massive support of what I was doing was really taken to a test. For example, when the parents called the school administrators in the second year to complain about all the chaos in my classroom, I got undivided support from the principal, which just made all the difference. I was always backed up, and that was just incredibly good. I find however, that the overall support I got was on the whole insufficient. In fact, I never got an official mentor during the first year of my teaching. There should be some systematic support network to get you started, to keep an eye on you, and to sort of pep you up. I feel very strongly about beginning teachers having to take on a whole class alone. Instead, they ought to be able to join a team which would then be responsible for a group of students.

Now, when I look back to those two - three beginning years of teaching, I feel even stronger about the situation of beginning



teachers. Like me, I was simply thrown into the most difficult class in the school. It was supposed to be some sort of a solution to have two young novices, wet behind their ears. All other teachers, who had been teaching this group of students, had given up on them. I don't think it is morally right to do something like this. Mind you, in retrospect I think that I wouldn't want to change anything, because I survived. After all, I think that I learned absolutely 1000 things, but it's a bit risky to do this. (H1c), 7), H2,16, H3, 11, H5, 20)

**Comments:** Hanna's substitute principal and her assistant were in fact her mentors, informally though, and they gave her the psychological support she badly needed, but that was not the case when the regular principal returned after Christmas in the first year. She was much more formal, not inviting in this regard, and Hanna found that “a bit shocking”. She phrased this rather mildly, that this had indeed been more than a little shocking for her as the story shows.

Hanna received a different kind of support in her second year, when the parents turned against her. Then the regular principal backed her up and showed the parents that she had confidence in Hanna. The regular principal must have detected a promising teacher in Hanna, when she got to know her and her work with the children, in spite of her rugged beginning in the first year. Hanna's ability to create relationships enabled her to access different kinds of mentoring, even though she was not appointed a formal mentor, in order to receive help from those who have more experience.

Hanna said that she had “learned absolutely 1000 things”, having to go through the rough seas of her first two years of teaching. As she opened up her practice to the above mentioned colleagues it enabled her to learn e.g. how to work with and create relationships with both students and parents alike, she learned how to manage this difficult class, she learned how and when to set limits. Other major learning experiences were not giving up, and one can certainly say that the expression ‘what doesn't kill you makes you stronger’ really applied to Hanna in these circumstances. She said that it was very risky to place someone “wet behind the ears” in the most difficult class in the entire school. Having to experience such a behaviorally challenging class, with several educationally needy students as well, was indeed a challenge that one might think would soon drive a novice out of the

classroom. Instead Hanna demonstrated her resilience in that she managed to deal with the challenges in the realities; she was certain that she would be able to tackle the situation. Her positive outlook on life gained the upper hand.

The stories Hanna told through her first two years, demonstrate how she grappled with extreme difficulties in her grade five and six classes. The road she travelled was rugged indeed, and there were times when she felt she had lost sight of the teacher she wanted to become. More than anything it was Hanna's inherent good humor, her resilience and her positive nature, that kept her afloat through the rough seas.

In the following passage, the process of validating herself as a teacher, is the substance of the stories that will be presented.

## **5.5 Validating Self as a Teacher**

For Hanna, the realities in the early years of teaching were not only characterized by difficulties, there were also experiences of joys and successes. I present two stories which demonstrate how Hanna validated herself in the early years of teaching. They depict a young teacher who begins to get a handle on things in her teaching, and to manage it in ways where she can see her students flourish in her classroom.

### **5.5.1 Getting a grasp on things: Developing New Teaching Practices**

There were many things that were successful, Hanna said at the end of her second year of teaching. Her story of what she felt were her accomplishments, how she felt her ideas came to fruition is as follows:

What I felt was going much better were many things that had to do with organizational issues. As you know, all the difficulties in the beginning weighed heavily on my mind. I was alarmed because everything really was very difficult, so much more than I could have imagined. I was not at all optimistic that things would ever go well but then, in the new year, it was getting better and better, things started improving, slowly but markedly. For example managing the behavior of my students, and generally getting across to them. I felt that they started to trust me, as I got to know them better. What I'm saying is that I came to terms with the fact that these things take time, as I think

this is just a natural development. I started overcoming some problems and just getting used to what I was doing, and familiarizing myself with things and thus becoming a bit more self-confident.

Then in the second year I gained yet again a better perspective on what one had to do, what one had to accomplish, so that it would have some value. I just knew better what was needed, and what had to be done somehow. For instance the lesson planning. My assignments were more creative. I felt more secure in assessing the students, and the collaboration with other teachers I also managed well. I was more successful in this because I was a bit more experienced. What I felt I really managed to pull off was teaching Math. This was a pleasant surprise because I'd been rather prejudiced against teaching Math, and against this new Math material as well. Many students made really good progress, but not all, not those low achievers in reading, for example. I can also mention the Social Studies' teaching. I started to manage using some of the diverse teaching methods we learned about in the IUE. I had already experienced that otherwise the students would simply rot away, because they found the traditional seat-work methods so endlessly boring. Yes, and I loved teaching poetry because there I began to get through to them! No textbooks, just poems of our own choice, poems that we wanted to work with; describe, discuss, interpret in words and by using drama. One somehow becomes so alive when one explains a poem which is awfully sad or really funny. When one manages to get through to them doing that, that's extremely important, it's something you really remember.

What I also found encouraging was that my students said that they would describe me as a very good teacher, that is what they told me. Frequently very lively and fun to be with, full of life but also firm and often crossed as kids say when one is firm. These were the energizers that kept me going. As I was going to take a maternity leave in the first months of my third year and would therefore not continue to teach this class, I decided to throw a fare-well party and invited them to my home. I was really happy to be able to say goodbye to them in that way, that our rather rugged relationships would come to a nice end. (H1b),1, H1c),1, H2,1-2, 16-17)

### **5.5.2 Enabling Everyone to Flourish**

In our conversation at the end of Hanna's third year of teaching she expressed a great relief that she was finally able to see her students flourish in the classroom, to experience that her teaching was of some value instead of having to just monitor behavior all the time. The story she told about her revitalization runs like this:

When I came back by mid-year relaxed after my maternity leave, I was assigned special education teaching in the remedial room within my school. My students were 'new Icelanders': a blind girl and students with diverse learning disabilities, all in grades 4-6. I really liked this teaching. Finally I was really having fun at work, - yes, I found it very interesting. Especially with the blind girl as there were so many new things I was learning, this was so different from everything else. Getting insight into her world, her experience, and putting myself in her shoes. I found this really enjoyable and interesting. I succeeded a teacher who was a specialist in teaching the blind, and she familiarized me with the work, and helped me a great deal but there is not much relevant curriculum material available in Icelandic. She had made a lot of stuff, and there is something in English, but not a lot. I started to learn Braille and how to use the Apacos device, which the blind girl uses in Math. Obviously, this was completely new to me, but I was of course learning a great deal. I also did some things differently than before. For instance, I took her to the countryside, on whole day excursions, and we'd use that as a resource for learning.

This teaching was not the same aggravation like being a class teacher. I was actually just doing the fun stuff, actually teaching. That's what I was actually doing. I was not dealing with some behavior hassle all the time! I really felt that I could see so much progress. I felt that I could manage so well in assisting these students. This meant a lot to me as one of my aims in teaching is being able to let my students flourish. And I could see that happening. In this teaching I could actually put into practice the diverse teaching methods I'd been wanting to try out the previous two years and I felt much better about myself as a teacher. With these students I didn't need to be 'the bogey-man'. Now I could actually concentrate on how to stimulate them, how to motivate them, and how to maintain their interest, and that is what I had longed for from the beginning of my career in teaching. For

example, as the immigrant children were from five different countries, their mutual language had to be Icelandic, so the most urgent thing was to get them talking. Not to worry about the grammar. And we'd be talking and talking, about everything in their daily lives, to increase their vocabulary. Then we'd examine the words. We made small books where they wrote their words, illustrated them, and wrote stories about them. We'd go outside to examine the environment and found relevant words. We had a lot of fun together.

This whole teaching was such an important learning experience for me, that it hastened my decision to go back to university, to graduate school, to study special education teaching. It was not because I wanted to be in special education teaching per se, but rather because, as a class teacher, one needs to be more capable of teaching diverse students because these students will be in my class anyhow. Last year I had for example three students who I didn't have a clue how to respond to. I would have liked to have some foundation or some form of education helping me to deal with their educational needs.

It was also an interesting and important learning experience for me to come across an attitude of disrespect from my colleagues regarding my teaching in the remedial room. It was often as if they felt me and my students were just pottering around, just passing time, especially with the blind girl. Teachers would come in and talk in a loud voice, or interrupt us in some other manner, or request that a certain student would join his or her class right now, regardless of what we were doing. I don't think they were doing this deliberately, it's more without thinking, but I find that this definitely shows a certain attitude towards this teaching. For me, it was an honor to be asked to take on this teaching after my maternity leave. I could see that there were so many learning opportunities in it for me.

This teaching was revitalizing for me in a way which made me feel open again to change and innovation. Now I am for example very excited about the arrangement which we are going to set up next year, my fourth year, that is the multi-age grouping. I find that very exciting. We are four teachers who are going to team-teach grades 5-6 and I'm confident that we can work together; that we will just function like a

machine. This is really something that I want, and I'm indeed looking forward to the coming year. (H3) 1-5, 7)

Three of the teachers had already met in the spring of Hanna's third year (the fourth teacher had not yet been hired), and she told me that they had already started preparing by "discussing this endlessly", and by visiting schools that were team-teaching and had multi-age groups. Her cheerfulness and positive attitude was back. The teacher she wanted to become was closer she said: "I can envisage it. I'm looking in that direction and the only thing that really hinders me or holds me back, is myself really" (H3, 10).

**Comments:** As can be seen in the former story about validating herself, Hanna began to get a grasp of things in her second year, and with that her self-confidence was returning with her determination to overcome hindrances. Hanna was teaching the same class again and by getting to know her students better she earned their trust and respect, which enabled her to deal with the relationships in her classroom. Once that big hindrance was more or less out of the way Hanna was then able to teach as opposed to monitor behavior all the time. Hanna's main learning this year was to become better at organizing her practices; she managed to use diverse teaching methods that her students found engaging, she began to teach poetry that the students had chosen and liked, and she introduced drama and role playing in her teaching. These new practices were very significant in her learning this year and became a new thread she began to weave into her developing personal practical knowledge.

Further, much to Hanna's surprise was her success with teaching Math. Hanna's story, *A Girl from a Farm*, brings to light that Mathematics was not within her mother's interest and she could not help Hanna with her homework there. Hanna's mother had passed that attitude over to Hanna making her "rather prejudiced against teaching Math". Here is a good example of how personal knowledge from childhood becomes evident as practical knowledge in teaching. This is still another important thread in the tapestry of Hanna's personal practical knowledge. Moreover, as Hanna got to know her students better, she could see that some of them were not making progress in her classroom in spite of her efforts. She was very concerned regarding this issue. Hanna wanted to reach all her students, she

wanted to be able to touch their souls, and that was not happening with some of them. The meaning she made of this experience turned her interest towards going back to university, to graduate school, to study special education, as became evident in her fourth year.

In Hanna's third year her positive spirit and her excitement returned. The latter story is about everyone flourishing, about being a creative teacher who is responsive to her students' needs. Even though Hanna was not a certified special education teacher she was assigned to teach that, and in her mind it was an honor. It was of great importance to her to be able to reach those students, and she tried out very creative methods with her special education students, which were quite unconventional in her school, in her attempt to make these students flourish. This shows that Hanna was learning to put into use the creative, active and innovative teaching methods she encountered during her teacher education (see p. 124–126). That evidently revitalized her because she was acting out in practice the practical part of her personal practical knowledge from her teacher education program. Further, the latter story also shows Hanna's concern regarding the professional attitudes of her colleagues, in this case the status of special education teaching. In our conversations she often revealed her concern regarding teachers who she felt were not good teachers.

This story also shows how willing Hanna is to assume responsibility for her actions. Despite her extremely difficult beginning with the most educationally needy class, she looked inward for meaning making of her experiences. She did not have the need to find something or somebody else to blame. As can be seen, it was in her own power to find ways to solve problems, to seek ways to change the situation or the methods of teaching in order to enable every student to blossom. Her positive side and her open mind took over, and she was looking forward to the coming school year.

Hanna's eagerness for the coming year, her fourth year, was evident. That is the substance of the two stories that are presented in the next passage.

## **5.6 Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences**

In this chapter there are two stories. One is about how Hanna realized her vision of what she referred to as touching her students' souls by taking action when she had the opportunity to team-teach in a multi-age group of students. The other reveals how her opinions and views on reluctant teachers developed as she proceeded in her teaching without hesitation even though it meant going against the grain in her school.

### **5.6.1 Seizing the Opportunity to Act on One's Vision**

In light of what Hanna had said regarding beginning teachers' ability to join a team of veteran teachers who would jointly be responsible for a group of students, it was no surprise how excited she was when that was to happen in her fourth year. Individualized learning and student collaboration<sup>8</sup> was the new policy in her school, and due to decline in student numbers the administrators had decided to bring about multi-age grouping in grades 1–6 as well, in the hope that this would support the new policy. At the end of her fifth year Hanna told this story about her experience with team-teaching and multi-age grouping:

When team-teaching, individualized learning and multi-age grouping was in the pipeline, I could definitely envision possibilities; we could divide labor, we wouldn't need to teach all subjects, we could have diverse groupings and use multiple teaching methods which would allow us to reach all students, touching all of them. So I envisage this as making use of the team to increase diversity in teaching and learning, and to do all kinds of stuff one just wouldn't be able to do alone. This is the second year of the multi-age grouping, and I'm very happy with it, especially how it translates for the students. I think that this kind of grouping is better in many ways than same-age grouping. I think it is the right philosophy. I believe that this really agrees with the students, but of course there are drawbacks with this setup as with

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<sup>8</sup>In 2002 the Reykjavik educational authorities (Starfsáætlun fræðslu-mála Reykjavíkur, 2002) initiated a new policy; individualized learning and student collaboration for its schools, which many of them have been trying to adopt one by one. This policy for example, builds on what is known from Carol Ann Tomlison's work on differentiated instruction.



everything else. What matters however, is that as a teacher, one begins to think about each and every student. One goes beyond thinking about the whole class all the time, and what everyone should be able to do according to age and all that. I was brought up in multi-age grouping schools so I know this as a student as well and can resort to that experience.

Last year, my fourth year, when we were starting out, I constantly had to convince the teachers of the pros of this system. I was in the role of having to persuade them that this *could* actually work, as well as *how* this could work, and then I could use my experience as an example. Gradually one of them started to accept it. Also, I felt that very soon it became obvious that the age didn't matter. We were trying to individualize the learning as much as we possibly could, which of course is the policy of the school, so it's a good thing simply to stop thinking about teaching the whole class at the same time. An example was when we were going to group the students by ability. We would first check what each student could do, their strong sides, which brought into light that it did not depend on age. Sure enough, it turned out that Palli in grade five and Stina in grade six were on the same page so to speak. Additionally, a strong argument for the multi-age grouping is the fact that the social interactions of the children become much, much better. The groups were more peaceful, the atmosphere was more relaxed. I've not had to deal with this rivalry and these mean interactions, which I was faced with in the beginning when I was teaching kids of the same age. We have the three classrooms in this corridor at our disposal, as well as the corridor itself. The students kind of flow between these areas, and we have divided them into all kinds of groups; the ability grouping I mentioned, but we have also used one-sex grouping, and everything down to completely random grouping.

My classroom is big and very nice and offers multiple possibilities as to how the physical environment is arranged. My students typically sit grouped by fours, because I want them to learn to work together, it's essential that they learn that. Then I set up a home-corner with a comfy sofa and a small table with flowers on. There were choices for them, like I made a lot of cards with a variety of options. My students

and I made individualized study-plans in collaboration, and when my students had finished what they planned each time they could choose what to do next from these cards. My intention for giving them these options was to encourage them to complete what they had planned, and they made use of this opportunity a lot. On the whole, I feel that my program has worked out really well this school year, although one is always searching for new ways to do things and more teaching methods, which could fit this program. And generally trying to find solutions to the flaws that still can be found. By going to graduate school to study special education, I feel that I have acquired knowledge and competence to cater for my students, whichever way the group is combined each time. Besides, these past two years *have* convinced me that I *will* still become more and more competent in finding ways and possible solutions for *all* my future students. I can visualize that happening. (H3, 7, H5, 2-6, 10, 22)

### **5.6.2 When Acting on One's Vision Means Going Against the Grain**

One of Hanna's serious concerns were teachers who were reluctant to change. She felt very strongly about teachers who never needed to "be on their toes in relation to anything" (H5, 5). This knowledge of teaching made her feel that there in the schools were too many mediocre or even bad teachers. Here is the story about Hanna's relationship with reluctant teachers at the end of her fifth year:

This team-teaching hasn't turned out the way I had expected. To be quite honest I was the one on the team who was most devoted to the multi-age grouping system. There is no doubt about it. I was usually the one who brought in new ideas, suggested teaching methods and different approaches. Therefore it wasn't the sort of give and take I had hoped for. I can't say that I got any inspiration from my team. Sorry, no. We were three teachers on the team this year teaching grade five and six, which was divided into three mixed-aged homeroom groups. One of the teachers was also on my team last year, and then she was really skeptical of this multi-age grouping, but gradually it has been changing, she's become much more positive. Simply that made everything this year much easier than last year, when I was basically the only one on the team who in essence was in

favor of this setup. The third teacher is still very negative towards the whole thing. Sometimes I've become irritated and just annoyed towards him because of this situation, and shortly before the end of this school-year I found that I'd become pretty tired of this negative teacher. So much so, that in fact I gave up on him in the end. I stopped trying to involve him in things, and simply proceeded with this program in my classroom with my homeroom group and the other teacher.

These teachers have been teaching for years, and they prefer same-age grouping; that there the ability will surface. I think that the reason for me being so much more open and – yes, more broadminded, is because I went to graduate school. Studying part time with teaching got me really inspired again and that made me more alive in my job. Perhaps the reason might also be the fact that I have not taught for as long as they have. Perhaps people who have taught for 100 years are more inclined towards always doing everything the same way, I don't know. Everybody in the school knows that I use every opportunity to draw attention to the advantages of multi-age grouping. But most of the teachers in here don't want it, they are so preoccupied with wanting everything to be as it has always been; 'just because' – and then there is no reasoning.

Mind you, I don't know how often I have spoken to my principal about hiring teachers who are willing to put this policy of the school into practice. It's not enough that the administrators of the school and a handful of teachers want this; this policy will never be implemented unless the teachers want it as well. There is no teacher in here who's afraid to lose his or her job. Nobody has applied for a vacant position in my school, and I'm sure that the teachers have become too secure in their positions, which means that they don't need to be on their toes in relation to anything, and that is dreadful. This experience has made me feel that there exist in schools too many mediocre or even bad teachers. I'm a mother as well, not just a teacher, and I wonder if I will be lucky enough to get a good teacher for my child when he starts his schooling, which of course is absurd! It should almost be the rule getting a good teacher. But it's not like that. These teachers are simply preoccupied in talking about their low wages, and how difficult

everything is; they're just stuck in the nagging. One can just imagine how comfortable this is for them; they can go on however they like, they subscribe to their wages. Okay, I admit, the wages are rather low, but those teachers find that teaching is so much better than having to live up to some standards in another job. That's what I think. This situation means that we need to reshuffle and get some new teachers, there's no question about that. As I said, I decided to proceed in my classroom with my group of students without hesitation in spite of this negative teacher on my team, because I believe in this philosophy of multi-age grouping. And fortunately not all the teachers are like that. More and more often I've turned to teachers in the youngest grades for inspiration, I really like the way they do things there. They are teachers who I hope to team-teach with later. (H5, 5, 6)

At the end of Hanna's fifth year of teaching she was content in spite of reluctant teachers. She found her profession extremely important, she respected what she was doing and it meant a lot to her as there are so many people "who are bored stiff in their jobs and just do it because they have to" (H5, 6). In Hanna's mind teaching is a noble occupation which she is proud to be part of.

**Comments:** Hanna's experiences of developing her practices were both positive as well as negative as the two stories above have clearly shown. Hanna's excitement about team-teaching connects with her need to belong and it echoes the stories from her childhood and schooling. She often talked about that she wanted to belong to a group of teachers who shared educational ideals and enthusiasm, who wanted to discuss ideas, methods and what paths to take. By means of team-teaching she hoped that that would come true. The latter story clearly shows that the experience of team-teaching failed to fulfill Hanna's hopes. She had not managed to create meaningful and productive relationships with one member on her team even though she had put a considerable effort into that, as this teacher was in essence against the new policy of the school on individualized instruction (see p. 148 and footnote 8). As is evident in the former story, multi-age grouping was the educational philosophy Hanna felt was right. Clearly, that is the meaning she made after having taught students with special educational needs in her third year of teaching, thus she was in total consent with the new policy of her school.

Hanna's understanding of multi-age grouping, as the former story reveals, can be traced back to her earliest knowledge of schooling as she attended a small country school with multi-age grouping her first seven years, and this was a natural path for her to take in order to create an educational whole. It was a distinct part of the personal practical knowledge she brought with her into her teaching. During her fourth year Hanna went ahead to build a program that would reach all her students at their individual level of ability and cater for the various needs of them in a multi-age group. Simultaneously, she took graduate courses in special education, and in so doing she revealed her ability to develop new kinds of relationships with students and the curriculum content. Taking these courses made her apparently more confident in this area and added a new dimension to her personal practical knowledge. Here, Hanna shows how she has come to a new understanding of herself as a competent and confident teacher, and how she made adjustments to her practice by designing a program that would enable all her students to flourish.

Additionally, in spite of opposition in her team regarding multi-age grouping and individualized instruction, Hanna made an effort to win the team over, and she was beginning to succeed in that with one of the teachers towards the end of her fourth year. Having put her foot in the door and seen the possibilities of this program, she was not willing to take a step back. Instead, Hanna now had the confidence to adjust the program to her homeroom group of students, to her classroom and worked with the other teacher on the team, the fifth year, instead of letting that experience stop her from following her vision of teaching and learning.

Hanna maintains that one of the benefits of multi-age grouping is that the social interactions of the students become much better than in same-age groups. That is the meaning she made of her experiences from her first two years in teaching. It should however be considered that perhaps these two different situations, the first two years on one hand and her fourth and fifth year on the other, are not equivalent. Therefore they may not be comparable because Hanna's improved classroom management skills, as well as more knowledge of practice and confidence in planning teaching, attributed to what increased experience and graduate education may have brought her, as she was

evidently certain of. Through going to graduate school she gained the knowledge and competence needed, and last but not least, she rejuvenated her ideals and her visions in teaching and learning and found paths to realize them. In other words, when the opportunity came to act on her earliest vision in teaching and learning which she created during her teacher education, Hanna clearly seized it without hesitation. Moreover, towards the end of her fifth year Hanna found a team in the school closer to her principles in teaching and learning. The possibility of teaming up with them the coming year put her hopes up yet again.

In the latter story about Hanna's relationship with reluctant teachers, she expressed her frustration regarding such colleagues. Her intense feelings brought her to discuss this with her principal. After unsuccessfully trying time and again to convince certain colleagues that diverse and multiple approaches to teaching and learning and multi-aged grouping were the ways to go, her conclusion was that they were so comfortable in their positions that they did not need be on their toes, so to speak, that they "subscribed to their wages". This of course can be interpreted as very critical remarks. Note that multi-age teaching has been one of the most controversial educational issues for the past decade in Iceland, whether it is implemented because of a decline in student numbers, or as a method used to individualize teaching and learning. Hanna knew this, and had gained enough confidence as a teacher to express her views and to act on them, even though it meant going against the grain. That too had become an indisputable part of her personal practical knowledge.

In the last part of this chapter are three stories about re-creating story of self as a teacher in the process of creating rich learning community in the classroom.

### **5.7 Re-Creating Story of Self as Teacher – Creating Rich Learning Community**

The stories of Hanna are more than anything else stories of creating relationships and drawing on support, inspiration, ideas and ability to create new practices by accessing her creativity and resilience. They are about how a beginning teacher has reconstructed her past and her intentions for the future to deal with the requirements of the present

situation. The fourth and fifth year of Hanna's teaching she was team-teaching a multi-age group of 10 and 11 years old students. Multi-age grouping is part of her practical knowledge from her schooling as she attended two small country schools herself, where two to three grade levels shared a classroom and one teacher. Through this teaching Hanna was creating a rich learning community and in the process of doing that Hanna re-created her identity as a teacher; she re-created her story of herself as a teacher.

### **5.7.1 In a Class of 25 Some Will Surprise Us Later – Hanna's Passion in Teaching**

In Hanna's metaphor of the garden, the roots of the plants have been growing during the five years of her practice in the classroom and her participation in the research project. They support the flowering of her passion for teaching. Through our conversations her passion for the right of all children to receive education in their home school, in the regular classroom with their peers was tangible, and she believed that multi-age teaching was among the means to that end. Similarly, meaningful relationships with colleagues, students and their parents, were components of that vision. Here is how Hanna explained what this meant to her:

It has always been my conviction that the school should be for everybody, that is what I think. Opportunities to let everyone flourish within the school should be in place. It is my firm belief that multi-age teaching is in many ways much better than dividing by age, but of course there are both pros and cons. However, the main advantage of it is that as a teacher I begin to think more about each individual; taking responsibility for the development of each student according to specific individual needs. And as we are trying to differentiate teaching and learning as we can, it is a good approach to simply stop thinking about the whole class as one all the time. Going back to graduate school strengthened my belief if anything. But what I describe as *teachers' incompetence* to tackle individual needs is also one of my major concerns now. My heart aches when somebody says: 'Siggi should be in *Öskjuhlíðarskóli*.'<sup>9</sup> I just can't stand it. I find that teachers

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<sup>9</sup>A special education school for mentally challenged children.

never think: What can we do so that Siggi blossoms. Instead they say: He should be in *Öskjuhlíðarskóli* or in the remedial room. This is what I think independent of the schools' capacity to deal with inclusion. But the thing is, some teachers just want to get rid of these students, and I find it devastating because it's completely unfair to them. The teachers discuss or rather complain in countless meetings, about how this and that student is so low in ability, but never is the teachers' lack of skills nor the schools' incapacity to handle inclusion discussed.

Sometimes I get so angry, because I feel so strongly about this! We know of course, that in a class of 25 students some will surprise us later. And you must never judge somebody prematurely and say that nothing will become of Siggi, he's such a low achiever. This is something I want to avoid at all cost. That's why I think that it is the teacher who is a low achiever when he or she is unable to identify Siggi's abilities, because they are certainly in place. That's why I feel that team-teaching in multi-age and inclusive classrooms are means to improve schools. But it's odd that the teachers are not interested in discussing inclusion for instance. I would like to see some kind of forum within the school where we can discuss everything regarding teaching; different ideas, how things are going, how to find solutions to present problems, which instructional methods work well, etc. The teachers are often so dispirited somehow, they can't be bothered to discuss this; the pedagogy of teaching. There is no one here who reads anything, and often they don't know anything. Everyone is so tired all the time. I don't know. There is no lively and active educational community in this school.

What I also feel very strongly about are parent-teacher relationships. I find it extremely important to have good relationships with the parents. I have experienced having tremendously difficult students as well as difficult parents, and now I know a great deal about how to handle these situations, as well as what my rights are. Back in my first and second year, I felt I constantly had to be so defensive. That is very difficult because parents and teachers must work together in order for something positive to happen. Somehow I do not see myself coming up against this kind of situation again, I can see that clearly now. I've become so much more assertive with the parents. Much more



confident regarding what I am doing. I've not encountered anything like this since then. I've only had good relationships with parents this year and I consider myself quite competent in speaking with them. I place emphasis on explaining my program to them, and how I view teaching. I find it necessary to allow them to keep a tab on what's happening. I use e-mail a great deal to inform them of what their kids are doing during the school day or the school week, I send them pictures and especially positive news, simply to be responsive to them. But then there are always the same parents who respond and are in touch with me. There are not many who do that. Most of the parents came to the curriculum introduction meeting in the fall, where they showed their appreciation, and to the parent-teacher conferences and the like, but hardly any dropped a line, nor came for a visit to the classroom, even though they knew they were always welcome. Perhaps this is a typical situation. As you can see, I find it extremely important to be on good terms with parents all the time, but evidently this is something that needs more consideration.

Yet another thing that I'm very passionate about is the flow of my teaching. Back in the days when I was starting, I envisioned an ordinary school day to be always extremely enjoyable and interesting, and that I would always be engaged in something exciting and that I and my students would be alive and active and that I would not fall into some kind of boring routine with my students! That's what I hoped for, but it didn't happen for quite a while. Therefore it is very important for me to see now that my students find it gratifying to be in my classroom, to know that they feel good here. I'm sympathetic to my students, I make an effort to create a relaxed atmosphere without loosing everything into some baloney or nonsense. Also to be fair in all my dealings with them, and I make a point of having a place for humor; to sort of play with the humor in my teaching. It's ever so important not to take yourself too seriously, not to be afraid if somebody laughs at you and to have the ability to laugh at your own mistakes. Every single one of those components are very important to me because it's not just you doing your job. It's you and perhaps 25 other individuals, whose souls you are supposed to touch. (H1a), 7, 8, H3,7,10, H5, 2-3, 11, 13-14, 18, 23)

### **5.7.2 Being Constantly on One's Toes – Creating and Re-creating Identity as a Teacher**

When the fifth school year had come to an end, Hanna and I met in her classroom which still echoed of active, lively children. Her journey to becoming the teacher she intended is a never ending story she said to me. Going to graduate school part time in her fourth year to study special education in order to become a special education teacher was not Hanna's intention. Rather she wanted to acquire the necessary or the supplementary knowledge and skills to be able to become a better classroom teacher, to be able to attend more intensely to students with special educational needs within her class and most of all to be able to attend to all her students. Going to graduate school brought Hanna the opportunity and inspiration she needed to assert her beliefs, her pedagogical vision, and to develop her practices. This is Hanna's story about that journey:

I think that I'm on the right track to becoming the teacher I wanted to become when I graduated, I hope so. I have the feeling that I'm growing, and that I'll get there. I envision that I will become more and more able to find means and possible solutions for all my future students, and these past two years have sort of convinced me that I can do that. Mind you, when I look back over those five years I can tell the changes within myself, how I feel as a teacher, how I have grown and developed as a teacher. The first two or three years were a struggle and then, during the fourth year, and especially this year, there is this turnaround in that I really started to enjoy being a teacher. Last year, when I went to graduate school studying special education part-time, it all came back to me: This passionate interest I had when I was doing my pre-service teacher education, all these possibilities and ideas and reaching everybody, which had just evaporated during the struggling years; it was almost like seeing the light! And it was a good feeling, I can tell you!

I can remember that at the end of the second year, I felt that sometimes I was totally incompetent as a teacher. Very often I felt I didn't get the hang of the subject matter I was teaching, so that it would be rich both in content and method, it was so difficult having to prepare teaching in so many subjects. I also felt it was not motivating enough, and that somehow I didn't affect my students. I felt I just

needed to practice more to become what I wanted to become. And I really tried not to lose sight of the goal. What I think has been my major support in the direction I was heading as a teacher was experience of course, going to graduate school, and my colleagues as well. One watches good teachers around, and sees that this one is great, and that one is doing cool stuff, and this is something I want to learn. Then again one also sees teachers who are clearly *not* doing cool stuff, and that's how one learns from the environment and experience. The general moral in this school has become so that teachers who are doing good stuff do receive recognition. That's why it's such a good feeling having endured the terribly difficult experience of the first two years. I'm so glad that I didn't simply throw in the towel and quit! Because, as I've said, immediately during the third year everything started to fall into place, flourishing somehow, and that felt absolutely great!

When I went back to graduate school, I found the spark of interest again, and all this positivity within me. It was fantastic. It even felt just like when I started my teacher education. At that time I was so full of excitement, joyful and eager and all that. Having graduated I looked so much forward to starting teaching and then, when I finally had begun teaching I was totally tossed to the ground. Therefore it felt so good surfacing again, becoming optimistic again and receptive and determined, as well as conscious of what was happening in education. My students tell me openly that I am fun to be with, and that I am a good teacher. I love my job and I enjoy being a teacher now. Nevertheless, I always have to bear in mind that even though something is going incredibly well, it must be reconsidered on a regular basis. One has to be receptive to development and change. I must never just sit back and think: I'm there, this is it. I must constantly remember to be on my toes! That's how I want to continue to develop as a teacher. (H2, 16, H3, 6,10-11, H5, 1-2,5,11,21,22)

Because Hanna went back to graduate school doing part time studies towards an M.Ed. degree, she felt that she had developed her vision, become more “broad-minded and more open to new ideas and yes, perhaps more alive in my job, you know” (H5, 4).

### **5.7.3 Capturing the Togetherness – Hanna and Her Classroom**

When looking around in Hanna's classroom the open classroom comes to mind, with the notion of differentiated learning and teaching. Her classroom provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in active learning. There were various learning centers, planned for several periods a week, each having a task with materials the students were supposed to engage with, and from which they could choose. One center had two sewing machines and knitting needles, and another was the home-corner. Several times a week there were particular lessons where each student worked according to her or his individual study plans, which they made in collaboration with Hanna. They could go to the centers when they had finished. "This turned out to be very encouraging for them, to finish their tasks. They really liked the centers" (H5, 10). She grouped most of the tables in fours, but four of her students sat alone some of the time when working on special tasks, two because they chose to, and another two because otherwise they were not able to concentrate, so she has designated tables for them. The work of her students was on display on the walls around the room, even the chalkboard. Hanna's classroom is a place where her students like to be. They tell her that "they feel good in here" (H5,10). Hanna's classroom is a stimulating learning environment. In Hanna's last story she talks about what the classroom means to her:

I want my students to be together, to work together; I need the feeling of togetherness in my classroom. I really like my classroom, it is so big that it sort of allows for all kinds of things, like a home-corner, I think that's a great advantage. They absolutely loved the home-corner. I brought in a carpet, a couch and a coffee-table where I made sure always to have flowers in a vase. This is a sort of a retreat, or a quiet place, where my students can withdraw. Whether they were working on some assignments, individually, in pairs or in a small group, resting or reading. Then if somebody had stomach pains, for example, they could lie down there for a while. There were definite rules in the home-corner which they respect. I find it very important that from the moment my students step into my classroom they feel it is a welcoming environment. If it is a barren wasteland, unfriendly or always in a mess, that can explain why somebody is not achieving. I

find it very important that my students learn to work in collaboration, but without being disturbed, so that I won't need to isolate them. There was, of course, this agreeable murmur and that is very comfortable. But I always have rules. I'm all for having set rules. They do respect that. I know they want that, they feel well when there are rules. I want my classroom to have a homelike atmosphere, so that they really feel well, because they spend so much time here. It must be a place with humor. (H5, 8-10)

**Comments:** The first story which is on inclusive education, shows how Hanna learned to be attentive to each individual student, to create learning practices that allowed her to do this and how she has learned to create positive relationships with parents. The intensity of Hanna's opinions on what she feels is the right thing to do in education is clearly revealed in this story; it is the teacher's responsibility to attend to each individual's educational needs; it is the teacher's responsibility to keep a tab on what is happening in education at any given time, for instance by reading up on the latest research; it is the teacher's responsibility to discuss such readings, to share ideas, to find possible solutions in collaboration with colleagues; i.e. to be engaged in active pedagogical discussion. Hanna wants to belong to a 'lively and active educational community' (H5, 23). Apparently, that is how Hanna understands what being a true professional means. In her mind this is an important means to improve schools. Yet another important means to that end is team-teaching in multi-age and inclusive classrooms, coupled with being on good terms with parents. Hanna has learned a great deal through dealing with difficult parents. Now she has become more assertive in her interaction with them as the story brings to view.

The issue of inclusion is close to Hanna's heart. She *feels for* the children who do not receive the services or the teaching and learning which they are entitled to because of teachers who resist change. Hanna is critical of her colleagues in this regard as the first story also reveals. Her remarks are serious, but it is obvious that Hanna has become self-confident and experienced enough to express her feelings towards teachers who “subscribe to their wages” (H5, 6) as she phrases it. Going to graduate school clearly helped her to find solutions to practical problems in the classroom, and gain perspective of the whole picture, to create paths for her initiative, creativity and

desire to build a constructive environment in order to become a better teacher for all, because “in a class of 25 students some will surprise us later” (H5, 18). Creating a classroom situation where each student can blossom in his or her own way is evidently her main *passion in teaching*. Thus Hanna’s lived experiences through these years have made her assertive in the sense that she knows what she stands for, she knows what she wants, and she knows where she is heading. Her lived experiences have become an integral part of her personal practical knowledge of teaching.

Hanna’s telling in the first story about the role of humor in her classroom and being able to “play with the humor” in her teaching is not surprising considering how she described her favorite teacher who became her role model. Hanna had a certain image of the teacher she wanted to become at the outset and that included having fun in the classroom and being able to use her sense of humor with students. Becoming like her favorite teacher was part of the practical knowledge from schooling Hanna brought with her into her teacher education and to her own teaching. As has been discussed, one of the things she found truly difficult in the first two struggling years was the absence of humor in her classroom! It seems that finally she has arrived at a point in her teaching, where there is room for humor. Hence, humor is one more thread that she has been able to add to the expanding tapestry of her personal practical knowledge.

The second story on how she asserted her pedagogical vision, brings to view that Hanna felt she was on the right path to becoming the teacher she wanted at the outset of her teaching, but simultaneously she knows she will never arrive at her destination. Hanna acknowledges that her development as a teacher is an ongoing and life-long project. She knows that she must always be on the move, always be on her toes, ready to develop and change, there were several steps she had taken on the route she had been travelling these five years. These learning experiences were e.g. the fact that she survived the ordeal of the first two years and did not give up at that time. This gave her an important understanding of herself, namely that she was a survivor. Other learning experiences were her colleagues, both those she categorized as good teachers, as well as those who she felt were not. Watching the effects of the good teachers' practices in their

classrooms made her understand what she wanted to bring to her own teaching, and similarly, watching teachers who she did not categorize as good teachers, ascertained her of what she wanted to avoid in her own teaching. Further, she has learnt that when cultivating with a team, it requires the whole team to tune in with one another. Thus, through her lived experiences Hanna has been creating and recreating her identity as a teacher; therefore re-creating the story of herself as a teacher these five years of teaching.

In the third story Hanna describes her classroom and what it means to her. Her classroom reflects her emphasis and passion in teaching, which is attending to the different needs of her students according to ability and interest and the enjoyment of learning. It is noteworthy, how preoccupied she is with the fact that her students respect the set rules in the classroom, and that she did not need to isolate some students because of disruptive behavior. In light of her earliest experiences, this is understanding, as most of her energy at that time went into dealing with disruptive students and finding ways to separate them in the classroom. Isolating them, as she calls it, was one approach. She had made the rules for the classroom together with her students right from the beginning, but it was not until she began to handle their behavior in general that respecting the rules followed. It was obviously a great relief for her. I could hear that in the tone of her voice, and that of her body language. This was also an important learning experience for her.

In our conversation at the end of Hanna's fifth year we discussed if participating in this research had influenced her attitudes towards teaching, schooling and students. She was not quite sure to begin with, she felt it had not actually made an impact on how she went about doing her work. After some thought she told me that participating in this study had made her more conscious as a teacher. Each time we met and discussed it made her more reflective and evaluative, it made her think about how she felt as a teacher, how she saw her teaching and herself as a teacher differently "because I never talk about my teaching so extensively with people, you know" (H5, 23). As has been brought to light Hanna wanted to take part in active discussions about teaching and education and she found that participating in this research made her realize what had worked and what not in her own

teaching. By telling and re-telling stories of her lived experiences it developed her present stories each time, and will most likely influence Hanna's future experiences.

Already as a beginning teacher Hanna wanted to become a successful teacher, remembered always by her students as the really good teacher who respected all her students. In short, she wanted to become an excellent teacher. This was her vision and she has not lost sight of that vision. Hanna's fifth year has come to an end, and her students showed her their appreciation by giving her presents and thank-you cards. That made her feel that she had been able to create a rich learning community.

The stories of Hanna's concerns draw attention to the reality that shaped her circumstances as a beginning teacher, these were the stories she lived by during the first years of her teaching. These are stories that tell of disappointments but also of joy and successes which made her feel at the end of her fifth year that she was steps closer to being the teacher she had envisioned. Hanna's stories through the five years of teaching give substantial insight into the construction and reconstruction of identity through the development of professional practice. Hanna has brought her experiences and knowledge into her present practice. Thus, these have become parts of and expanded her personal practical knowledge.

### **5.8 Bringing Hanna's Stories to a Close – Summary of Hanna's Stories**

In this chapter I have presented Hanna's stories of the development of her professional practice and her professional identity, which she shared with me during our five years of research relationship. They tell of her experiences in her first five years of teaching and of the meaning she made of these experiences. The stories show the development of a teacher, from graduation, through her early years of teaching, to the end of her fifth year of teaching. Hanna talked about her expectations shortly after she got her teacher certificate, about wanting to become a successful teacher who would be remembered by her students when they grew up. Hanna expressed her wish of being able to use all the diverse and multiple teaching methods and strategies she had come across in her teacher education. Before she



started teaching, her idea of an ordinary school day was that it should always be extremely enjoyable and interesting, and that she would always be engaged in something exciting with her students. She said she hoped that her students would be alive and active, and that she would not fall into some kind of tedious routine with them. However, she was concerned about communicating with parents and that she might not be successful to begin with, but that she thought it would go well, as she usually found it easy to connect with people.

The challenges Hanna had to deal with when she was faced with the reality of the classroom turned out to be much greater than she had imagined. During Hanna's first year, and well into her second year of teaching, she talked about her most serious difficulties and concerns; classroom management problems, not being able to motivate her students, her own lack of inventiveness, failing to meet individual needs, having no resources to fall back on in order to make the lessons interesting, as well as dealing with difficult parents. These were the main hindrances she thought. She even felt that the situation was sometimes completely hopeless, and that she did not like herself as a teacher at that time.

However, there were joys and successes as well. Hanna's major source of support during the first struggling months, were the Head and the Deputy Head. Another source of joy for Hanna was experiencing that things started improving, slowly but securely, in the new year. During her second year she said that she had gained a somewhat better perspective on what she had to do, so that her teaching would become of some value. Her assignments were more creative, she felt more secure in assessing the students, and she managed well to collaborate with other teachers. Then during Hanna's third year of teaching she felt that at last she was being able to teach, as opposed to just monitor behavior all the time. This experience made her decide to enroll in a graduate program in order to strengthen herself as a classroom teacher.

The following is a summary of the way in which Hanna's stories have shown how she brought both her personal knowledge from her home and upbringing, and her practical knowledge from her childhood and teenage schooling, to her teacher education and her own teaching,

making these experiences parts of her personal practical knowledge as a teacher the first five years of her teaching:

- her personal practical knowledge of her favorite teacher from grade 10 merged with the image of the teacher she initially wanted to become
- the negative experiences of being afraid in school affected the importance she placed on relationships in a constructive and friendly classroom environment
- her personal knowledge from the baking class figured into the emphasis she placed on being able to show initiative and be creative herself as a teacher, and for her students to be alive and active
- she fell back on the practical knowledge of the traditional teaching methods she knew so well from the time she was a student, in both compulsory and secondary school, during her first two struggling years of teaching
- she brought her personal knowledge, from her home and upbringing, of her mother's negative attitude towards mathematics to her practice, into her teaching making her insecure and reluctant of teaching mathematics
- she also brought her personal knowledge, from her home and upbringing, of her mother's positive disposition towards the Icelandic language (mother tongue) and literature into her teaching, making them her favorite subjects to teach
- her personal practical knowledge of active and innovative teaching methods from her teacher education merged with her teaching as she became more confident in her role as a teacher
- her personal and practical knowledge of multi-age grouping from her childhood schooling figured into her practice in her fourth and fifth year

Hanna's journey to becoming the teacher she envisioned is a never ending story, she said at the end of her fifth year, and she thought that she was still growing. Hanna brought her personal practical knowledge of her favorite teacher into the image of the teacher she initially wanted to become, she has been working with that image and as her stories have shown, she is a teacher who experienced that sometimes it takes bending to avoid breaking. By telling and re-telling her stories of how she has approached her battlefield bright eyed and bushy-tailed, her personal practical knowledge has developed so that she has been able to turn her dilemmas and difficulties into successes, thus she has been able to re-create her identity as a teacher with a

spirit of survival. Hence, Hanna's stories tell of a teacher who has become self-confident enough to realize her vision of teaching as enjoyable and interesting, of her students as alive and active, where every student can flourish, and feel good in her classroom, and where she makes sure that humor has its place.

Hanna envisions that she will become more and more able to find means and solutions to all her future students, as her experiences from her fourth and fifth year have taught her this. Hanna is very passionate about the rights of all children to receive education in the regular classroom, and team-teaching in a multi-age grouping is one of the best means to that end. As has been shown, Hanna is a teacher who always wants to be receptive to development and change, who always wants to remember to be on her toes in her teaching. The star Hanna hitched her wagon to at the outset of her teaching is in sight at the end of her fifth year. She is continually working to come closer to being the successful teacher she wanted to become, who will make a difference in her students' lives, however, she acknowledges that her star will continue to move further ahead. That is the way it is and that is the way it should be.



## Chapter 6 – Jon's Stories

*Jon*

*Tall, fair, well-built*

*Eyes with a tender gaze, serious nature*

*Man without many word*

*One who values mutual respect*

*Jon, alike Jason*

*Who seeks to travel with a team*

*Through the rough seas ahead*

*Passes the cliffs like the dove*

*Careful before every step*

### 6.1 Introduction

*“I want to be a good teacher who will be remembered by my students ... because they have learnt something” (J 1a), 11-12).*

This chapter is about Jon. It tells stories about his origins as an individual. The telling takes us back to his childhood to bring to light his experiences both from schooling and his personal life. As these stories will unfold, these experiences as well as later ones are the underpinnings on which Jon's understanding of the state of affairs he finds himself in each time is based. Through our five years of research relationship he identified and explored his experiences, their contexts and the meaning he could make of them, as well as his learning through the development of professional practice.

A journey into the uncertainties was Jon's immediate response, which was quite unusual, as he rarely gave an immediate answer. We were discussing metaphors and teaching, as the end of his fifth year of teaching was drawing closer. I asked him what would be his metaphor of himself as a teacher. Jon describes his metaphor of teaching as a

journey into the uncertainties. It is a journey where the traveler heads out with certain ideas and goals in his haversack, expecting something or other to happen, but unsuspecting what that could be. He travels prearranged routes, but then something happens, something comes up, good or bad, or the traveler steps off the road to have a look at what is there. He cannot know at that point if he will come back to the same track, or whether he will create a brand new path. The traveler may encounter unforeseen pits en route, or take paths which were not always the ones he wanted to take, or should have taken. The stories that are told en route reflect Jon's feelings of insecurity as a teacher, but they also reflect much tenderness and solemnity. Some of the stories reveal what he feels are his limitations, others are of finding his way through the maze, preferably with a team. Jon's journey indeed led him into the uncertainties, but instead of complying with his own limitations, he strove to fend them off, and in so doing he has added that to the vision of the teacher he wanted to become.

Jon began his teaching career at The Hill School which is a grade 1–10 basic school. It is a village school off the south coast of Iceland. This school had a reputation for being progressive and giving special attention to flexible schooling and team-teaching in open areas. When Jon and I met for our first research conversation he had just finished a two days professional development workshop about teaching Social Studies which I had given for the local educational authorities. This was an optional offer and Jon was the only teacher from his school. Before I turned on the tape recorder he told me that because of this PD (professional development) workshop he felt he had been given a head-start in thinking about the beginning of the school year, compared to his colleagues. This first conversation of ours took place two days into the school year but the students had not arrived yet. The only comments Jon made about his workplace just before he started teaching was that his teaching was still in flux as it had not been fully decided in which class he would become the homeroom teacher:

I will be a homeroom teacher either in a grade 3 or grade 7, but it has not yet been decided. Additionally, I will teach Social Studies and Math in grade 9. On a team with Leo. This school advocates team-teaching, which is one of the reasons I decided to apply for teaching here. I prefer the

middle grades, but grade 7 is a bit old and grade 3 a bit young. But they will be in grade 4 next year. At first I definitely felt that grade 7 would be a better option but now I'm thinking that perhaps it's just as good teaching grade 3 (J 1a), 13-14).

Jon felt quite well prepared for teaching Social Studies and Math in grade 9, as he majored in those subjects. But that was not the case for his main teaching he said, which was being a homeroom teacher in either grade 3 or grade 7 because he had not taken an elective course in his teacher education program on being a homeroom teacher. He had opted for something else at the time. He expresses his uncertainties there. It turned out that Jon got the grade 7 class and became their homeroom teacher, as well as team-teaching with Leo in grade 9. Jon really looked forward to start teaching, in fact, he had become rather impatient to begin.

The telling begins with stories Jon told me from his childhood; it consists of two stories which are supposed to give an understanding of his experiences both from schooling and his personal life. These are followed by the six themes, or theme stories, which emerged from the data. Within each theme story there are series of stories from the time Jon decided to become a teacher until the end of his fifth year of teaching; a process through which he created and re-created the story of himself as a teacher. These stories include experiences from his early years when he was dealing with challenges of validating himself as a teacher through developing new practices which would help students to learn. These stories also show how Jon managed to create new relationships with students, colleagues and parents alike. The closing stories depict how Jon understands himself as a teacher at the end of the fifth year of his teaching, and of how he has re-constructed his identity through the development of his professional practice. Each theme story concludes with my analysis and interpretation of how the stories within each theme story illuminate and provide insight into the topic which it has been chosen. The only exception from this is in the second theme story, *5.4 Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years*, where there are four different sub-stories, two of which are analyzed together and the second two separately because of their dissimilar contents. Jon reviewed drafts of this chapter and offered his comments

on each draft. He verified that the stories presented an authentic portrait of his development as a teacher. He granted his consent for the final version of his stories as they are told here. Therefore, the stories and the meanings presented here have been created collaboratively by the researcher (Lilja) and the research participant (Jon).

Now allow me to take you back in time to visit Jon's stories from his childhood.

## **6.2 Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual**

These two stories from Jon's childhood provide insight into his experiences in his schooling and his personal life. They tell of a boy who longed to be socially active in spite of his timid nature – and they tell of a boy who learned the importance of reaching all his students as learners in a secure environment.

### **The Broken Window**

Suddenly he heard the sound of glass breaking! It was a really loud noise and he felt anxious. All the kids in the small country school just stood there in silence and watched the broken window. They had been playing ball games in the school yard as they had done since he could remember. Never before had they broken a window while playing in the yard. This fall there was a new headmaster who said to them every single day: 'Watch out for that window!' when they were playing ball games in the school yard. It had never occurred to them that the windows were in jeopardy. Only a week later there was a broken window in the small school house. The new headmaster made a fuss over everything and the school was no longer this secure place he felt it had been. The old headmaster on the other hand never said anything at all about their ball games in the school yard. For years they had played and never broken a window. But it only took a week with the new headmaster. The old headmaster in this small country school was also his teacher. He really liked him as a teacher, he was calm and he never worried too much. And he really liked this school. Every fall he would look forward to the beginning of the school year. His friends were there and being raised on a farm he sought after their companionship perhaps most of all. His teacher was such a kind



person, he gave his students a lot of freedom yet he learnt a lot from him. The calmness about this teacher gave him a certain sense of security which he valued deeply. It gave him the feeling that there were no real dangers around. For grades eight through ten he went to a somewhat bigger country school further away where there was a dormitory. All the schools in the surrounding region sent their students to that school for grades 8-10. They all stayed in the dormitory during the week. He felt he had kind of left home and was really grown up. He liked it there, but most of all he liked the social life which he took an active part in. His class was unruly and difficult. Most of his teachers had given up on them except this one teacher in grade 10. His way of dealing with behavior, his self-consistency and his methods of working with them made all the difference. This teacher believed in them, that they could learn, that they could achieve something. And to their own amazement they actually did. This was an exceptional teacher if he ever knew one, he felt. Then there was his Math teacher. He really liked him as well but he kept it to himself as none of his friends liked him much. This teacher never had to raise his voice, the students listened to him, he was calm, but considered really boring even though Jon did not think so. His humor was rather sarcastic and perhaps his classmates did not understand it. He learned a lot in his classroom. He did not think highly of teachers who let their students get away with the minimum amount of work, who told jokes in order to gain popularity. They were not good teachers, he felt; teaching was a serious matter and involves a great responsibility.

### **A Boy from a Farm**

Jon was raised on a farm outside a small village on the south coast of Iceland. He received a good upbringing, he thinks, his parents were strict in a fair way. There was not much money around which meant that there was not much to spend on stuff kids usually want. To be brought up on a farm meant freedom for a boy who wanted to play outside all day. And both his parents were always around. This meant a lot to him. Both his parents worked on the farm as well as having odd jobs temporarily in the region. His mother, for example, was a teacher for one year but without a teachers' certificate. That turned his attention towards teaching differently from just being a student in the

school. His mother was an active member of one of the political parties and had a seat in the local government. His father was also very active socially. Often Jon would go with them to meetings. They passed on to him the appreciation of being socially active. His parents were influential role models in that area. Thus Jon became very active on the student councils both in his secondary school and in high school. Quite early on Jon joined the youth section of his mother's political party, as well as taking part in the youth sports club in the region – in spite of being rather shy and withdrawn. Where Jon came from this was simply the thing to do. Growing up he looked up to his father and everybody said that they were very much alike. Neither of them took pleasure in having the spotlight on them, both of them had always been considered men without many words. Additionally, both of them did their jobs silently and discreetly. Jon could feel the weight of the restraints of being so shy and quiet heavily on him, as it conflicted with his desire to be socially active. Most of the time he managed to hide this, as he had worked really hard on that. So hard that people around him did not notice. They found him neither shy nor withdrawn, but then again they did not find him to be one of those loudmouths either. He was just well liked in his own right. However, Jon did not feel these restraints when working with younger children, as he did during the summers after grade 10 by participating in the extracurricular activities and working in the youth part of his sports club in the region. He found it effortless to communicate with them. Exploring various professions was an assignment in grade ten and Jon elected to look at the teaching profession. He really enjoyed the time with the grade one children even though he was there only for a day or so. He observed for example Math lessons which he found great fun, went for a walk with them and just found it pleasant to be with them. The Math teacher in grade 10 was Jon's favorite teacher. His calm, quiet presence appealed to him, which made him value Math highly. In him Jon found characteristics that he thought constituted a good teacher.

**Comments:** These childhood stories tell of a boy and a teenager who is sincere, quiet and thoughtful, but shy. Yet one who simultaneously seeks the company of his peers and is eager to socialize like his parents. Experiences, where order, calmness and a secure environment

are highly valued, is the essence of the former story. Jon's experiences from his schooling are closely linked to his apparent need for security and trust. He valued teachers who were orderly, who went quietly about their work without too many words but who were at the same time fair in their dealings with their students. Jon's memories of these teachers, became the image of a good teacher in his mind, thus this image construes parts of his personal practical knowledge from his childhood schooling.

Teaching involves trusting students as the story of the broken window and the old headmaster reveals, and simultaneously it requires great responsibility. These teachers gave Jon the sense of security he needed and the experiences from their classrooms gave Jon important understandings. As will be shown later, the meaning he made of these experiences is how big a role security, orderliness, self-consistency and trust plays in Jon's attitudes to the classroom setting, and in the teaching and learning. Frequently Jon elaborated on the emphasis he put on these issues in his teaching, which shows how he had brought these practical knowledge from childhood and teenage schooling into his own practice.

Further, Jon's story of the teacher who had faith in the ability of his students, and whose belief concerning them was actualized, shows how important it is to him that his ability as a learner was recognized. It is also very likely that Jon's modest, quiet and timid nature made him the student who did not receive much attention in the classroom. The meaning he makes of this as a teacher himself is that he places high importance on reaching all his students wherever they are as learners, of listening to them, as well as on the fact that he wants his students to learn something from him, as will be uncovered later. This teacher, together with the Math teacher, gave Jon important understanding of what signifies good teaching. Such experiences became a part of Jon's knowledge and understandings of schooling and teaching, thus they constitute parts of his personal practical knowledge as a teacher.

In the latter childhood story it can be seen that Jon took really good care not to let his shyness stop him from active social participation as he worked very hard at concealing it. His shy, friendly smile and his calm manner which is neither obtrusive nor goes

unnoticed makes him pleasant to be around. The story also shows his desire to have a voice, not necessarily a loud voice, but to be heard. Additionally, this desire can be directly linked to his personal knowledge from his home and upbringing, as it was his parents who passed on to him the appreciation of being socially active. Jon brought this personal knowledge into his own practice as will be revealed. Moreover, during his teenage years Jon discovered how pleasant it was to be around younger children and work with them. His personal qualities of honesty and openness made it easy for him. The meaning he made of this experience was that teaching might be something for him, it might even possibly be a future profession.

All these experiences became parts of Jon's knowledge of schooling and teaching – thus they represent parts of his initial personal practical knowledge, which later transmitted into his ideas, beliefs and perspectives of what it means to be a teacher. Jon carried this with him to his teacher education program and to his teaching practices during his first five years of teaching. Making this connection is crucial as it is the ground on which a teacher can build further development of his or her teaching.

As Jon's childhood stories have been revisited it is time to jump ahead in time in order to get a closer look at his teacher stories. In the following passage we hear stories about career decisions and visions for the future.

### **6.3 Becoming a Teacher: Being Careful before Every Step**

In this part of the chapter we hear two stories. In the former story Jon talks about why, during most of his teacher education, he was quite hesitant or undecided about becoming a teacher and what made him change his mind. He talks about his teacher education, and describes what changes he would like to see in the program. In the latter story Jon portrays his initial vision of the teacher he wants to become.

#### **6.3.1 Deciding to Become a Teacher**

Working with younger children was what Jon wanted to do, he told me in our very first conversation, but not necessarily as a teacher. Nonetheless he decided to apply for The Iceland University of

Education, as indeed he wanted to be qualified as a teacher, but he was not sure whether he wanted to work as a teacher at all. This is Jon's story about how this came about:

I had been working during the summers, as well as with school in the winter, in the sports club divisions for younger children, 9-12 year olds, in my home district and I really liked that. The first time I remember considering becoming a teacher was in grade 10. We did an assignment where we had to look into various professions, and I decided to have a look at teaching as a profession in my school. However, I didn't give teaching per se much thought for a long time after that. It was not, in fact, until during my last practice teaching that I actually decided that this was something I wanted to do. That was the first time I gave it a really serious thought to actually become a teacher. When I was at the IUE I kind of knew that I would perhaps teach one day. But it was not until in that particular time that I finally decided to become a teacher immediately after graduation. There was just something about the way it worked for me which made me take this decision, despite the fact that things had not gone all that well during practice teaching. Regardless of that, I felt that this was definitely something I wanted to do. My practice teaching was in grades 8 through 10, in a relatively small town school that had been considered a good, non-traditional school for a number of years. It was really a nice surprise for me to experience the pleasant relationships I had with the teenagers, as I had not envisioned myself doing that beforehand. I would have thought however, because of the way I am, rather quiet and not very outspoken, that it would not go well with teaching teenagers. But it didn't turn out to be an obstacle at all. This experience, as well as knowing that I find interacting with younger children easy, made me decide to join the teaching profession right after graduation.

In spite of my indecision of whether or not to become a teacher, I of course gave it a thought during my teacher education what being a teacher and teaching meant. What I think teaching entails is child rearing and education, that's what I think. I'd rather have more of the education than the child upbringing. I feel that the school needs to consider itself to be a more of an educational institution; we must not forget ourselves in the nurturing role. But it should doubtlessly be

there as well. It's a bit tedious when teachers mainly look at themselves as bringing up or rearing children. I find it inappropriate when teachers think that they are some kind of surrogate of parents. The role of the teacher is to educate, to prepare their teaching well, in order to teach well. I am sure that teaching requires an extreme amount of work, and that each lesson and each day must be loaded with stimulation. During the periods of my practice teaching, I found that there were even thousands of inputs each day. I find it really strenuous to be in the role of the teacher; and how one can be so tired, simply by associating with kids. In spite of this, I find that teaching is exciting, especially when each lesson is well planned, because then time simply flies as opposed to when the planning misfires.

During my teacher education, I got the feeling that too often the classroom was seen to be like a sort of home of the teacher and a bit closed to others. This was much talked about, both among the teachers in the school where I had my last practice teaching, as well as among my fellow students, and we found that the classroom is like this; there is a door and it is closed and what happens inside is often just in the mind of the teacher, which I find rather sad. To me this means that nobody knows what the teacher is doing, as he is alone in the classroom and not working with another teacher. I would much rather want to work in cooperation with other teachers. Mind you, we were encouraged to do just that in our teacher education, which was good. I find that I was also quite well prepared for teaching my two major subjects, Maths and Social Studies. Many things I learnt there have been very useful. Regardless of that, what I would like to change in the teacher education program is how some of the courses are organized, for example, the elective courses. There were lots of such courses, which with hindsight, would have been extremely useful, such as the course 'Being a Class Teacher'. I think that some of these courses might be amalgamated into one big core course which should then be made very practical, where you get to know the job better, while you are still in your teacher education program.

Moreover, I think that too often we were doing the same thing twice in some of the courses, – as in our first year. There were these three theoretical courses on similar topics and they were talking about the

same people, such as for instance about Dewey, in all these three courses. That would have been okay however, if different light would have been shed on Dewey in each of the courses, but that wasn't the case. The same perspective on Dewey was presented in each course, which meant it was simply a repetition. What I would also like to change, is to have longer periods of practice teaching, where you can really see for yourself what's happening in the classroom. Even though it's good that we had to make this huge lesson-planning folder in our first year, where every single lesson was carefully prepared, because it teaches you what careful lesson planning and organization is about, – it doesn't give you a good enough picture of what it's like in the classroom from one day to the next. Not only do I want to see longer periods of practice teaching, I also want to extend teacher education itself! I want the B.Ed. degree to be four years, no less, as I don't think it's possible to find room for everything within the three years as it is now.

However, I do realize that it's not possible to teach everything. To all this I would like to add that I feel that discussions on teaching were desperately lacking in my teacher education. In fact, as student teachers, we hardly ever discussed teaching per se while in the program. If we did, it was mostly in connection with the practice periods. Substantial discussions on professional matters should of course be a regular part among student teachers in the teacher education program. Regardless of my criticism, I find, on the whole, that the teacher education program in the IUE offers a very satisfactory preparation for becoming a teacher. Like for instance, when I was in some courses I often thought about how lucky I was being there. I thought about those who are teaching without having teacher qualification, especially when the course dealt with issues that are in no way evident, like for example, why do we have schools, or about the ethics of our profession, and how this education has taught me a lot. Simply just to notice that something is wrong. If I hadn't been there, I think that I would otherwise never be able to notice that something was actually wrong. This has been an eye-opener, because now I think that this knowledge will help me to be wakeful regarding issues like bullying, and child abuse, regarding students with for example dyslexia, including generally knowing that there are so many methods of teaching. (J 1a), 6, 7-8, 9, 10, 1b), 6, 3) 13-15)

### **6.3.2 The Vision of the Teacher Jon Wants to Become**

Jon told me that the responsibility of teaching was of special concern to him, now that he was actually confronted with taking on his first job as a teacher. Right in the beginning of our research relationship Jon explained what becoming a teacher meant to him:

Becoming a teacher means that you are engaging in a '24/7' [round the clock] kind of a job, especially because I'll be teaching in the countryside, in a small village. There you'll always be the teacher; the teacher in the shop and the teacher in the elevator. Everywhere you go, you'll be looked upon as the teacher, and you must naturally behave as such. Therefore becoming a teacher involves an enormous responsibility, which I feel might be overwhelming at times, but I feel compelled to accept it. Mind you, if it will happen that I might not act responsibly enough at some point then I will simply have to deal with that and be rational about it, because you can't always be responsible for everything. I can't be this perfect individual. I have made the decision to become a teacher, and I have made a decision that this will be okay. My background of being a country bloke, will, I think, make this easier for me. What I think will be easiest for me is to communicate with the kids. These are really the least of my worries. Then again, what I really worry about now, is that I won't be inventive enough in my teaching. I truly dread that my teaching won't work and that the class will be really disruptive and that I will have a knot in my stomach because of all this. I want to be a good teacher who will be remembered by my students. Not because it has been extremely entertaining but rather because they have learnt something. I'm not interested in being this entertaining teacher, not in the way that most people understand entertainment. And I'd prefer to gain order and control in my classroom without using harsh discipline. I want to become a good teacher, but it involves a lot of work, and I think it's up to me whether I'll succeed in that. But I think, that I've got what it takes to become a good teacher. (J 1a), 11, 12-13)

In our meeting which took place in the very early days of his first school year, Jon said that he looked forward to begin his teaching. Human relations were what Jon expected to come rather easy to him, both relating to the whole class, as well as one to one relationships with individual students.



**Comments:** Jon was hesitant in arriving at the conclusion of actually becoming a teacher, even though he liked to be with younger children. It was not until at the end of his last teaching practice that he made up his mind, even though he had experienced quite difficult times. He felt that he would be able to handle this job, in spite of his shy and reserved nature. Further, during practice teaching he realized that he could manage his anxiety of being in front of a whole class of teenagers. This made him decide to join the teaching profession immediately after his graduation.

It is interesting how Jon phrases his initial ideas of what teaching is about; that teaching is fundamentally about child rearing and education. He prefers to have more of the education. In the Icelandic context it is safe to say that this is a phrase commonly heard in the discourse of education and schooling. Jon even finds it inappropriate when teachers think that they can be some kind of a surrogate of parents. What does Jon then really mean when he says that school should be more of an educational institution rather than a rearing one? When this is viewed in light of what kind of teacher he wants to become, it is clear that he puts great emphasis on the role of learning in schools. This again can be linked to his own experiences, i.e. to his personal practical knowledge from his childhood schooling, and to his favorite teachers and his ideas of what it means to be a good teacher; which is a teacher who made sure that the students learnt something. That suggests that in Jon's mind good teachers made sure that their students did their assignments in school and their homework on time.

Additionally, Jon says that the classroom is like "the home of the teacher", which is interesting in the light of what he claims schooling should *not* be about. Typically, one role of the home is to be a kind of "nest" for child rearing. Still Jon does not want teachers to forget themselves "in the rearing role" which indicates that he is referring to the privacy of the home rather than to the rearing role of it. Jon's claim that "what happens inside [the classroom] is often just in the mind of the teacher" supports this assumption, as the well-known traditional approach is one teacher alone with his or her class behind the closed door of the classroom. These images of the teacher working alone behind the closed doors do not seem to appeal to Jon as he expresses the wish to work with other teachers. This manifests itself in

the fact that, in spite of being a man of few words and having a reserved nature, his first job was in a school that focused on team-teaching.

Jon is quite critical of the teacher education program he went through, for example regarding courses more or less with identical content, the lack of organized discussions on teaching per se, and longer field periods. However, he finds there are positive aspects to it as well, as he feels that he has learnt a great deal. It is noteworthy however, that already before he starts his teaching he expresses concern for students who may need some extra attention. Later, as will become clear, his empathy towards these students is presented in the stories he tells of his interaction with his students, and in how he talks about them.

It is also interesting to point out Jon's images of the role of the teacher, one of which is "to prepare their teaching well in order to teach well". Juxtaposing this with what he says about well-planned lessons as opposed to ill-prepared ones, a thread can be traced from this belief to difficult experiences in his practice teaching when he had not done careful planning. The learning experience for him was that careful planning makes for good teaching. Adding this to his grave concern about not being able to be innovative enough in his own teaching shows that Jon had a rather clear idea of where his weak spots might be. As he was creating a professional knowledge of teaching this negative experience became a part of the personal practical knowledge he carried into his own teaching.

When Jon talks about himself in the role of the teacher in the latter story, he is cautious. He speaks slowly; he takes his time to think about what to say, which indicates inner uncertainty about his own strengths and weaknesses in the role of the teacher, which then again, may have made him insecure about whether he will succeed as a teacher. Even though he had made a conscious decision that he will do all right as a teacher, he knew that he might not have full control of what will transpire. This is reflected in his words when he says "[I] can't always be responsible for everything" that might happen, and that he could not be a perfect individual. He appeared to be, in fact, safeguarding himself against the possibility that he might fail in some way, at some point in his teaching. This mitigates his former claim that "it will be easiest to associate with the kids". Perhaps he is saying

this in the case that he might indeed make some mistakes in his relationships with his students. If that will turn out to be the case later on, he could always refer to his own words of caution. The mere thought of the great responsibility he feels is involved in being a teacher, weighs him down. However, regardless of his tendency to be careful before every step, he makes it clear to me that he has made a decision to become a teacher, and moreover, that communicating with the children will not be a major problem.

In the following section of this chapter four stories are used to present the experiences of the early years of his teaching and the way in which he dealt with challenges in the realities of the classroom.

#### **6.4 Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years – Dealing with Challenges in the Realities**

This section of the chapter tells stories which are grounded in Jon's experiences in his first as well as second year of teaching, when he was the homeroom teacher of grade 7 and 8. In our first conversation, just before he set his foot in the classroom as a beginning teacher for the first time, he expressed his doubts with respect to his ability to be imaginative in his teaching. Additionally, Jon said that his greatest anxiety concerned his worries that the teaching as a whole would not prove to be good enough. Jon travels into his teaching along roads paved with uncertainty.

##### **6.4.1 Shackled by One's Limitations**

Jon was relatively satisfied with how things went the first several weeks of his teaching mainly because "there are no behavioral problems in my class" (J 1b), 4). His major challenge the first weeks of his teaching was himself, he told me in our second meeting in his first year. Later, when Jon was looking back over his first two years of teaching, he talked about his own limitations. Not just in the sense that he was uncertain of his duties as a teacher, but more about how he experienced his calm and quiet nature getting in his way in the classroom. The following story presents how Jon explains what he meant by that:

What I found most difficult was to tackle myself, one always wants to try to be a bit too nice. I don't think that my students sensed my

insecurity as such, that it was sort of getting in the way of my teaching. *They* thought that I was very calm, and they told their parents that. Then in my first parent-fall-meeting, the parents told me that their kids said 'he doesn't say anything unless we keep quiet', meaning that I was so calm, and they also said 'he actually speaks too slow', which told me that they didn't notice my stress. To tell you the truth, I was rather shocked to hear that they said I spoke too slowly in the classroom, I had not realized that. I really don't know what to say. No, it hadn't occurred to me. This came as a big surprise. Of course, I find it more telling of me that I speak too slowly than if I was said to speak too fast. I simply haven't given it a thought whether I speak too fast or too slow in the classroom. But this is definitely something that I'm willing to look more into. One of my major personal rules was not to speak until my students were quiet. I must say that it was very difficult for me to stick to that; always be this self-consistent in my actions, because what I wanted was to avoid getting into a quarrel with my students.

I have totally fallen into this trap, feeling that I'm losing control completely, that there is always this commotion in my classroom and always this yakking. Sometimes I get a husky voice simply telling them what to do! Then I go home, sit down and shake my head, asking myself: Do I wish for the kids to shut up? Is that what I want? -No, it's not like that in my classroom, it's totally normal that they chatter when they are doing their seat work. I want my students to work in cooperation, not just individually. But when I want the whole class to listen then I'm determined not to speak until they are quiet and they totally know that. Then I just stand there and ... Well, I may not have gained a very good control over this but most of the time I stand there with my arms crossed, everyone can see me, and the most attentive ones notice it right away, they then want the information and ask questions, but they know that I won't say anything until there is silence. And that's how it is. Like I said, there are no, or hardly any behavioral problems in my class. Perhaps I can say this because I don't perceive the commotion in my classroom or this yakking, as I call it, as behavioral problems. Then again, I must say that I have experienced the convenience of using fill-in assignments and various seat-work with my seven graders, and the relief of total silence in the

classroom under such circumstances. Yea, yea, it is good to know that there can be total silence. Even though, I prefer them to be working on something creative and the like and getting ideas from each other. I want to try to build on cooperation; I consider it necessary for the society, politically.

What I've also found, is that I've had limited capability to tackle parents who can't handle their role as parents. In a parent-teacher conference for example, they may say that they are going to do this and this and this, then they come again next term, and then they are going to do this and this and this –all over again [he says with emphasis]. Even though I've not been in teaching for long I'm always saying to myself 'ah, maybe I should have tackled this differently' or 'why didn't I say that?' I am aware that maybe I should have been more brisk and firm. I could for example have told the parents: 'You must do this and abide by it'.

Still another thing that I've been struggling with is that I actually really need to find ways to express my interest in what I'm teaching. It was brought to my attention in my final year doing my practice teaching. My placement teacher was tracking my teaching, I was teaching some Math, and he said to me: 'How are the students supposed to be interested in what you are doing, you don't show any interest! This doesn't matter to you'. I've been sort of struggling with this, and I think a lot about this when I'm teaching. Yes, even when I'm teaching Math and Social Studies, which are my main interest areas, in which I majored, this happens! I obviously need to be interested in what I'm teaching myself, and I'm convinced that if I will be able to express my own interest in the subject matters, it will initiate my students' interest and ambition for what I am teaching. Surely, I don't want to be the kind of teacher who pours the subject matters into my students' heads. I want my students to feel that interest comes from within themselves, and I must ignite that interest. This has in fact been what I have found most difficult in my teaching, so this is definitely something that I'm constantly working on, and will have to continue to do that. (J1b), 2,4,5,6,8-9, J2, 2, J3, 10-11)

#### **6.4.2 Planning Lessons Is a Time-Consuming Task**

“Look”, Jon said to me when we met by mid-term in his first year, “I’m just like the alcoholics, I virtually live one day at a time!”. Then he added after having pondered on it a bit: “Of course there are assignments that take longer time, but the preparation and all that is just intended for today and perhaps the day after” (J 1b), 2, 6). Jon said that he would indeed like to have a clearer framework, such as knowing, for instance, what he was going to do next week. He found that an extremely difficult task during his first and second year. Here is how Jon explained that:

I sort of anticipate that I will continue having difficulties planning my lessons for some unforeseeable future. I would like to be able to get out of this kind of alcoholism of just day-by-day-planning. I can tell you that there were many things that surprised me in the very beginning. The biggest surprise though was how much time was in fact needed to plan the lessons, which was way, way beyond what I would have expected. Planning the teaching takes an incredible amount of time! Endlessly at school, never-ending preparations, on top of everything else that needs to be done.

And in addition to preparing each lesson, there are several meetings each week; one three hour staff-meeting, then one meeting for the homeroom teachers, and then the third one for each team of teachers to prepare their collaboration. I’m definitely not willing to spend all my waking hours at school. Which means that there are times I begin an assignment or a project, and in the middle of the lesson, well yes, it turns out that I’m not well enough prepared, or I’ve realized that the assignment is simply not good enough. This has resulted in a lack of self-confidence, and I felt this was the main obstacle for me to begin with; this feeling of never being certain whether I was doing the right thing the right way. Therefore the teaching itself is not how I want it to be, as I’m not able to plan my teaching properly.

To be quite honest, I know that the reason for that is my own reluctance to spend virtually all my waking hours planning lessons. So, I don’t work long hours into the night, or rather, I try not to do that. And I say to myself: ‘Now the working hours are simply over, and I just couldn’t finish this’. Well, I might bring some assignments home

with me, like if I need to read something, or mark papers in Spelling or Math or something, –something within a frame. But, if I'm preparing something which has not yet started, like working on some ideas which are not ready, then I don't take that home with me. I could well do something every single night if I wanted to. I must admit that this means that I'm too often too dependent on the textbooks, mainly because it's somewhat easier to manage the class, but also because, like for instance when teaching Icelandic in grade 7, my content knowledge is actually very weak. It makes me feel really inadequate when I basically don't know the subject matter, so I find it really difficult to do something different than simple fill-in assignments. I should of course turn to my colleagues for help on this issue, but honestly, I simply haven't taken the time to do so. Well, except once, when I met with the grade 6 Icelandic mother tongue teacher, who sort of leafed through the textbook with me. I'm not happy with this, this surely is something I want to change.

Mind you, my goal is to be able to plan a week ahead, but I tell you, there is no time available for that, and there is simply no basis for carrying that out. One example of an assignment I managed to plan for a longer period though was the Classroom Design Project, which was planned as a competition between groups with prizes for the winning team. This was great fun and there was this excitement around this project because of the prizes. It was really awesome to see something like this being so successful. Also, to watch what had been flourishing in certain groups, what had not in others, and that still others just wanted to do something else. Not everyone was so enthusiastic all the time of course there is a difference from one day to the next. I really learned a lot doing this project; about my students, about group dynamics and not the least, how much more I enjoyed this kind of teaching.

Then during my second year of teaching I was teaching grade 8 Geography, and I must admit that I was still not very innovative in my teaching, because it's possible to do this just like some workbook work. Yes, so I always planned some workbook work after each chapter. Using methods like fill-in assignments for behavior control is not really tempting I can tell you, but it is good to know they are there

if, and when I come up against losing a total control of the class. To tell you the truth, I was not very proud of this part of my teaching. I allow myself to dream that lesson planning will become a bit clearer, and that the future plan will be clearer. That's what I hope for anyway. But I imagine it'll be like this for some time. So, on the whole, I spent a similar amount of time planning my teaching during my second year, but I think I made better use of it, as I could draw on what I had learnt from the first year. (J 1b), 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, J 2) 9)

Jon's future dream was one of a clearer vision, and he expressed sincere hope that this might be something he would improve in one day. However, Jon sounded rather dispirited when he said that.

**Comments:** The lack of confidence Jon was experiencing, was his main obstacle to begin with as a teacher, in conjunction with not finding out how to express his own interest in the subject matter he was teaching. This is what agonized Jon most of all in his teaching; these were the limitations he felt he was grappling with during the first years of teaching.

Jon told the former story in a slow, hesitant, and careful way. He was indeed shocked that he was reported to speak too slowly. The image he had of himself was one of a calm, rather quiet person, but not a slow one. His facial expression told me more than many words; being a slow person was not how he perceived himself. This really became food for thought for him. Later, when he had read his interim narratives, he explained to me that when he speaks too fast he tends to mutter, and that was the reason he tried to speak slowly in the classroom.

Another interesting issue in this story is what Jon said about the absence of behavioral problems in his classroom, and that he did not perceive what he called commotion and yakking in the classroom as being behavioral problems. Despite this, he talked about almost losing control in the classroom completely, developing a husky voice after giving his students instructions, and that seat-work and relying too much on textbooks, for instance, worked fine for managing the class. One can but wonder why he said that. Could the reason be that he honestly did not find that of any importance at all, or that he did not feel he had the strength and self-assurance to really deal with it? By saying that he accepted the noise level in his classroom, he may have



been trying to mitigate the problem, since otherwise he would have to confront the difficult fact that he was not in control of his classroom. Further, he may not, at this time in our research relationship, have been ready to admit to me that he could not manage the class. Instead, he maintains that he accepted this, while simultaneously telling me about his husky voice.

When Jon says: “Do I wish for the kids to shut up? Is that what I want? – No, it's not like that in my classroom”, it is obvious that there is an inner conflict between his newly acquired vision from his teacher education and the personal practical knowledge from his own schooling. The conflict is the following: On one hand he definitely wants his students to cooperate, and that can obviously never happen in silence, and he knows that. On the other hand he was still “hanging on to” the personal and practical knowledge of schooling, with the memory of his favorite teacher, the one who was in control of his classroom, seemingly without any effort, fresh in his mind. This was the teacher from his grade 10 class, who never had to raise his voice, the students listened to him, he was calm, and this teacher was Jon's role model. This specific practical knowledge seems to have given Jon the understanding that classroom control can be acquired without much effort. Thus, this story may give an explicit example of the conflict most beginning teachers struggle with. It is the conflict between the personal practical knowledge from their own schooling and the newly acquired knowledge from their teacher education, which the beginning teacher is trying to “fit” into his or her teaching. This is one vivid example of how a beginning teacher feels when he is struggling to accommodate the new knowledge to the pre-existing personal practical knowledge.

The greatest challenge Jon met with in his teaching was how to develop competence to express his own interests and finding teaching strategies to channel them. In fact, he struggled with this during the five years of our research relationship, even though the most difficult battle was during the first two to three years. Jon was shackled by his own limitations, e.g. his indecision concerning dithering regarding parents, coupled with his reserved nature. His lack of self-confidence manifested itself perhaps in this lack of ability to express his interests; an ability he claimed he did in fact possess. Already in his first few

weeks of teaching, Jon was dealing with what he had feared would happen before he started his teaching; insufficient lesson planning, and uninteresting or even low quality lessons. It turns out that Jon's expectations from before he started teaching were quite realistic.

It is interesting to note in the latter story, that even though Jon thought he spent a lot of time preparing, he felt that too often his planning misfired in some way. Obviously, as expected from a beginning teacher, he had not yet acquired a comprehensive overview over what teaching entailed. He compared himself to an alcoholic, only being able to plan one day at a time which he hoped he would be able to break out of one day. Additionally, he talked about all the obligatory meetings, implying that he considered them time-consuming and bureaucratic; ultimately consuming valuable time away from his lesson planning. Jon said that he was not ready to spend more time that he already did on planning lessons even though he may have needed that in order to prepare them better. This raises the question whether it is possible that Jon had experienced during his teaching practice that parts of his teaching failed due to insufficient lesson planning? Given that possibility, this failure may have fuelled his insecurity, making him even less confident his first and second year. In order to restore security he resorts to what he is familiar with from his own practical knowledge of schooling, i.e. traditional methods of fill-in assignments and workbook work. This supports the assumption that lesson preparation was one of his weak spots, and insufficient lesson planning had therefore become part of his personal practical knowledge in his beginning years.

In spite of being dispirited regarding his first year's teaching there was this one project which Jon felt went really well, which was the Classroom Design Project. Through this project Jon experienced that he had in actual fact planned teaching that was of some worth. This was a teaching in the spirit of what he had envisioned himself to be doing with his students. He had managed to transmit his interest over to his students and he felt they were learning. I could sense that it was very important for him to be able to account for one such incident, because it made him feel that his first year's teaching was not a complete failure. It meant a lot to him. However, Jon's difficulties in

preparing interesting lessons continued to be a problem for him well into his second year of teaching.

### **6.4.3 Dealing with Difficult Incidents**

There were times when Jon found himself painfully incompetent as a teacher. One of Jon's major concerns during his second year was teaching grade 8 Icelandic mother tongue. He found it difficult to organize the teaching in a way that it would work out smoothly, and naturally run its course, because “I basically didn't know the subject matter! I would have needed longer planning time, so that I could tackle it and would be pleased with it” (J2, 5). This resulted in too many low quality lessons, he said to me, and that reduced his pleasure. Jon explained what he meant in his sincere and quiet manner:

My lack of knowledge and skill in this area, especially when teaching grammar and spelling in grade eight mother tongue was sometimes terribly embarrassing. Even my students noticed it! There was this one incident I remember explicitly. The teacher on my team and I had been explaining about adverbs in the previous lesson, and we hadn't finished. In the specific lesson in question, she was not with me, instead it was this very experienced Icelandic mother tongue teacher, and she wraps up the explanation. This incident is totally engraved in me. I said to her: ‘You’re really amazing in adverbs, aren’t you?’ She said: ‘Yea, well, I believe I am’. And she just explained it on the blackboard. Yes, she explains, and wraps it up. And the kids just go: ‘Yea, yea, is it like this, is it really this easy!’ Then, after this, I sensed that they knew that I didn't know, as they said to me: ‘Why can’t we get this teacher?’ I think that explaining adverbs was something that I would have figured out of course, but her explanations were simply better. It was as simple as that. The thing is, I haven't had enough time to really dig into all the subject curricula as I should have, and I find that really devastating.

Another thing I want to mention is that to begin with I was stuck with the feeling that everything had to work exactly like this or like that, otherwise everything would collapse. This made me feel very stressed, which then again made me sometimes inflexible in dealing with my nine graders, like the incident when I got into a conflict with them about grades on a Math test. We, the two Math teachers in grade 9,

designed a test and model-answers for us to use, when we went over the results. And it's quite possible that there would be 1.0 discrepancy in how we would mark the same answer. But the discrepancy turned out to be greater, almost 2.0. The students were not at all pleased about this, and it was rumored that the grades in the other class had been 8.0 on average but in mine only 4.0. Fortunately, parents who work in the school told me about these rumors. This discrepancy turned out to be in one of the evaluative questions. One simply has to deal with that, and I didn't just give in by scaling up their grades. Instead, I told them that they would have to take that particular part of the test again, and that I thought it would have deeper impact on them, and result in better grades. They sort of accepted that. But I also said that they could tick the parts that they were at odds with. Then they could come to me afterwards and discuss it with me. Well, nobody did, so I considered this to be over and done with. The other Math teacher was just pleased that I was this tough. We fully agreed on how this matter was to be dealt with. ((J2, 10, J1b), 5,6)

**Comments:** Jon's perceived failure in teaching Icelandic made him go to his principal at the end of his second year, to ask him not to assign to him any more of such teaching: "I told him that I would teach Math down to grade one, or virtually anything *but* that" (J 2,5). His wish was granted.

As has already been pointed out a difficult issue for Jon was planning interesting lessons. Especially in Mother Tongue, a subject area in which he said he needed more knowledge. Repeatedly, he talked about not having time to familiarize himself with the subject matter well enough in order to plan good quality lessons, and he was reluctant to spend even more time than he already did. This raises the question whether he was in fact making effective use of the time he actually spent on this endeavor. It also raises the question whether Jon was addressing this issue so often and in such various contexts, because he felt that I might not be very impressed by his teaching since the importance of drawing on a multiplicity of methods in teaching had been emphasized in his pedagogical courses at the IUE.

Another interesting observation here is the Math-grade issue. Even though Jon said that this had been over and done with, I could sense his feeling of discontent about how this was settled; meaning that his

students had only paid “lip-service” to his “ruling”. The story shows that he linked this incident to his tendency to be stuck in what he conceived to be the right conduct. He took it very seriously to be fair in all his dealings with his students, and it obviously hurt his feelings when they appeared not to see the fairness of his suggestions. As for his colleague, the other Math teacher, Jon did not confront him with what appeared to be the cause of this incident, which was that he may have been too generous with the grades in his class. Instead, Jon tried to blame it on the type of questions and the ambiguity of the rules of grading students. I do not think that Jon would have even mentioned this incident to me if he sincerely felt that his colleague had done the right thing. Jon was, of course, a beginning teacher, and being so modest and unassertive, it is reasonable to believe that he felt that he could not point that out to his colleague, the veteran teacher.

#### **6.4.4 Having a Good Mentor**

Jon was assigned a mentor in the beginning of his first year. He was in fact well received as a beginning teacher in his school right from the beginning, and he explained to me that already when he came for an interview the previous spring, he received a warm welcome. This is Jon's story as told at the end of his third year, about the welcoming atmosphere of his school and the good mentoring he received:

The atmosphere is really good in here, and that is what really fascinated me with this school. There were a good proportion of male teachers here, as well as a good age distribution. And I felt that I was being accepted like a full-fledged teacher with respect to how I had been asked how I was doing, and if I needed some help. The mentor I got my first year was very nice. She introduced me to all the traditions of the school, and such. It rarely happened during staff meetings that they would be talking about something that everyone was supposed to be familiar with, and I would just sit there in total ignorance. I can name the annual celebration festival of the school as an example. She said for instance: "The annual celebration festival will be held at this date, and the preparations will start about three weeks before", which meant that I wasn't completely baffled, like: '*What annual celebration festival?!*' or something like that.

Yes, I can say that the support I've had from the outset has been very good, and I've gotten positive feedback on what I'm doing. I do appreciate the guidance I received the first year, it was on a positive note, and I got the assistance I asked for. However, the real professional mentoring I got was from a teacher who worked closely with my team, the special education teacher during my second year, but especially the third year of teaching. She has totally been my major source of support, and she has similar ideas about ..., don't know if I should mention the term as it seems to be a fad, yes, well, personalized learning. She definitely wants students to learn, on their own terms, and working in part within their interest areas, like this project we are thinking about doing with those special ed. boys next year. We totally agree that there is no use forcing them to spend 10 years in school and never allowing them to do anything they are interested in. So the support I've got from her in this is extremely important. Perhaps I would have got it from someone else, perhaps not. But the thing is, as she's involved in this class because of students with special education needs, I've needed to turn to her because of them anyway, and then additionally, been able to consult her with lots of other things that I've been speculating about. I find it extremely important to have had the opportunity to work so closely with a veteran teacher, who has encouraged me and shared my ideas.

Another source of support in my case has been my colleagues. When you can discuss things. It's actually just essential to be able to discuss with someone what you have been doing, and how everything you did kind of sucked. Somehow to get some sort of feedback. To tell you the truth, I have not in any way been reluctant to reveal or discuss my own incompetence or embarrassing moments in teaching with a colleague. I truly find it absolutely necessary to be able to do just that. (J 1b), 8, J3, 11-12, J5, 13)

**Comments:** According to Jon, the mentoring he received the first year was satisfactory. He was for example not in 'total ignorance' about how things were run on a day to day basis because he received necessary information. He did not seem to require anything more than that, except to be able to discuss how things were going as the story shows. That was something he actually sought after right from the

beginning, and not necessarily from his mentor. In the second and third year of his teaching it was the special education teacher on Jon's team, who was his major source of support. From the story Jon tells it can be assumed that this teacher found in him a teacher with similar vision towards teaching and learning to hers; that they shared respect for every student, and their potential to learn. She appeared to have noticed in Jon a teacher who wanted to reach out to the low achieving students, and gave him the support, mentally as well as professionally, which he needed to carry out projects that met the needs of this group of students. Jon appeared ready to accept her professional support, especially in the third year. Therefore, I maintain that he may not have 'heard' her during his first year, when he was so absorbed in tackling himself as a person in the role of the teacher.

Jon's contradictory attributes deserve a commentary too. On the one hand he is quite aloof and quiet, but on the other hand he is very open and willing to discuss his teaching in an undaunted manner. Appearances can indeed deceive. In his openness and sincerity, Jon revealed his lack of self-confidence in the classroom, and how it stood in the way of the teaching he wanted to achieve. Additionally, what is indeed notable, is how openly and sincerely he talked about what he felt was his incompetence as a teacher, and the way in which he expressed his feelings. It is exactly this sincerity that both colleagues and students alike seemed to sense in his way of being, and which makes him so agreeable. Anecdotal evidence has it that it is uncommon that male teachers allow themselves to be so honest and unabashed in expressing their feelings regarding their inadequacy in dealing with such matters.<sup>10</sup> Doubtlessly, this turned out to be the hallmark of our long standing research relationship; Jon's quiet, modest sincerity and openness. When Jon told me stories of his failures as well as his successes there was always a certain twinkle in his eye, and a warm smile could be seen flickering there too.

The following passage presents stories about validating self as a teacher, and they are about joys and successes in the classroom.

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<sup>10</sup>As gender issues are not a part of this research I will not probe that further here.

## **6.5. Validating Self as a Teacher**

The realities in the early years of teaching were not only characterized by difficulties, there were also experiences of joys and successes. Below are two stories Jon told which demonstrate how he validated himself in the early years of teaching. They show a young teacher, who despite a diffident and calm nature, finds a way to address what troubled him openly and honestly, and who has found paths to take his teaching along through the confusion.

### **6.5.1 Having the Guts to Be Sincere**

There were several occasions where Jon felt the embarrassment regarding his ignorance in some of the subject matter, because he did not have the time needed to prepare lessons properly, he said at the end of his second year. The incident when he did not know how to explain an adverb to his 8th graders, and turned to the veteran teacher to come to his aid, exemplifies this situation. He decided to take that up and discuss it openly with his class. Jon found it important to always try to be sincere and honest in his interactions. Here are examples of how he explained this:

I was quite distressed over my students' suggestions that they should perhaps have another teacher teach them Icelandic. I thought about this, and then about a week later, I decided to discuss this incident with my students. I told them that I simply wasn't good enough in Icelandic grammar and spelling, I just admitted that to them. I told them that I totally realized why they wanted the other teacher. Then I discussed this more on their basis; like for example if they didn't understand something, then they would have to work hard at learning it. I told them that the same would go for me, that if I didn't know something, I couldn't just skip it. I would also have to do my best learning it. Then I said that I really hoped that they would get a better Icelandic mother tongue teacher next year, and then this somehow evaporated because I found that they truly appreciated my honesty and openness discussing this with them. However, I must admit that perhaps it was a bit easier for me to come clean about my incompetence in teaching Icelandic mother tongue, than it would have been for example, in Math or Social Studies, because I majored in those subjects in my teacher education program. Mind you, I find it



important to talk to my students if something is wrong, whether it's me or my teaching, like I just described, or their conduct.

There is this boy in my homeroom class, for instance, who has shown great progress in his conduct this year. When he was younger and during the middle grades, he used to be insufferable, it was impossible to have him in the classroom, I was told. He was always in trouble, almost every day, his temper was well known around the school. And he used bad language with everybody, whether staff or students. And so, right in the first or second week last fall he ran into one of his troubles. He was extremely angry, and was going to run off home and all that, like he had often done, but I managed to stop him. I spoke to him for about 40 minutes, there was hardly a mention of the incident, but we spoke about everything else. There and then I managed to connect with him, and since then there has perhaps been one such episode a year. That meant a lot to me. Then in the spring, as he was being evaluated by a psychologist, his mother asked me if I wouldn't definitely continue teaching the class the following year. She was very pleased when I said I would. She said: 'He needs someone with him, who is this calm, someone like you'. These are precisely the things that make teaching really worthwhile.

What also makes teaching worthwhile, is to understand what careful planning involves. During my third year of teaching, I really experienced the importance of careful planning; the importance of being well prepared and ready to carry out what I'd planned, because simultaneously my students were ready to address challenging tasks. This is what matters most of all to me in my teaching, because you can virtually drop an unprepared lesson, or at least half of it. What I mean is this: An unprepared lesson is when you come in, and you're not sure what you're going to do, and you need at least five minutes to decide what it was you were going to do, and the students, - they're gone, disappeared, have just started chatting and they know that this lesson was not prepared. As a result, I sense some kind of disrespect, or what can I say, no, perhaps not disrespect, but rather, they know for sure that I didn't put much effort into this, and then I get this: 'Why should we put any effort into the studying if you've not done your homework' -attitude. On the other hand, I can feel huge

difference when I'm well prepared; then the class is calmer and they're simply more ready to work. They can sense that I'm more confident, which then has an effect on my whole bearing. (J2, 10, 24, J3, 5-6)

When Jon was telling this last part of his story, there was laughter in his voice.

### **6.5.2 Finding One's Way through the Maze**

At the end of his third year, Jon told me that he had decided to end the whole group teaching in order to allow for student learning. The special education teacher on Jon's team had encouraged him, and the other teacher on the team, to try differentiated instruction in Math. Finding paths like that for his teaching, made him feel that he was more agile in his teaching:

In my third year, I sort of stopped doing this whole group Math teaching and tried differentiated instruction instead. The special ed. teacher on my team encouraged me and the other teacher on the team to try this in Math, and she was going to lead it. She was very enthusiastic about that approach to teaching and encouraged me to try that. What we did was that first we divided the grade nine students in two groups. In one group were the best achievers in Math, together with the weakest students in Math. We assigned two teachers to that group, one of who is the special ed. teacher. In the other group, were the so called average students, who had one teacher. This group was much smaller than the other one, and needed more 'spoon-feeding', so to speak, and whole group-teaching from the teacher. Then we divided each of the two groups of students into subgroups of 3-4 students, and we have changed these groups regularly, in intervals of three to four weeks. We then attended to each group; where they were each time, if there was anything they needed, or if they wanted assistance in something. In the case when students wanted assistance from a teacher it worked like this: First they had to try by themselves, then they could ask their group, but it was only when everything had run aground that they could ask the teacher, because that teacher might be busy working with another group.

This has worked very well. The students made their own study plans for two weeks at a time. They started by reviewing the National

Curriculum Guide in Math for grade nine. Each of them decided which goals they wanted to work towards, and this was really difficult in the beginning. The students just said: 'What! Why are we doing your work?'. Then in the spring term, when the students had become familiar with this system, that is making their own study plans, and this started to run smoothly, I often felt terribly bad because sometimes I wasn't sort of *doing* anything in class, because I was not actually *teaching*. Especially after they had learnt that it is their responsibility to finish this chapter this week, or next month, or whatever, and became more independent in this. Yes, sometimes it happened that I felt that I wasn't doing anything in these lessons, and I got this feeling: 'Hang on, shouldn't I be teaching in here!'. It's a very difficult feeling, and it takes time to adjust to this new role as a teacher. But the thing is, the kids have been learning. I have become aware of changes in my students' attitudes towards Math, and towards the fact that they themselves must see that they need to finish some material.

However, both they and I are still extremely stuck in the notion that grade nine must have this book, and they must be going through *this* chapter *together*, and it's incredibly difficult to just skip something. Not that I hadn't done that, because there are of course students who have learning difficulties, and then you skip a chapter or something anyhow, as it doesn't serve any purpose for that student to complete it – not that I'm saying to that student: 'You can't do this'. These lower achieving students made their study plans in consultation with the special education teacher, and we did push those students who could do more. I find that the students have really made some progress in trying themselves, in trusting in themselves, and in that they were not just waiting for someone, the teacher, to come and tell them what to do and how to do things. As you know, Math has always been my favorite subject, and I really enjoy teaching it. I must say that I was very enthusiastic about this development of teaching Math in grade nine. This individual study plan program is the issue that has preoccupied my mind since last fall, but it takes a huge amount of time to prepare all that. Yes, in my experience, careful lesson planning is very time-consuming. Especially like the realization of new ideas, to carry ideas forward. You get the idea, it's vivid in your mind, but to take it from there down to a piece of paper, and then to your

student, so that something will become of it, that's an extremely long process, and can take a vast amount of time.

I admit that I find it frustrating having been able to see only a few of my original ideas come to fruition. But when that happens, I definitely score, both for myself and my students! And a feeling of sheer joy and pride follows. Like in the teaching of Social Studies, which is another major interest of mine. In that teaching, I have felt that I've had more opportunities to allow for much more variety in the choice of topics and assignments, especially this year. And I can allow my students to tie in their own interest. Mind you, the projects that I've been doing with my students are much fewer than I would have wished for, but I'm pleased how successful they really turned out to be. This year I'm the subject coordinator of the Social Studies in my school, and that, as well as having taught this subject in grades 7-10, has given me a comprehensive overview I felt I needed, so I feel that I'm closer to what I wanted to do in my teaching. What really matters to me is for my students to show aspiration in what they are doing, more so than showing interest, because if they have the will to succeed, the interest will follow.

What is also important is for me to be well prepared and ready to perform what I intended, and for my students to be ready to tackle challenging assignments. I ask of my students to do their work, to be responsible for their learning, I'm their assistant, not their commander. So, what I find extremely important is to approach each student as an individual. I can show those who have the greatest learning needs a lot of attention, and discuss with their parents and help them. I devote time to them, I work with them. And time is also needed for those who are more advanced. Those who have the ambition, and those who want to be able to find the answers themselves. They want to be independent, and I think that I encouraged them a lot by using these methods. It's those children in between, who I need to devote more time to, but perhaps I don't, because it's not obvious what one needs to do. My methods of approaching learning issues don't seem to work with the middle group I think, at least I haven't found the way to them yet. In my experience, this group of students tend to find my methods the most difficult I

think, as they want the right answers delivered to them. They become irritated, sometimes a great deal. But I tell them that it's more important that they can find the 'right' answer themselves, because I won't always be at their side. As a result, this group of students haven't been inclined to turn to me for assistance, and to tell you the truth, this bothers me, as I want the same for them of course, as for my more advanced students. And I want the same for my average students as for my weaker students, who I often guide step-by-step through a task, appealing to their common sense, which they indeed possess, and as a result they have learnt that they can do things, which then again has given them a lot of energy.

I find it extremely important to have high expectations for my students, but I find it equally important to come to terms with their limitations, in order to be able to give them realistic feed-back. I must accept that this student can only do so much this time, and be able to tell him that as well. It's not enough for me just to have this knowledge, and that I ask this of him, rather I have to be able to communicate that to my student, telling him that it is okay. That's what I've learned a bit. (J2, 13, 17, J3, 2-5, 17, J5, 14)

**Comments:** What is notable in the former story is that despite a diffident and calm nature, Jon did not let that prevent him from discussing with his students his own shortcomings, which must have been very difficult for him. Jon's perceived failure in teaching Mother Tongue was stuck on his mind at the end of the second year, but I believe that the way in which he approached it with his students shows how he managed to turn it around so that his perceived failure became a strength. He had the guts to be sincere, to be open, and he dared discuss his own performance as a teacher with his students, which most teachers might find a very sensitive issue. Students do appreciate it when their teachers dare to be open and sincere, but it matters how they approach it, especially with teenagers. There is this certain danger of being 'mushy', and most likely teenagers will dislike that. Jon managed to avoid that, and they accepted his explanations which indicate that he had been able to build very good relationships with this group of students.

Precisely because of Jon's calm nature he managed to connect with a difficult boy in his class. Intuitively, Jon seemed to know what the boy needed, and with patience and calmness, which are indeed Jon's strong sides, and with his warm attitude, he managed to reach out to him. This was Jon's own private victory. I could sense that when he told me this story.

Jon also revealed that he had experienced many insufficiently prepared or even unprepared lessons as this story shows. Earlier, he had told me how frustrating he found it not having enough time to plan his teaching, and from what he said above, he seemed to be quite familiar with this situation. What is notable here however, is not the fact that a teacher experiences 'god-knows-how-many' unprepared lessons, but rather how straightforwardly Jon conveys this matter to me. It could be expected that he would find it so embarrassing that he would rather not mention it, or perhaps more accurately, he would not tell the whole story. Certainly, beginning teachers do talk about difficulties due to not having enough time to plan each lesson properly, but not that they enter the classroom, even frequently, without any planning at all. There is perhaps a tendency to blame such difficulties on everything else but that possibility. Nonetheless, once again, Jon shows how prepared he is to be sincere and open in our research relationship, which I believe a longitudinal study can allow for. As there was laughter in his voice at the end this story, it appears that he had come to terms with this part of his struggling beginning.

In the latter story Jon expresses a sense of joy in how the Math teaching had turned out. He enjoys teaching it. His childhood story pictured Jon as a teenager whose favorite teacher was the Math teacher. Jon's attitudes towards Math as a subject, and towards teaching it, constitutes a part of his personal practical knowledge from his teenage schooling. Jon felt that he had accomplished something in Math, as his students had made a lot of progress. Further, what is worthy of note here is what he said about this new system; that he had the feeling that he was not in fact teaching. During this time, Jon was obviously experiencing an inner struggle between his more traditional images of the role of the teacher, and living the new role. This means that his traditional image of teaching, the practical knowledge of teaching which he brought with him from his childhood schooling into

his own practice was not in accord with the role of the teacher in the new program of differentiated instruction. The conflict between his old personal practical knowledge and the new one that was emerging, made him feel insecure about how his new role will now be constituted. This is another example of a recreation of his personal practical knowledge. Additionally, the way in which Jon expressed his feelings in this regard, may be quite uncommon. Once again, he shows how willing he was to expose himself. He did not wrap up what he wanted to express in *ambiguities* of meanings. He was honest, sincere, and straightforward. That was indeed Jon's strength, which I experienced repeatedly in our research relationship.

As Jon was trying to adopt to this new role as a teacher, he concurrently needed to deal with his students' skepticism towards this new program. It rendered e.g. in their reaction of disbelief when they had to find their own goals to work towards. Jon needed to establish among his students the sense that they were indeed learning, even though they were not all doing the same assignments, on the same page, in the same book, in the same given timeframe. Jon seemed to be able to accomplish this despite his own doubts, which indicates that he had a strong conviction for this program; that the differentiated instruction or the individualized learning program had become part of his new vision in teaching.

It is true, that Jon wanted his students to learn in his classroom, and he said that they were indeed learning. However, he was concerned about his average students. He felt they were kind of left out, as he did not seem to find ways to reach them, their level of ability, and their attitudes towards their learning. Jon frequently told me how reluctant he was to lean on the more traditional ways of teaching, which tend to be rather directed against these students, i.e. the average student. Still, in his third year of teaching, Jon talked about how much time it took to plan teaching. However, there is now a different sound to it as he had accepted that lesson planning is indeed time consuming, and he was beginning to find his way through the maze, step-by-step.

In the following passage there are three stories which depict what held Jon back in his teaching, the importance being able to have good relationships with people, and that he is a team-player.

## 6.6 Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences

This section of the chapter presents three stories of Jon's developing sense of confidence, yet avoiding the comfort-zone trap, they tell of how he established good relationships with both parents and his students and of his desire of where he wants to take his teaching.

### 6.6.1 Wanting to Go there but Holding Back

Frequently Jon expressed his wish of being able to plan his teaching a week ahead in time and consequentially become more himself in his teaching. When asked how he felt his teaching had changed over time, Jon told this story:

Well, late in my second year I finally managed to plan the teaching a week ahead of time, which was one of my goals from the first year. For me it meant that I was not as fixed on my lesson plans, I found that I was more able to deviate from it if needed. That was a great relief, and one of my greatest learning experiences at that time. Then, by the end of the third year I felt that my teaching reflected more confidence, and that it had become more stable at the same time. But when that happens, then you face this certain danger of becoming *too* confident, if one can phrase it like that. Let me explain. We had a professional development day, late in my third year, where this talk was given on the issue that one always has to be on one's toes as a teacher, meaning that when we stop trying to bring about change, then we've reached the level which renders security and that's when we get stuck! In my case for example, I might want to use an assignment from last year which was really successful, because by using it again, it provides a certain sense of security. But it simply might not work now, even though I'm very enthusiastic and totally convinced that it'll be a success this time around as well, because it might not hit home with my students. The meaning I make of this is that we have to learn to 'read' what's happening in our teaching, read what works with our students, here and now. In other words, we have to take really good care of not falling into the comfort zone!

To be quite honest, the best moments in teaching happen when I actually managed to move *my students* out of the comfort zone. For



example, I'm very much into asking my students critical questions, and even pushing them into doubts, and as a consequence, they also realize that they are often right by saying what they are saying. If a student asks for example: 'Am I right in this?', then I would reply: 'Well, I just don't know. Do you think you're right? -and why do you think it's right?'. Something like that. I think I kind of place great emphasis on this, and the reason is I want my students to acquire and practice critical thinking. I want them to be able to realize that it's they themselves who need to find the right answer. I want them to realize that they're not to be spoon-fed, rather that they are searching for the right answer. I want them to understand that they can't just wait for me to bring the right answers to them. I've had quite a lot of criticism from them, asking: 'Why can't you just tell me the right answer, why do you always ask these difficult questions!?' They've really been outspoken in their opinions, which is good. I'm convinced that it is of utmost importance for my students to be able to search for answers themselves as 'I won't always be at your side', like I tell them. They have in fact, become really receptive towards this, and they do understand where I'm going with it.

Then during my fifth year of teaching this was actually taken to a test, as I sort of stopped teaching in the classroom altogether. I was working in a school which is a treatment resource number one, and a school number two. This was a totally different environment to the regular school. It's a special education school for students in grades 6-10, with severe behavioral problems. Many of them were drop-outs from their home schools. I had moved to a bigger town by then, and was offered a position in this school after my second paternity leave during the fall of my fifth year. The students in there could be divided into three groups. About half of them were on the autistic spectrum, or dealt with some mental health problems then there were kids with ADD/ADHD, and those who have delayed cognitive development. And not to mention those who were perhaps plain and simply misbehaving, who have had no sort of upbringing. In this school I had to start more or less by working my way into gaining their trust, ensuring ways to respond to them. If an interest could be found in music for example, then we'd go for that, finding a music teacher to come once or twice a week to tend to that. There I ran into, what can

I say, just total walls where a student didn't owe me anything. There could be this very good day and the student was very positive, and then the next day, it was just like there was a completely different student who came to the classroom. Totally! Then I was simply the biggest of all jerks, and all these words, this foul language that was used to get at you.

This surely was a challenging undertaking. In fact, there was not much of this traditional kind of teaching, like picking up a text-book, which is naturally not what happens every day with these kids. We played cards and games, there were outdoor activities and we did some carpentry and some art work, and we were sort of simply *there* for these kids. When I was able to kind of reach the students, then I perhaps began to try and teach something, which perhaps is not taken as 'real' teaching...or... – Well, yea, of course there was a lot of teaching *in it* but teaching something is doing for example math, mother tongue and social studies. It means using text-books. But you know ..., yeah, well, that's what it means when talking to people *outside* of teaching, at least. This is the definition of teaching, I would say, outwardly, kind of. What I mean is that I am the only teacher in this school. The other people working there besides me and the principal, is a psychologist, an occupational therapist, a family therapist, an assistant to the teacher and a cook.

What I'm saying is, that what we were in fact doing with these kids, wasn't purposeful enough, and not really organized. I've in fact resigned, because of a professional conflict with the principal. He's just too old; he doesn't have the energy to deal with these kids. His decision making means that he comes to us asking: 'What! Will there be outdoor activities tomorrow? What do you think we should do?!' All his decision making was like this. This created stress for me. I find that attitudes like that towards teaching and learning reflect poor professionalism. In my case it meant that I had to take on other people's jobs, and I wasn't ready to do that. In all honesty, I have to say that I surely could have planned something which is anyhow a part of the curriculum for this age group, through music as I mentioned. And I could have planned creative writing through for instance poetry and the like - and I could probably have planned some math if I really

had put my mind to it. Yeah, well, in fact, I find it really sad to be leaving, I would have liked to continue, and build up the teaching and learning in there, but I felt it was somehow not possible while this principal was there. (J2, 8, J3, 8, J5, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13-14)

### 6.6.2 Letting Go when Working with People

The teacher in a small village school is vulnerable to the whole community. Being a teacher is not only limited to his workplace as has been pointed out: “You’ll always be the teacher; the teacher in the shop and the teacher in the elevator” (J 1a), 11) as Jon said in our first conversation. He is very conscious of the importance of building good relationships with the parents and his students right from the beginning. Here is a story which portrays that:

The first group of parents I met was at the curriculum introduction meeting which was held about three weeks into my first school year. I was the only teacher in that meeting, but the principal was there with me. They were always in these meetings, the principal or the vice-principal. It went really well, and I got praise from the principal afterwards on how I conducted it. My meeting lasted two hours, while the other teachers' were 30 to 60 minutes. I prepared myself very carefully for the meeting, gathered all the curriculum material, displayed it and invited the parents to try some math problem-solving, and the like. And allowed them to have a go at them. And I told them what was ahead in my program. I got many really good questions, and there was a bit of lively discussion. Not in any way did the parents let me feel like a novice teacher in that meeting. The parents who came to that fall meeting were the positive parents, because there were no behavioral problems in my class. Naturally, if something had come up, then I would definitely have gotten some reaction from those who were kind of negative. Well, something actually came up, and I met with the parents of the two students involved, and it was successfully resolved. However, I had the chance to meet all the parents in the parent-teacher conferences later that fall, and that was nice.

What I think I need to improve a bit regarding the parents, is telling them *why* I am teaching their children like that. Not just telling to the parents: 'I'm teaching with these methods', rather: 'I'm teaching with these methods *because...*'. Mind you the community of parents in this

village is not all that enthusiastic about what goes on within the walls of the school. They don't consider it their business, and this indifference is really considered a problem within the school. What this meant for me was that I hardly got any reaction to what I was trying to implement, for example in the Math teaching in my third year, even though my students took home with them their individual study plans for their parents to look at and comment on. In spite of this general indifference towards the school, I've felt that on the whole, my personal relationships with the parent groups in my classes could be categorized as positive. I think that I can say that the parents seem to like me, perhaps because I'm this calm. Perhaps they felt that it would transfer to the general behavior of the class, which then again might result in their children being more relaxed and happier in school. To be quite honest, I do think that my calmness did transfer to the general behavior of the class.

My first class was a very noisy grade seven class, who was used to having teachers who were constantly yelling at them, telling them to shut up. This was a class that teachers had always found extremely difficult. That's what I constantly heard from them 'these kids are so difficult', or something of the kind. So, the students were definitely rather shocked when I started teaching them, because I used a totally different approach. They were high-pitched, and I rather just wanted them to find it within themselves that their conduct was not good enough. I pointed that out to them very calmly and patiently. I think they were a bit startled by my approach to begin with; which was that they would have to be responsible for their own behavior. I then continued being their homeroom teacher in my second year, teaching them Math, Mother Tongue, Social Studies and Life-skills. The unrelenting clamor of these students who were bursting with energy was really tiring, but I didn't find them difficult, they were no more difficult than other children. I think they were better if anything. They were simply ever so energetic, and it was my job to cap that energy. What I did was to give them responsibility and ownership of their learning in math for example.

What I find extremely important in my relationship with my students is what I would like to call democratic collaboration. The students

have to be mindful of others, there is a definite limit and they have to stay within it. Usually I talked it over with them. I tried to ask them *why* they were doing what they were doing, what they thought of it, and if they thought it disrupted others. And it always resulted in them responding that they were being disruptive and that that was not good, and they were back to their seats. End of case; most of the time. I could not be bothered to engage myself in a petty quarrel and raise my voice. To begin with, I've got such a feeble voice, I wouldn't make it to the first recess, it would be husky by then. So, I've sort of done this consciously, because I know that my voice can't endure it. I think that they did appreciate this. What I have wanted, is to be a teacher who could give my students as much responsibility for their own behavior and learning as they could handle, and I preferred to be more in the role of a coach than their manager. I've never set out to be the entertaining teacher. I mean, if I'm boring and my students succeed, then I'm at peace. (J 1b), 4, 8, J 2, 5, 11-12, 14, J3, 18)

Jon felt that this was one of his successes as a beginning teacher, being able to establish good relationships with both parents and his students.

### **6.6.3 Intending to Go for the Team**

The forthcoming school year, his sixth year of teaching, Jon will be teaching in an open-plan school. Jon looks very much forward to this teaching, because he will be teaching in a school which emphasizes mixed-age grouping, team-teaching and individualized learning. Jon will be working with a larger team of teachers than he has done before. The teaching will be in an open space, where five groups of students of mixed-ages from grades 6–7 will study and work together. Jon's enthusiasm for what lay ahead was obvious:

This teaching will be both very exciting and challenging. We are going to be five homeroom teachers team-teaching, as well as a special education teacher, and three assistants. We will need to work together very closely, and plan all the teaching as a team. We'll get a very open time-table, and within it we have to teach these traditional subjects, like Mother Tongue, Math, English, Danish, Social Studies and Natural Science. We can entirely decide how we'll teach those subjects; it's simply ours to plan it. Jointly, we will decide which learning centers there are, when we integrate the curriculum, and how

much time is allocated to that. Accordingly, we can decide to concentrate on Social Studies for example, and really take time for it, plan a theme for a certain period of time, and skip Math and Mother Tongue for example, while working on that. I really like the thought of this, and this will be really exciting.

Well, undoubtedly, there are both pros and cons in a program like that. What worries me regarding this and the individualized learning, in particular in an open space like this with so many students, is perhaps precisely the danger of the individual getting lost. This system demands a lot of safeguarding, so that some individual won't just float by unnoticed, and won't learn anything, or won't be attended to. And let's just hope that I'll manage to create good relationships with the other teachers. That, of course, is really of the greatest importance in all of this. I'm not very familiar with this kind of program, even though a team of three teachers, in the village school where I used to teach, covered the teaching of all the academic subjects in our grade level. In that sense it was perhaps a similar program, but there was no co-operation across grade levels in that school. At that time two hours a week were set aside for each team for our collaboration and co-planning, but I would say that working side-by-side was more characteristic of our team in my third and fourth year, than was co-operation, except between me and the special ed. teacher. I'm sure it will be great fun to be in this kind of *real* co-operation, but I think it really requires the team of teachers to have similar teaching styles and possess similar attitudes towards teaching and learning. (J5, 10-11)

Jon is a team player. In spite of his calm bearings, I can detect enthusiasm in his voice when explaining to me how the educational program is organized in the school in which he will be teaching the forthcoming school year. I can hear that he is genuinely excited with regard to what lies ahead for him.

**Comments:** What I would like to bring out from the first story is Jon's awareness of the danger of falling into a comfort zone. Not just himself, but also his students. This raises the question of why this spoke to him at the end of his third year, so that he made a point of telling me about his observation, and the meaning he made of it. In all likelihood, his growing confidence in teaching may have opened his

eyes to all the possibilities teaching could entail, to which he had perhaps turned a blind eye during the first two struggling years. In addition, his growing confidence in teaching made it also possible for him to call on his students to show that they have knowledge of things, to give them responsibility for and ownership of their own learning. Jon had become confident enough in how he addressed this in his classroom. Here Jon shows how he has learned to “read” his students, how he is able to make better decisions about activities and assignments, how he has developed his questioning methods to guide students towards their own thinking and to search for their answers. Further, this story shows how Jon has developed new relationships, new practices and a sense of himself as a competent teacher who is true to who he is as an individual.

However, by telling me the story of his co-workers' attitudes in the special education school towards what teaching entails, Jon is in fact re-telling his own story of what teaching is not, and in fact this is a good example of how Jon is changing some “landscapes” (Clandinin, et al. 2007) of his own personal practical knowledge. As Jon's growing confidence in teaching, and as his changing landscape of what teaching can be, is still in the making, he seemed to find it difficult or almost impossible to fight the traditional attitudes of his co-workers in the special education school where he was teaching during his fifth year. More importantly perhaps, the laissez-faire attitude of the principal. These attitudes seemed to have taken away some of his newly found learning from his third and fourth year, and left him almost at a standstill. He said that he should have done more that he could have planned something, but he did not do much of what he said he should have. That raises the question why he did not. This could suggest that Jon was more of a team player than a leader, that he tended to, at least to some extent, reflect what was being done around him, rather than take the initiative to change things. He surely wanted to go there but he held back.

As Jon's stories thus far have made clear, he did possess attitudes and visions that were not much in line with the more traditional ways of teaching. They have also revealed a teacher who had acquired the ability to change some school landscapes, as he did when team-teaching with the special education teacher who initiated the

individualized teaching and the differentiated instruction in grade 9 Math. This too supports the claim that he needed to team up with a doer in order to flourish. But in the special education school he seemed to have been overpowered. He realized that and resigned. That is what Jon was grappling with during his fifth year as a teacher. In spite of that, Jon seemed to have reached the phase in confidence building as a teacher which made him assured enough to decide that instead of getting stuck in some possible comfort zone, he preferred to leave and start team-teaching in an open-plan school with an innovative team of teachers – in the coming sixth year of teaching.

The second story shows that Jon had only positive relationships with the parents of his students. In our conversation before Jon started teaching he did not list relationships with the parents as a possible cause for concern in the job that lay ahead, it was not an issue for him, neither before he started teaching nor during his first five years on the job. The possible reason could be that as he had been an active member of the youth sector of a political party, he may have had quite some training in giving talks to different audiences.

Jon's methods of classroom management mirrored both his own personality traits as well as how he described his favorite teacher. Yet again, the personal practical knowledge of his own schooling surfaces. Just like his favorite teacher, Jon approached his students in this calm, quiet and kind, but firm manner, with expectations of responsible behavior, and there was no beating around the bush. In his first year of teaching Jon said there were hardly any behavior problems in his classroom as he did not view what he called “commotion and yakking” (see p. 183–185) as problems. Little by little (Jon was their classroom teacher for two years), his students came to terms with and understood his classroom management methods of waiting patiently until they noticed that he wanted their attention. Then during the third and the fourth year this method developed into what Jon called democratic collaboration, and in the story Jon shows that he was able to use discussions and long conversations, where he listened carefully to his students, then persuaded them kindly to be considerate and respectful of themselves and others. Jon did not pretend to be an authoritative figure in the classroom; instead he saw himself as their



coach. This supports his claim of using democratic collaboration as the main method of classroom management.

What is noteworthy in the third story is Jon's rather detailed description of the program where he will be teaching his coming sixth year, and how it was to be organized. That raises the question of why he told me this story. It seems obvious, that through this story Jon was telling me where he wanted to place himself within the educational spectrum, and where he was heading in his teaching. Additionally, this story indicates that he had given this a considerable thought, even to the extent that he had already pictured himself working within this program, as he was speculating what might work for and against it. This story combines the two issues Jon finds most important in his teaching, and which surfaced time and again in our conversations over these five years. His concern for students who might get lost in such a program. Here, Jon was expressing his concern for the well-being of the individual within such a large mixed-age group. Consequently he worried that his students will not learn in his classroom, and he worried about his weaker students. Due to his own modest and timid nature, Jon's knowledge of how it feels not being noticed and receiving perhaps hardly any attention in the classroom was an important part of the personal practical knowledge he carried with him into his own teaching, as can be seen throughout his stories in how he has made sure to attend to all his students. However, Jon expected that this teaching will be both challenging and exciting. Further, he was sure that such a program will demand a lot of safeguarding. His previous experience, when differentiating the instruction in Math during his third year, gave him some insight into what this kind of program could consist of, both the pros and cons.

This story also brings to view Jon's desire to be in a close, and active cooperation with a progressive team of teachers. At the end of his fifth year of teaching, Jon knew what he did not want; which was the *laissez-faire* strategy of teaching and learning in the special education school. Additionally, he had been assigned to teams in the village school, right from his first year, but it did not turn out to be the real cooperation Jon sought after. However, the third year, when the grade 9 teachers on Jon's team, were trying out differentiating the instruction in Math, Jon partly experienced the cooperation he sought

after, but the coming year will go way beyond his previous experience. What he indeed wanted at this point in time, was to try his hand at developing new practices, and creating new relationships with a team of teachers, which, as the story shows, he found of utmost importance. Hence, Jon looked forward to his sixth year of teaching working with a team of innovative teachers.

In the last section of this chapter there are three stories about re-creating the story of self as a teacher and about re-constructing identity through the development of professional practice.

## **6.7 Re-Creating Story of Self as Teacher – Creating a Respectful Classroom**

The stories of Jon reveal a reserved teacher who goes about his job in a quiet, friendly manner. Regardless of his modest nature, Jon was gregarious, he wanted to be in the midst of things, taking part in innovative teaching, and he was a team player. His ideals in teaching and learning have their roots in his teacher training, which he patiently tried to implement and integrate into his own teaching. His modest nature did not allow him to shout out during difficult times, when they worked against him in the classroom in his early years. Instead he kept it to himself, thus showing the resilience that kept him afloat while working towards creating a respectful classroom environment.

### **6.7.1 There Must Be Something in there for Them – Jon's Passion in Teaching**

In Jon's metaphor of the journey into the uncertainties, there were paths that indeed took him to unforeseen pits but they have also directed him into routes where being there for his students and the wellbeing of all of them was in place. One of his main worries before he started teaching was that he would not be able to intervene if a problem came up, not just because he might not recognize it as such, but rather that he would not dare to get involved "because it might not *be* a problem, which then again might lead me to closing my eyes when actually confronted with a *real* problem" (J 1a), 13). Jon was very conscious of the necessity of approaching each student as an individual, whether with regard to personal problems or to learning needs. Jon explained this as follows:

What matters most to me is for my students to be prepared to address challenging assignments, because I want them to be able to tackle such tasks when they go out into the world. Usually, each group of students covers a wide scale of ability. Like in the group I was teaching in my third and fourth year, there were so many boys who were definitely not going to do some academic studies after grade 10, because they weren't ready for that, or they didn't want that, or there was no encouragement, or whatever. But, they might become good truck drivers, for example. These were boys who spent their days rustling up motorcycles, and taking engines apart, and putting them together again, and driving tractors, and just working on the farm at home, and that was their interest. I wanted to take that into the school. During the fourth year there was this idea of a project on my desk, which meant that this group of students would simply be allocated a shed to work in, where they would have certain amount of time to take an engine apart, for example. They would receive a certain amount of money from the school to fix up a kaput motorcycle, for example. They would need to buy something, and then they would have to make phone calls to find out about the cost, and they would need to evaluate where it's cheapest, and perhaps look for offers. Something like this is likely to become very valuable for boys like that and who are in this situation.

So, I would like to develop into being the kind of teacher with whom my students experience some meaning of being with. I want them to look forward to going to my classroom, and that they feel good while learning. I don't want them to be just waiting for each lesson to end. I want each lesson to have some meaning for each student, even though it's only a minute for some, that there is something interesting that happens. To be quite honest, I have become more realistic in my attitudes towards my own capacity to make a difference in my students' lives. In the beginning, I believed that I could do anything, but now I sort of know that not everything is quite possible. For example, I can't place all my students under the same category and say: 'You have to do this!', because I've learnt that even easy assignments can be too difficult for some students. And by the same token, very able students may simply brush off some assignments, thereby leaving me a bit hurt and thinking: 'Oh, you should be able to

do better than this!' So, it's these kinds of things which I've learnt the hard way, so to speak.

I can see now, retrospectively, having taught in the special education school during my fifth year, that the students who came to that school had been losers in school their whole life. What they needed was to feel that this was some kind of a refuge, where they could feel good. That they would gain some faith in that it's possible to go to school, and enjoy it. And if someone didn't want to do something at some point, then he would know it's okay, because I thoroughly believe that in the end he will want to do something. In my experience, all of them wanted to do something, nobody could be bothered to do nothing for a long time. Their self-confidence needed to be restored, as well as their self-image. When the time came for a student to go back to his home school again, we would send with him what we'd found out worked for him: 'You need to tend to this student like this'. One student, who we reached, or rather who I managed to reach, really liked playing cards. He was this super card player, and the only thing he needed, was for us to send the message to his home school that somebody would take care of this, so that he would have a partner in there when things would look poorly for him. Then they could just say: 'Hey listen, now let's play some cards'.

The meaning I have made of this experience has deepened my belief of what matters most to me, which is for my students to feel good in school, to feel good about themselves, that they know that they can accomplish something, that there is hope for them somewhere. Here, I'm above all referring to students who cannot deal with this ordinary school. I want for them to be able to come to school, and look forward to it. There must be something in there for them, something to look forward to. That is what matters most of all, I think, because when that is in place, it will hit home somewhere else in their lives. It was a great relief for me to discover that it is okay if things did not always turn out the way they should have. That was a big deal for me in the beginning. It was also a great relief for me to realize and understand that my students have different needs, and even though one student is not doing well at all, it doesn't necessarily mean that everything I'm doing with them is totally wrong. To be able to accept

that was perhaps the greatest relief of it all, I can tell you. (J3, 5-7, 9, J5, 7-9, 12, 14)

Jon's passion in teaching is for his students to learn in his classroom; to work on each task with ambition, to keep their pace and be independent. There was a warm smile in Jon's eyes when he talked about this.

### **6.7.2 Starting to Relax in the Role – Creating and Re-creating Identity as a Teacher**

The fifth year since Jon's graduation as a teacher had almost come to an end when we met to talk about his journey hither. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in late May. The place Jon chose for our conversation was his old university, where he received his initial teacher education. He always liked coming there, he said. Jon's journey towards becoming the teacher he initially intended has taken him across some unforeseen landscapes; it has indeed been a journey into uncertainties. At the end of the fifth year I read to him what he had said in our very first conversation; the days before he started his teaching, about what kind of teacher he wanted to become. I asked him to comment on it, to tell if he felt he had become this teacher. Laughingly he said that the seriousness of what lay ahead had obviously been very stressful for him at the time as Jon's telling about this journey shows:

I don't think that I'm there yet. And I find some of this not of much importance now in fact.<sup>11</sup> I think though, that I still want to be this teacher who the kids will remember, because they have learnt something in my classroom, or that they had had such a good experience with me, but I think it's totally okay to be humorous too! I do hope that I'll be able to open their eyes to, what can I say, the meaning of life or what they're capable of. Five years ago, I wanted to be able to teach everyone addition and subtraction for example, but now I would rather want to be able to, yes hopefully, teach everyone addition and subtraction, but I would also want to teach those who

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<sup>11</sup>At the outset of his teaching Jon said for example that he wanted to be a teacher who will be remembered by his students. Not because it had been extremely entertaining but rather because they had learnt something.

can't do that, how to use a calculator and if they can't do that, then they would learn that they could ask somebody else, or find their own sort of way to seek the answer.

What makes a teacher memorable, are mainly those moments which are not direct teaching, but which perhaps really make up the most memorable experiences for the students. I experienced such memorable moments with my students during my fourth year, when we were preparing the annual festival in the school, which is an extra-curricular activity. We were working together into the evenings, because everybody was so enthusiastic about it. I was the teacher in charge of the preparation, and I felt that I could be more at ease with them under these circumstances, which made me more light-spirited and more fun, than when I was in the regular role as a teacher in the classroom. I can envisage the possibility of bringing that role together with the role of the teacher, but it'll still take some time for me to master that. I really wish for that to happen.

Actually, very often I have really worried, perhaps these are needless worries, but I have worried about that I am not listened to [e.g. by students]. I feel like I don't possess what's needed to capture attention, to be able to capture my students' attention just like that, by doing something or other. I think this is due to some kind of diffidence within me. I maintain that I am very shy. But those around me don't necessarily agree with me. However, I really try very hard to grapple with this. I think this is some kind of timidity regarding that I might be doing things incorrectly, or that I feel I'm being viewed with suspicion or doubt. Possibly by students or colleagues or others. I'm so hesitant when it comes to opening myself, hesitant to be myself, yes, a bit hesitant to just be spontaneous and let go off some restraints. I never intended to become this teacher who doesn't smile until after Christmas! I've really thought about why I'm like this, and I know that I've got this from my dad. Neither of us like it very much to be the center of attention in front of a crowd. Instead, we more or less like to go around doing our thing quietly and calmly, if I can phrase it like that. But being a teacher is perhaps not the job where you disappear into the crowd, do you? I've really given this a lot of thought.

To begin with I was incredibly preoccupied with all the responsibility demanded by this job, that I was a certain role model, and of the seriousness of it all. During my last practice teaching as a student teacher, it was pointed out to me that I didn't give any indication that I enjoyed what I was doing, and how on earth I could expect that the children would! One naturally has to give unbelievably much of oneself as a teacher, and one has to be able to reveal one's joy. This has been my Achilles' heel as a teacher. I think that sometimes I tend to get lost in some minor details, which are perhaps of no importance at all! But I really feel that I have actually improved in this area quite a lot.

Now, I have really begun to allow myself more time just to relax with my students, just; 'let's talk together, discuss anything that's on the news ...', or something like that. Simply give myself time with a student or students. I think that this is extremely important. And this leads to much more positive relationships, as there is not this divide between the teacher and the students, and then one is not always instructing or something. I do experience it intensely that I'm becoming more easy going in my teaching, and that I'm starting to relax in my role as a teacher. (J5, 15-16, 18-19, 20)

Jon's major concern when he looked over his first five years as a teacher was an element which he felt he had limited control over, that is capturing his students' attention by, for example, revealing his enthusiasm. At the end of his fifth year he still felt that his own character traits got in his way of becoming the teacher he initially envisioned. He said, his students would describe him as a reasonably strict teacher, who required certain boundaries to be respected, and once they were, he would be fair in all his dealings with them.

### **6.7.3 Capturing the Respectfulness – Jon and His Classroom**

Entering Jon's classroom was like entering a typical classroom of the upper grades of eight through ten. There was no 'unnecessary' stuff in there like flowers, extra lamps, ornaments or books, other than textbooks, nor did I see the works of his students displayed on the walls. This was a classic grade 8–10 classroom, as I knew them, where the homeroom teacher is male, except perhaps that it was very tidy. His students were sitting randomly either in long rows or in small groups,

working on their own or together, and the atmosphere was relaxed and calm. Just like Jon is, I thought to myself. I could sense that this was the hallmark of the relationships in his classroom, in addition to the mutual respect between him and his students, which I observed the day I spent in that village school. The mental environment of Jon's classroom was almost tangible, and one could sense the positive relationships in there. In Jon's last (micro) story he tells me what he means when he talks about relationships in his classroom:

Relationships and respect perhaps simply *is* the purpose in my classroom. The text-book is not the purpose, but much rather what I, and my students say. That is perhaps the purpose. And what the student learns is much more the purpose than what the textbook says. I want my classroom to be a place where there is mutual respect and being mindful of others, where we can talk together. Before, I had been in fact too preoccupied with the notion that everybody must learn exactly the same piece of knowledge. But when you read the *National Curriculum Guide*, it first talks about the well-being of students before dealing with the content part, so it's extremely important that the kids feel good in school if they are to learn. Let me take an example from Social Studies. When we were studying World War II, and the British occupation of Iceland, not everyone was supposed to know all the details regarding the what, how, and when. Instead, I wanted my students to experience the spirit of the times, put themselves in the shoes of people from that time, and most importantly, understand why this happened. What I find important is that they can in the future think back and, yes, okay, remember that World War II began 1939, but rather that they will remember that this actually did happen, and that it caused horrible distress and destruction to millions of people, and that they have developed the attitude that we do not want that to happen ever again! That's what I mean when I say that I want to open their eyes to the meaning of life. (J3, 16, J5, 19-20, 21)

The very morning I sat in Jon's classroom observing his teaching, I could sense that his calm and seemingly confident presence was felt by his students. The physical environment of the classroom never seemed to come up in all our conversations during these five years. It did not appear to be an issue in Jon's mind, when talking about his



teaching and the learning of his students. Consequently, I never thought to probe into it.

**Comments:** The first story of Jon's passion in teaching shows how he has understood that what matters most is for his students to work on each task with ambition, to keep their pace and be independent. Time and again this came up in our conversations, especially when he was expressing his inability to really do something of worth for his students. His empathy for the underdogs of the school system is self-evident both in the story of the boys in his grade 10 class, his fourth year of teaching, and the story from the special education school for students with severe behavioral problems in which he taught during his fifth year. Jon seems to be creative in finding ways to reach the underachieving boys on their own level. Here Jon indeed shows how innovative he could be in his teaching, and how well he understood his students' educational needs. He went out of his way, supported by the special education teacher working on his team, to dig out their real interests, and he understood what lay behind it. His personal practical knowledge from his own schooling in a country school gave him an understanding of and insights into their line of thinking, and how their background affects that. These understandings and attitudes are evident when Jon emphasizes the importance of the restoration of their self-confidence as well as their self-image. That seems to be the central aim of that school in his mind, and it has become a part of his developing personal practical knowledge.

The core of Jon's learning the first five years of teaching, was for him to realize and understand, what it indeed meant that not everything is quite possible. Additionally, Jon seemed to have come to terms with the fact that not everything is possible. It might even be said that he has become more realistic about the limitations of teaching. One could say that teachers are no more miracle-workers than doctors, for example. Therefore, it seemed to have been one of Jon's greatest learning moments when he understood what it really meant that he was not doing everything wrong, although one student was "not doing well" academically. In that case scenario, it seems that Jon felt his role was more about making students feel welcome in his classroom, than anything else. This was Jon's new understandings, and above all, his newly discovered passion in teaching, that there must be

something in there for them because it will hit home somewhere else in their lives.

In the second story it can be seen how Jon's idea of the teacher he initially wanted to become has changed these five years, and that his initial image was perhaps not worth striving for. Jon had not mention humor as an important factor in teaching, and the childhood story, from his own schooling, shows which teachers he found good teachers, and they were not considered funny or entertaining by his classmates. There was no mention of humor having a place in those teachers' classrooms. That notion was a part of the personal practical knowledge he brought with him into his initial image of the teacher he wanted to become.

Additionally, this change in Jon's idea is also interesting because it appears that oftentimes newly graduated teachers seem to have quite unrealistic ideas of the kind of teachers they want to become. When it seems that they will never get there, it may make them very frustrated. It did not seem to be the case for Jon, as he had abandoned the essence of his old image, which was that he did not want to be the comedian in the classroom. When Jon worked with his students outside the classroom, he experienced this light-spirited humor with them; he was beginning to integrate that into his teaching and starting to relax with his students. In those circumstances he felt the burden of the role of the serious teacher which had travelled with him from his childhood into his beginning teaching, actually lifting off his shoulders. This telling reveals his desire to integrate that into his role as a teacher. Jon felt better about himself as a teacher, to him this meant that he was moving out of the seriousness of it all. This story also shows how he has re-created his identity, from being this shy, formal and non-giving teacher, to becoming more open and receptive to his students. He still finds teaching a serious a job, but he was beginning to bring humor and lightness into it. He is more content, as well as more self-confident as a teacher.

At the end of our five years of research relationship, Jon told me what had been bothering him as a teacher for years. He told me that he had been having the feeling that he had not been listened to, and he talks about his inadequacy the previous years to capture his students' attention. He felt he had not been as dynamic a teacher as he wanted

to be. I am certain that he would not have revealed his feelings on this issue to me if we had only met a couple of times during, for example, his first year of teaching. By telling the story from his last practice teaching again, in this context, shows what a burden this must have been for him during all these years. It is not unlikely that this experience may have been the most influential factor in shaping his identity to begin with as a teacher. A research relationship for five years like ours builds up trust over time and allows for more in-depth studying of experiences, and what they truly mean *to* the participant, as well as the meaning they make *of* it. By telling and re-telling these stories, Jon recognizes what kind of teacher he is, which makes it possible for him to change and develop as a teacher. He said that he had worked very hard at changing this, and that he found that he was finally getting there, as he was starting to relax in his role as a teacher. This indicates that he was beginning to create a new story to live by.

Jon's classroom reflected his emphasis in teaching, which was for his students to work together as well as independently, on various tasks, according to different individual needs in a relaxed and respectful atmosphere. When I observed Jon in his classroom, I could see how he was the role model for the behavior he expected from them. Jon may be unconscious of the physical environment of his classroom, but he seemed to take good care in catering for his students' well-being. Frequently, Jon made a point of that he wanted his students to feel that his classroom was inviting, that they looked forward to coming to school, and that they would find some purpose in being there with him. Every time he talked about this, there was a warm smile on his face, his eyes expressed his fondness for his students. Jon wanted to become a good teacher. At the end of his fifth year of teaching, Jon stood at cross-roads. He knew what he wanted, and he knew what he wanted to avoid. He wanted to teach in real co-operation with similarly minded teachers, creating innovative learning environments, where every individual counts. Moreover, he knew that he could not accomplish this on his own. This had become an important part of his personal practical knowledge.

The above stories of Jon tell of a young man who is calm and quiet, even seemingly withdrawn. They also tell of a young teacher who finds ways to reach his students in a way where he will most

likely be remembered. They tell of joys and difficulties, dilemmas and successes, but most of all they are stories of how a beginning teacher has shaped his professional identity. He has been working on the initial image of the teacher he wanted to become. Thus he has begun to re-create that image.

### **6.8. Bringing Jon's Stories to a Close – Summary**

In this chapter I have given a view of Jon's stories of the development of his professional practice and his professional identity. They tell of his experiences in his first five years in teaching and of the meaning he made of these experiences. The stories show the development of a teacher from graduation, his the early years of teaching, through to the end of his fifth year. Jon talked about his expectations shortly before he walked into his first classroom as a certified teacher, about wanting to be a teacher who would be remembered by his students, not because it had been extremely entertaining, but rather because they had learnt something. Jon expressed his wish to be able to work in cooperation with other teachers. To him the role of the teacher is to educate, to prepare teaching well in order to teach well. Jon said that being a teacher involved an enormous responsibility, and he expressed worries about not being inventive enough in his teaching.

The challenges Jon had to deal with when he was faced with the reality of the classroom was to tackle himself; his insecurity and his diffidence. During the early years Jon talked about how he felt his calm and quiet nature getting in his way in the classroom, and he was uncertain about his duties as a teacher, both regarding students and parents. Jon often found himself painfully incompetent as a teacher when he was teaching subject matters which he did not know well enough. This resulted in too many low quality lessons, and caused a lack of self-confidence. Jon's major concern throughout his early years was to find ways to express his own interest in what he was teaching each time. At the end of his fifth year he expressed that he did not possess what was needed to achieve attention, he worried that he was not listened to. This is what agonized Jon most of all in his teaching; these were the limitations and his biggest dilemma he felt he was grappling with during the first years of teaching.

However, there were joys and successes as well. Jon's major source of support was his colleagues, especially during his second and third year, when a teacher on his team gave him the professional mentoring he needed. He felt it was essential to be able to discuss both with colleagues and his students alike, when he thought he had failed in his teaching. This attribute, having the guts to be sincere, earned him his students' respect and affection. Another source of joy for Jon was experiencing, late in his second year, that he started managing to plan the teaching a week ahead of time. That was one of his greatest learning experiences at that time. Then, during Jon's third year of teaching, he said he indeed experienced the importance of being well prepared and ready to carry out what he had planned; eventually understanding what careful planning involved.

The following is a summary of the ways in which Jon's stories have shown how he brought his personal knowledge from his home and upbringing, and both his personal and practical knowledge from his childhood and teenage schooling, to his teacher education and into his own teaching, making these experiences parts of his personal practical knowledge as a teacher the first five years of his teaching:

- his personal practical knowledge of the classroom teacher, who he perceived as a serious person, merged with the image of the teacher he initially wanted to become
- the experiences of the broken window figured into the emphasis he placed on trust in his relationships with his students
- the experiences of the broken window also figured into the emphasis he placed on giving his students responsibility and freedom in his classroom, where they worked independently on their study plans in a secure and relaxed atmosphere
- the experiences of being modest, quiet and shy himself and therefore not receiving much attention in school, he brought into the emphasis he placed on attending to the individual needs of his students and paying attention to each and one of them
- his personal and practical knowledge of the kind and calm Math teacher from his own schooling merged into the image of what constitutes a good teacher
- his personal practical knowledge of teachers who were orderly, who went quietly about their work without too many words but who were at the same time fair in their dealings with the students, affected the importance he placed on listening to and

discussing with his students, and always being self-consistent in his relationships with them

- he brought his personal knowledge, from his home and upbringing, of the importance of being socially active, to his practice which manifested itself in his desire to have a voice that was heard, e.g. among his colleagues, and later in the fourth and the fifth year, to be able to relax in the role of the teacher and be more sociable with his students in the classroom setting
- he fell back on the practical knowledge of the traditional teaching methods he knew so well from the time he was a student, in both compulsory and secondary school, during his early years of teaching
- the negative experiences of inadequate lesson planning in his practice teaching affected the professional knowledge of teaching he was creating during his early years in teaching
- he brought his personal and practical knowledge of the teacher who recognized his ability as a learner into his own teaching by placing high importance on reaching all his students wherever they were as learners

Jon's journey towards becoming the teacher he initially intended has indeed been a journey into uncertainties. At the end of his fifth year he was not there yet, and that some of what he had said in the beginning he no longer found important. Jon brought his personal practical knowledge of the classroom teacher who was a grave person, into the image of the teacher he initially wanted to become, as can be seen from his childhood stories, and about teaching being a serious matter and involving a great responsibility. He brought that image to his early years of teaching. Jon has been working with that image, and as his stories have shown, he is a teacher who more than anything had to grapple with his own diffidence that he found to be stifling at first. By telling and re-telling his stories of his travels into the uncertainties especially in his early years of teaching where he felt he had to be careful where he treaded. And then with more confidence in his fourth and fifth year, his personal practical knowledge has developed so that he has been able to turn his dilemmas and difficulties into successes, therefore he was able to re-create his identity as a teacher. Hence, Jon's stories tell of a teacher who has, like the Greek mythological hero Jason, sent the dove through the cliffs to find out if they will collapse. At the end of his fifth year, Jon knows the value of being more easy-going in his teaching, the value of humor in the classroom,

and he has started to relax in his role as a teacher. He now knows that the cliffs will not collapse, as he thought they would at the outset of his teaching.

Jon envisions a development where he will be more at ease with his students and the kind of teacher his students will experience some meaning of being with. Jon wants them to look forward to going to his classroom, and that they would feel good while learning. He admits that the journey towards the star he hitched his wagon to at the outset of his teaching has changed some elements of the idea he had in his mind of the star at that time; he knows that the journey itself towards the star is more important than reaching it. He acknowledges that during the journey the star always moves further ahead, and that that is the way it should be.





## Chapter 7 – Linda's Stories

*Linda*

*Fair, small, delicately formed*

*Pretty with laughing eyes*

*One who is firm with a will of iron*

*Yet kind*

*Linda alike Athena*

*Who was born almost fully-armed*

*From the forehead of her father Zeus*

*Entered her chosen field*

*Practically fully-fledged*

### 7.1 Introduction

*“I want to be a good teacher who is a positive role model ... I want to create a warm and pleasant learning environment. ... I want to make a difference in my students' lives” (L 1a), 9-10).*

This chapter is about Linda. It tells stories about her origins as an individual. The telling goes back to her childhood to provide insights into her experiences both from schooling and her personal life. As will be revealed these experiences as well as later experiences are the foundations on which Linda's understandings of her situation each time rest. Through our five years of research relationship she identified and explored her experiences, their contexts and the meaning she could make of them, as well as her learning through the development of professional practice.

The Metaphor of self as teacher entered our conversation at the end of the fifth year. Linda describes her metaphor of teaching as a bright, colorful abstract painting. It is full of life, with lots of children and a myriad of possibilities. It is changeable and can be powerful at

times. The landscape that may be seen is of a wood which is neither high nor thick with hills to climb that are surmountable. It is beautiful with healthy growth. Her abstract painting flows vigorously across and over the frame to be continued. The strokes of the brush are strong, purposeful and intense. The stories that are told in the abstract painting depict a determined artistic teacher who aims high with her brush in a sturdy hand right from the outset of her journey into the land of plenty. Every stone is turned in order to seek solutions, every obstacle in sight is not seen as a problem but as a task to overcome. Going the extra mile is the rule not the exception. Most of these stories reveal a determination to become nothing less than an excellent teacher and how learning experiences can be seen everywhere and in everything. Linda's abstract painting was virtually dry at the dawn of her teaching but she has indeed added strokes here and there and has taken it across and over the canvas as she re-created the vision of the teacher she wanted to become.

Linda started teaching at The Heath School, a grade 1–7 compulsory school. It is a small school, with a rather stable student number. This school is considered one of the very best schools in Reykjavik (it is an award winning school), with steady work force and a principal with the reputation of being a progressive leader in education. Several days before she saw her class for the first time she made this comment on her workplace:

I'm experiencing these days, having been in Heath School for two-three days, that is planning and preparing the school start, that I'm terribly well received, all these teachers and the principal, this is all tremendously warm and everything's so pleasant. ... And I'm extremely lucky in one respect, I'm working with a teacher. An experienced teacher. We are together sharing one big class [team-teaching]. So I'm kind of lucky to have her. I think I'm in kind of safe hands a bit, to have her totally by my side (L 1a), 11, 5–6).

This is what Linda is really looking forward to in her teaching, being teamed up with a veteran teacher who in fact was in her last year of teaching. A first year's teacher and a last year's teacher. Linda was

convinced that she would learn a great deal this year team-teaching with such an experienced teacher.

The telling begins with two childhood stories which provide insight into her experiences both from schooling and her personal life. These are followed by the six themes, or theme stories, which emerged from the data. Within each theme story there are series of stories from the time Linda decided to become a teacher until the end of her fifth year of teaching; a process through which she created and re-created the story of herself as a teacher. These stories include experiences from her early years when she was dealing with challenges of validating herself as a teacher through developing new practices which would help students to learn. These stories also show how she managed to create relationships with students, colleagues and parents alike. The closing stories depict how Linda understands herself as a teacher at the end of the fifth year of her teaching, and of how she has re-constructed her identity through the development of her professional practice. Each theme story concludes with my analysis and interpretation of how the stories within each theme story illuminate and can provide insights into the topic for which was chosen. The only exception from this is in the second theme story, 7.4. *Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years*, where there are four different sub-stories, two of which are analyzed together and the second two separately because of their dissimilar contents. Linda reviewed drafts of this chapter and offered her comments on each draft. She verified that the stories presented an authentic portrait of her development as a teacher. She granted her consent for the final version of her stories as they are told here. Therefore, the stories and the meanings presented here have been created collaboratively by the researcher (Lilja) and the research participant (Linda).

Now allow me to take you back in time and visit Linda's stories from her childhood.

## **7.2 Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual**

These two stories from Linda's childhood provide insights into her experiences in her schooling and her personal life. They tell of a resolute girl who treasured friendship and being able to express her

independence and creativity in school – and they tell of a girl who learned from her own experience the importance of a rich learning environment where mutual respect in relationships was expected.

### **A Pleasant Surprise**

She was really surprised. And so were her parents. They were in a parent meeting and her teacher said she must stick to her own handwriting. The teacher told them she put great emphasis on not casting all her students into the same mold. It was in there she actually realized what that meant which came as a pleasant surprise to her. All her girlfriends had the same handwriting, it was the handwriting that was taught, and it was apparently the correct handwriting. But her handwriting was very different. She can't remember where she got it from. Even though she managed the correct handwriting very well her teacher wanted her to stick to her special handwriting. She found it remarkable that her teacher made this effort to allow her to express herself and her independence in this way, it made her feel privileged. She was convinced that all her classmates felt the same. She loved school. Every single day she looked forward to going to school, and she loved her teacher. She felt she had had this teacher forever but in reality she was her teacher in grades four through seven. This teacher made school a good place to be in. Her affection and her heart of gold earned her respect and the friendship of her students. This feeling of friendship shaped the relationships of the children in her class. They worked together on creative tasks, knowing that this teacher and the teacher of the other class in the grade level were an intimate team of teachers who were trying new things in their teaching; exploring new territories. She sensed that these teachers were in a way experimenting with them and their teaching and she was a bit proud to be a part of that. Those classrooms were rich learning environments where every student mattered and where diversity was embraced. There were mentally handicapped/challenged children which was not the common practice. Every student was treated equally and this teacher made them feel important to her, that she was there for each one of them. Totally. She felt she was in good hands because her teacher knew exactly what she was doing, she felt that intuitively. The transition to secondary school was on the other hand not a

pleasant surprise. In fact it was difficult as it was so different from her warm, friendly environment with her previous teacher. Not that she had bad teachers in secondary school, the problem was that they were so many and they were rather insensitive. At least compared to her teacher. Especially one teacher who was also the parish priest. Her family was going through severe crisis and everybody in this small town knew about it. His attitudes towards her revealed his pity for her. She remembers always how horrible that felt. He said to her that she must be going through really rough times and that she could always turn to him for help. And he said that in front of the whole class! Everybody could hear him. She didn't want his help. She didn't need his pity. And she was most definitely not appreciative of the way she sensed he was imposing on her. She was indeed having hard times but she was not going to allow that to dominate her life and break her. She had always been very active socially, belonged to a large group of friends and participated in various sports. She kept herself really busy. She was not going to let the difficulties at home interfere with her life outside the home.

### **A Girl from a Small Town**

Linda was born in a small town, the second youngest of four brothers and sisters. They were born within a span of six years. Growing up they were really close, they always played together like the best of friends. Always. It made all the difference for her mother raising four children so close in age. The upbringing was traditional, rather strict but fair. Her artist father also held a regular job in order to support his family. All the children took interest in his art and spent long hours drawing and painting pictures. Her mother didn't work outside the home, except for odd jobs here and there, she took good care of the home and her children, they had hot meals at lunch time and she made sure that they did their homework before they went outside to play. Linda's big group of friends lived in and around her street which was full of laughter and playing children every day. She loved the neighborhood she grew up in, the street, the family house with cats and dogs and birds, a horse and a guinea-pig, in short; their way of life. Suddenly dark clouds piled up on the horizon. Her father got a judgment for a white-collar criminal offense and they lost everything!

Every single thing except their personal belongings. Her parents and her brothers and sister had to move to their grandmother's home which was rather far away but in the same town. Upon waiting for his judgment completion he took to drinking. This two year waiting period was difficult indeed. In fact this was a shocking experience for the whole family; moving to a new house, leaving their street and all their friends, having to abandon their life. The small town's gossip was massive. Linda, being only eleven years old, understood only fractions of the whole situation but she knew it was her mother's firm determination that kept everything together. She held her head high and looked people straight in the eye. She induced her children not to feel sorry for themselves but to look ahead and aim high. Linda knows that the line between breaking and surviving is very thin. She credits it to her mother that they survived this trauma, mentally and socially. Through this ordeal Linda found out who her real friends were. She had insisted on continuing her schooling in her old school where her friends were, she wanted to hold on to some aspect of her old life. The kids knew about her father and were asking questions like, why did you move, where is your car and one morning one of her classmates asked her if she'd seen the paper. There it was - on two whole pages about her father's imprisonment with pictures and interviews and everything! Consequently her mother always kept her children informed as to what was happening there and then in her father's case, they discussed openly how they felt, what was being said in town and visited him. All this helped Linda face her circumstances and it made her insightful towards her own feelings and emotions as well as other's. Her own social and spiritual conditions awoke her interest in people in general, in human relationships and in psychology -which she channeled by selecting various courses in psychology when in upper secondary school. Once her father returned home again another period of difficulties began involving his struggle to become a father and a husband again, his efforts to reinstate himself as a member of the society of this small town. This took its toll on the whole family and yet again it was her mother's strength that kept them together. Her father's struggle to be accepted in his community, to be accepted as an artist yielded character traits that Linda had not known he possessed; he revealed how resolute he could be and that he was a fighter who was going to prove to the

community that he was able to make it. And he did just that. Linda is convinced that she would not be where she is today and what she is today if she had not gone through this experience; all the difficulties made her stronger, indeed it made the whole family a stronger unity.

**Comments:** These two childhood stories tell of a steadfast girl who cherishes warmth and mutual respect in relationships and in learning environments where both independence and collaboration on creative tasks is expected. Looking back at her own schooling Linda's memory of her beloved teacher is vivid. This teacher, who believed in the individual's right to self-expression, fostered friendships, was creative and innovative. Linda draws on these positive experiences with her favorite teacher to create her own image of the teacher she wants to become.

There are several meanings she made of her experiences from this teacher's classroom, which became the foundation of the personal practical knowledge from her childhood schooling which she brought into her teacher education and later her own teaching. Linda understands how important it is for the teacher to make her fondness and positive expectations explicit to her students. This is woven through almost every story she tells of her teaching as will be shown. Having the notion of her teacher being a progressive teacher and how that was translated into a rich learning environment, gave her the understanding that this was an integral part of good teaching. Linda knew that she was in good hands because she felt that her teacher knew exactly what she was doing. The meaning she made of this was that professionalism is an important part of all good teaching, and she gained an understanding of what it entails. Linda's negative recollection of the teacher who pitied her and expressed that pity in front of the whole class gave her insights that can be traced in her stories from her own teaching. The meaning she made of this affected the way she approached for example difficult students and students who needed individual attention.

As the latter childhood story shows, Linda had to deal with circumstances which few teenagers are likely to come up against, emotionally and socially. They were devastating but ultimately she survived. If anything, all these difficulties only made her stronger. When grappling with the difficulties that followed the crisis in her family, Linda became more insightful towards her own feelings as

well as the feelings of others. Her happy childhood up to the crisis was a firm foundation to build on; her sociability won her lasting friendships. Additionally, her mother was her major role model in how to deal with hardships, and then later her father as well, when he overcame the difficulties which followed his imprisonment. The lessons learnt from these experiences Linda carried with her out to the rough seas of life, and they became parts of the personal knowledge she took with her into teacher education and then her teaching. Further, it is notable that being brought up in the home of an artist attributed to Linda's vision of the multiple artistic and creative dimensions of teaching, as will come into light in her stories to come.

All these experiences are parts of Linda's knowledge of schooling and teaching – thus they constitute parts of her initial personal practical knowledge, which later transmitted into her values, attitudes and perspectives that she carried with her to her teacher education program and to her teaching practices during her first five years of teaching. Making this connection is very important as it is the ground on which a teacher can build further development of her or his teaching.

As Linda's childhood stories have been revisited it is time to jump ahead in time in order to hear her teacher stories. In the next passage there are stories about career decisions and visions for the future.

### **7.3 Becoming a Teacher: Hitching One's Wagon to a Star**

In this part of the chapter we hear two stories. In the former story, Linda describes first why she decided against taking a teacher education program right after finishing her *stúdentspróf* [final exams from grammar school] and what led to the shift in her attitude to taking that path, and then she explains what she thinks the essence of teaching is. The latter story is to depict Linda's vision of the teacher she wants to become at the outset of her teaching.

#### **7.3.1 Deciding to Become a Teacher**

Disenchanted was the word Linda was searching for when she was explaining why she had not signed up for a teacher education program right after graduation from *stúdentspróf*, upper secondary school.



Becoming a teacher was indeed the career option she contemplated at that time but she took a detour. This is how that story goes:

To tell you the truth the general negative public attitudes and discussions concerning teachers and their workplace turned my interest away from teaching. This endless talk about their wages and working hours and the general disrespect pulled me away from teaching and towards psychology, because one of my favorite subjects in upper secondary school was psychology. Then when I moved to Norway with my partner I decided to enroll in psychology at a university there. It was very interesting but somehow not exciting enough; not pure psychology. I became pregnant and it certainly didn't help that I was really sick the first months, I even had to run out of classes to throw up so I sort of felt out of place there, but more importantly, I felt the zest wasn't really there. I left and started working in a kindergarten with the oldest kids – and it was there where I made my decision. The moment I started working with these kids, I found that I knew precisely what I wanted to do. I simply took off! I was like 'okay, this is my thing'. I felt it passionately and I was absolutely determined to go back home and into the IUE and I don't ever regret that. There and then I simply realized that the path was right in front of me. Besides, I had noticed that the general attitudes towards the teaching profession in Norway was quite the opposite to that in Iceland and the discussions regarding teachers and schooling in general was very positive which made me even more determined. Additionally, I found the working environment in the kindergarten extremely attractive, the creative methods of teaching and learning that were used in there appealed to me immensely. And I absolutely loved working with the children even though I found them a bit too young. However, it made me realize, that I would much rather want to teach older children, and I envisioned myself rather to be a class teacher using these methods, having my own class and following it for some years, – and that's what I'm going to do. We moved back to Iceland so that I could register for the IUE, I was accepted and couldn't wait to start. The sooner the better.

When I think about what the essence of teaching is, to my mind comes how it requires bearing so terribly many things in mind at the same time, for example all the planning and the preparations. And it

involves this huge responsibility, because these young ones are taking their first steps of schooling, which I find really exciting, come to think of it. I expect of myself to be ready for anything, every single day. Especially teaching so young children. Then, when I look back to my teachers, especially my favorite teacher, I find them also to be such good friends, sort of buddies, and I remember this affection and this, these perhaps small things which then turn out to play a big role. In my mind the classroom is a small community, with certain rules, where the teacher and the atmosphere in the class play the most important part for a fruitful education to take place. But of course, there are many things that need to fall into place in order for that to happen.

During my teacher education I developed a vivid idea of how I wanted my teaching to be like, which has become my philosophy of teaching. And now I have the feeling that my philosophy is right, and I've got this huge ambition to do well. I think that I will emphasize many things, like multiple teaching methods and to sort of trust my gut feeling when there is something I want to try out. And I want to spot there some possibilities perhaps to change and improve things and to have positive impact, - really dare to do things. This is what I hope I won't lose because I've got that. Usually, I sort of throw myself into things when I know what I want. I'm hoping that I'll continue doing just that; having the guts to venture on. But as I've simply no experience, I'm sort of jumping into the deep end, but the so-called reality of the schools doesn't really worry me because I find that the world of schools which is painted in here, in the IUE, has given me a pretty good picture of how it works, I think. And this course 'Being a class teacher' I did with you, really comes in handy right now, I can feel that.

Yes, I think I've got a pretty good picture of teaching entails. But look, I was perhaps not the most typical student teacher because I felt I knew exactly what I wanted from the teacher education program right from the beginning. In my experience too many student teachers went through their teacher education without much learning and by studying just before exams, and simply imitate everything like parrots and not taking anything in. I think that one can go through this program in so many different ways. I could absolutely sense which students were doing this because of some interest and which weren't.

If you really attend to your studies, and embrace what you are learning then you can really be satisfied. And that is what I actually did. I really liked the readings and I tried to envision it in practice every time. I entered this teacher education program because I totally knew that this was something that I wanted to do. However, there were things lacking, like discussions on ethical issues regarding inclusion for example. I found that was rather lacking in my teacher education program. Obviously, school should be for all students, that sounds best, but I found that opinions on inclusion were extremely controversial amongst my fellow students, especially following each period of student teaching. We all have to realize and understand how extremely big a factor inclusion is in this job. I would have liked to have a more specific, yes, clear-cut line on how to approach this and much more discussion on how this is in reality. That's what I felt was missing from my teacher education. But at the same time I know that this is a very difficult task to learn during teacher education as this is obviously something which is mostly learnt through work experience.

In my experience from student teaching, the classroom is a place where I feel at home and now I truly look forward to meeting my students, and to discover perhaps how much one can do with them once I have managed to reach them all, which I hope I will do and which I *will* do. I like to work with people and find it easy to communicate with them. I think that will be of value for me in this job. I can feel that already. Like I said, I knew what I wanted from the teacher education, which was to become a good teacher – and I *will* become a good teacher! [she adds laughingly] I've been aiming at becoming a teacher for so many years that I can't wait to go out into the field, and become that good teacher. (L 1a), 4-9, 10-11)

In this conversation, which took place few days before she took her first job as a newly graduated teacher, Linda said that in her mind the road ahead seemed pretty smooth, meaning that she did not anticipate any problems in particular during her first year of teaching except for the obvious fact she needed to get a better hang of instructional matters, “but there are probably difficulties ahead”, she remarked without being able to think of any as the joy of starting teaching outweighs possible concerns. Linda revealed to me that if she in actual fact sets her mind on

something then she would not let anything get in her way. I was soon to find out how true that was as Linda did nothing by halves!

### **7.3.2 The Vision of the Teacher Linda Wants to Become**

It was apparent from the beginning that Linda perceived teaching to be something remarkable. This is something that she had been aiming at “for such a long time. It’s naturally amazing to have finished and find that this is totally what I want” (L 1a), 9-10). Linda made a point of expressing that in spite of three years teacher education she is not fully educated as a teacher; that it is a life-long learning:

I am a teacher now but I’ve got a long way to go, I’m just half way there, not even that. I am aware of that this is something that comes with vast experience. I intend to continue my studies which means that just one phase is over and the next one follows. I find it really odd to tell people that I’m actually *a teacher*! [There is a tinge of pride in her voice.] You asked me what kind of teacher I want to become, what my vision is. Well, – I want to be a good teacher who places emphasis on those elements that we have learned so much about in the IUE, that is to draw on a multiplicity of methods and assignments. And yes, to look to all these issues which are so much discussed there. I intend to be a positive teacher and avoid the salary-nagging in the staff-room. I would not be here unless I chose to. I want to receive my students warmly and create a kind and pleasant learning environment. I want to be a teacher who makes a difference in my students' lives, who influences them and who is a positive role model for them. Also, I intend to make a point of continuing my education, to read up on stuff in my field and not to stagnate on my job. And try to be sort of an open and encouraging teacher (L 1a), 9-10).

Linda looked forward to teaching, she was certain that it would entail a lot of hard work which at the same time was enjoyable. She knew that teachers have to be very organized and as that is one of her stronger sides, it will not be problematic for her. In fact, it “really surprises me that I in fact don’t dread anything, I’ve really thought about this. Like I say, I look so much forward to embarking on this job, that it overshadows everything else” (L, 1a), 10-11).

**Comments:** Grade one was Linda's first class, it was a big class with the two teachers team-teaching in one big classroom. As is usual in the youngest grades in Iceland, the homeroom teacher teaches all the subjects except perhaps physical education, home economics, sewing, carpentry, music and the visual arts.

Linda's reference to the negative discussion regarding teachers (in Iceland) in the first story concerns the prevailing view of the general public that the teacher's job only consists of the actual hours he or she spends with students in the classroom. This prevailing view has resulted in negativism amongst teachers themselves every time their contract was in the process of a renewal, as this "negativism" Linda is referring to transmitted beyond the teaching profession, and it added to the existing attitudes towards teachers as being a profession which was not held in high regard. This affected Linda's career decision at that time.

It should also be noted that Linda's interest in psychology is not surprising in light of her childhood and teenage experiences as can be seen in her childhood stories. The severe crisis her family had to deal with gave her an understanding of people beyond what one might expect from teenagers and which ignited an interest to probe this further. Psychology however, was not what Linda was looking for, even though she found it interesting as such. The positive attitudes she experienced towards teachers in Norway and working with the children in the kindergarten, gave her insight into what her future profession should be. Once removed out of the negative discourse in Iceland, coupled with a new perspective she inevitably gained from living and working in a new environment, Linda recuperated her calling to become a teacher. There was no doubt in her mind.

Further, it is observable how her image of the classroom is closely linked to her favorite teacher from grades four through seven, and how that ties into her understanding of what good teaching constitutes. When working in the kindergarten in Norway Linda's favorite teacher came back into her memory and she made a connection there: she realized that she could channel her interest in working with people together with expressing her need for creativity through being a teacher. Before Linda started her first teaching job she made a point of that teaching involved a great responsibility, that preparing each lesson was a lot of work where you have to mind even the tiniest

details and that the classroom should be viewed as a small community. Already at that point in time, Linda understood the importance of constructing emotionally as well as physically secure frame for the children to move within, because it was a well-established part of the personal practical knowledge she carried with her from her childhood schooling. Linda draws on these positive experiences with her favorite teacher to create her own image of the teacher she wants to become. Linda's stories will manifest her emphasis in this matter.

During her teacher education Linda developed a vivid idea of what she wanted her teaching to be like. What is especially worthy of note here is Linda's *single-minded* vision of what she aimed towards in her teaching; she felt that her philosophy was right, she knew what she wanted and she had the ambition to do almost whatever it takes to be able to realize her vision and her ideals. In addition, it is interesting to see how realistic Linda was regarding her own ability and her personal competence to attain her goals. She said that she does not let *anything* get in her way when she knew what she wanted and that she was going to continue to be bold and take risks concerning her teaching. This was indeed a part of the personal knowledge Linda brought with her from her home and upbringing. Linda's firm conviction deserves special emphasis in light of the fact that this was exactly what she did, sometimes taking it to extremes as coming stories will show. Further, Linda only had the experience from her student teaching but she did indeed take advantage of these periods in her teacher education program by applying for placements in what she knew to be "progressive" schools with "progressive" teachers. Her unusual determination and sharp focus during her teacher education was an important factor in her development as a teacher.

Linda had very clear ideas on what she thought good teaching entailed. As seen in the latter story she articulated that successfully, in so that she gets to the core of what it entails. Her ideas clearly reveal the impact of the practices of her favorite teacher on her image of what teaching is about. Linda worked with this image in her teacher education where she added dimensions to it and then took that into her beginning teaching as her personal practical knowledge. The upcoming stories of Linda will indeed tell of such a teacher, a teacher who unhesitatingly would turn every stone to seek solutions to

whatever comes up along the way. Additionally, Linda wanted to avoid what she called “salary-nagging”. What she was referring to here, was her experience from practice teaching where the discussions in every staff-room tended to revolve around teachers' wages. Linda wanted to take a positive stance as she had indeed taken an informed decision to become a teacher. A further interesting point here is Linda's idea that being a good teacher involves continuing your education, it is a life-long learning. During the five years of our research relationship, Linda was pregnant twice and had to keep to her bed for weeks each time. She contacted me to ask for advice on readings and the latest material, articles and books on education, as she wanted to make the best possible use of that time. The above stories of Linda show that right from the outset of her teaching she hitched her wagon of teaching to the bright star of her pedagogical vision.

In the next section of this chapter there are four stories which present Linda's experiences of the early years of her teaching and the ways she dealt with challenges in the realities.

#### **7.4 Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years – Dealing with Challenges in the Realities**

In this section of the chapter we hear comprehensive stories from Linda's first year of teaching, when she was team-teaching grade one with Brynja, a veteran teacher in her last year before retirement. The days before Linda entered her first workplace she expressed pure excitement about what was ahead. However, her journey cannot be understood without looking at it in connection with Brynja, as they were teaching side-by-side the same group of students in the same classroom.

##### **7.4.1 Working with an Experienced Teacher**

Few weeks into Linda's first year, she said at first that everything was “just fine, there is nothing wrong ...”. Then she adds: “This is a very good group of students, a bit big though, but I don't know, it's just going well somehow. Anyway there is nothing wrong, really” (L 1b), 1). Linda sounded cautious, and she stressed that she was of course working with a veteran teacher which perhaps gave her a different “start” from other novice teachers. I decided to probe it further with Linda and asked her: 'Are things going so well because you share the

same pedagogy, the same ideals of teaching?' Linda reacted instantly with 'NO!' Then she hesitantly said that they were so unlike, she had only been teaching for two months and Brynja had "sort of completely different ideas" (L 1b), 2) from hers. Linda sighed, and said that "she is simply so extremely ingrained – and she mostly looks up what was being done in grade one the year before. As if we were simply supposed to keep that!" (L 1b), 2). Following is the story about Linda's disappointments in the beginning of her career as a teacher. It is divided into two sub-stories in order to make Linda's meaning more explicit:

To begin with I of course decided to wait and see what kind of teacher Brynja was, and how she did things, because I wanted to learn from her. And of corse I let her control for example the reading lessons as I obviously didn't know how they worked, so to speak. I was so eager to learn as much as possible from this experienced teacher, but to my disappointment we turned out to be on completely different poles as teachers. Soon I found out that Brynja, who was in her last year before retirement, didn't in the least share my ideas and visions of what teaching and learning is about. I must say that I found that extremely stifling as it meant that I wasn't even close to doing what I had intended. I wanted to do a lot more of projects and themes and work more creatively. We didn't do enough of that, and she's very much old school. She just wanted to use what the first grade teacher did last year but I simply *could not* do that.

Then when I managed to make Brynja understand, that I didn't want to use all the material and stuff from last year's first grade teachers, it meant that I had to do everything myself. All the planning, all the preparations, finding all the material and arrange everything including finding ways to ignite the students' interest, because Brynja just pulled out lesson plans from some teachers' meeting since '79, for god's sake! Typed on paper, and the paper had turned yellow, it was so old! I must say that I was a bit ashamed that she was so unprofessional – especially since she could use newly published material, but she didn't seem to be interested in it at all! She showed me a book that the kids had done in grade one the year before. I wanted to do it differently, and have been a bit pushy there. I feel that she's a bit relieved though, 'cause it's kind of less work for her. – I've tried to talk to Brynja about this, but I felt that she wasn't really listening, because; *this is how it is*



*and this is how it should be.* It's not possible to discuss with her, I found that wicked. This really put me down 'cause I was just trying to do what I could.

Another thing regarding Brynja I found difficult is her conduct towards the children. I was terribly worried, because she can be so harsh to them. They were beginning to learn how to write and they found writing of course really difficult, they got tired in their hands and couldn't necessarily control the pencil, it was enough for them learning the right directions of writing each letter. But she walked around with an eraser and erased everything and told them to start again. So, every time she approached their tables the children started erasing and erasing. I totally disagree with this, I think this is very wrong. And then when I was teaching lettering I told them to put the eraser away: 'I say stop erasing, this is fine' and then again Brynja says: 'No it isn't'. That was difficult, terribly, because I think that these contrasting ways can make the children confused and insecure. So I decided to talk to Brynja about how wrong I found this erasing thing, that they were writing the letters correctly, the rest was practice. She gave in a bit, and it's a bit better but not enough, I think. Brynja simply wanted the children to get used to doing this correctly from day one, but I couldn't disagree more; this is such a big, diverse group they can't of course be expected all of them to perform the same way, but that's what she wanted, because that's how it's always been! This is my understanding of how Brynja's attitudes towards the students and the teaching appeared.

But all in all, I'm incredibly thankful though, for not being kind of insecure with what I think is right. I'm terribly glad that I have the guts to say what I think even though I'm wet behind the ears. I think it's very important to be straightforward, and come right out with what I feel is not right. Mind you, I could have taken the easy way out by just allowing Brynja to run things, but I wanted to make my own stuff, so I put an extreme amount of work into just the first weeks, so now I've got lots of stuff which she didn't want to have anything to do with. So by mid-year I was tired. Dead tired always. I was actually out after each day the first weeks as I totally drowned myself in work. I was doing considerably much more than I was supposed to but that's what

I wanted to do. Even though I put all this work into my teaching it was never a question of rivalry between us like; I've done more, you less, it wasn't like that. It's just, I have of course asked for it, – and got it! The thing is, I wanted more liveliness in the classroom, more creativity, I wanted my students to be active, not always turning this or that page. I totally know what I want. Anyway, I think that this collaboration between us was in fact the most difficult part of the teaching this year and I was definitely not prepared for that. (L 1b), 3, 9-14)

Linda looks at me and I asked her cautiously if she would have preferred to be alone in her teaching. “Yes”, she answered, with a quiet laughter: “This two teacher system or whatever it's called, this team-teaching, I'm not much into that, at least not right now, I don't like it”. – “Why is that, do you think?”, I asked. I could see that Linda was a bit hesitant, so I added: “Is it the team-teaching per se, or is it the teacher you're teamed with, do you think?” – “Yea ..., well ..., look, I just think ...”. – I could sense that Linda was not comfortable with criticizing Brynja, so I ensured her that nothing would be revealed in my writings which would give away the identity of Brynja. We discussed the meaning of that for a little while, then she told me another story to explain to me what she meant when she said she did not like team-teaching and preferred to be on her own:

Brynja had for example this tendency to make decisions without consulting me and I found that extremely frustrating. Like in the very first formal parent meeting early in the fall where we introduced and discussed the program for our first grade teaching that school year, among other things. Suddenly, Brynja announced that she was going to take care of mother tongue teaching, and that I would be teaching Mathematics! I was totally taken by surprise. There are issues like that which I find terribly wicked. Look, the problem was not that I disagreed entirely with that one of us kind of supervised one or more subjects. I mean, two of us were working as class teachers, both in charge of one big class, and it's okay if one of us is more sort of responsible for teaching perhaps the Mother tongue, but not splitting the subjects totally between us, because each of us had to be able to teach everything, and know exactly what was going on in the class from A-Z. There was no way that I could agree with breaking up the

subjects like that. Brynja had never mentioned this possibility to me so I felt I was sort of pushed against the wall in that parent meeting.

Then, there was this one smart lady in the meeting, one mother who said: 'Hang on, will you Linda, then exclusively be teaching Math and will Brynja be teaching the Mother tongue?' – and I just seize upon that and said: 'No!', I said: 'No, of course not, because we are two class teachers in charge of one class and if I'm for example sick one or more days she must be able to jump in with the Math teaching and know exactly what's going on and be able to cut in at any time and vice versa'. Then I said: 'I naturally majored in Mother tongue teaching, and of course I'll teach Mother tongue like everything else'. And this somehow, this was extremely weird, and basically very annoying, because she put forth definite ideas there without discussing them with me first and she plunged this forth in a room full of parents. I found that awfully *wicked*. Then when I'd said this, she became a bit awkward and said: 'Yeah, yeah, right, of course' and something like that. But then on the other hand, it came to light that she never ever looked at the Math, she had not taught one single Math lesson, she didn't even know where we were. [Linda laughs at this recollection, but I can see that she feels a bit embarrassed telling me this.] Look, I found it somewhat inappropriate for me, a beginning teacher, to oppose the veteran teacher like that in a parent meeting, but on the other hand I found this very unprofessional of Brynja. To be honest, I was rather surprised that an experienced teacher like that approached this issue in this fashion, especially because she had been in a two teacher system before.

I decided to take this up with her after the meeting, and I told her there was no way that I wouldn't also be teaching the Mother tongue. I intended to be fully active, take full responsibility of that teaching just like her. And she said okay. But in spite of that Brynja kept out of the Math teaching, like when I was sick for the first time the other day, for two days, there was no Math at all! Mind you, I suspected that the reason for this was because the Math material is new, it is very different from the one that it was replacing and it was new to Brynja, so this was something that she pushed away. She in fact is totally freeing herself, especially now! Well, I don't know ... But there must

also be some other explanation for Brynja's attitude towards the Math teaching, which I really must talk to her about. But, ehm, I'm awfully surprised by this. In fact, it has been incredibly difficult to talk to her. She's really nice, and has been good to work with her in many ways and everything, but it's incredibly difficult to discuss something, some issues with her.

Our relationship stayed the same the whole year. Just imagine, I was the one thinking at the beginning of the year, that I would be teaching with a veteran teacher with really interesting ideas and that I would be able to dive into her oceans of experience. But not much was there to gain. On the other hand, all the tiniest details on, ah, you know, what the traditional school is about, I learned totally how it is supposed to work. Like for example the secretarial side of teaching, which I'm indeed grateful for having been able to learn from her. I'm sure that will come in handy. But to be quite honest, I was more up to date on all the teaching methods, and how to break up the lessons, and do something interesting, and I was the one who brought in new ideas and ... So this has been an extremely difficult winter, - yes, totally [she adds with a deep sigh]. Honestly, I got the feeling that Brynja had hoped that she would be teaching with a beginning teacher who she could manipulate. Yea, well, what can you say, anyway that's the feeling I got. [There is laughter in Linda's voice but the seriousness in her eyes revealed her true feelings, as we both knew that she was not to be manipulated, she always tried to be true to her own ideals.] Working with a teacher like that is extremely difficult, it really sucks up you energy! What Brynja was always trying to do was to put me into a certain framework, which I was supposed to work within, I was never to go outside of that. Like using fill-in books and page 30 for everyone and just silence. I simply do not function in that kind of environment, let alone the 6 and 7 year olds. Though it's okay once in a while. As this was Brynja's last year of teaching, I think that perhaps that was the reason why she did not put all her energy into it. In her mind she had already left, I think. (L 1b), 6-8, 1c), 2-5)

### 7.4.2 It Is a Challenge Planning Lessons with a Traditional Teacher

Planning teaching is difficult. It is not because Linda does not have ideas, it is not because she does not have the courage to carry her ideas out; it is mainly because Linda and Brynja do not connect in their attitudes towards teaching and learning, they do not speak the same 'pedagogical language' as Linda described it, which results, for example, in ineffective lesson planning, as it was very often unclear who was going to do what as in; "...am I supposed to do this, or am I supposed to do that, or have we already finished this, should I perhaps do something else? I find this really very vague, somehow" (L 1b), 6). Linda would have wanted to do more long-term planning, not just this week-to-week planning but "right now there is no way I can catch up with that, I have not as yet gained the perspective needed, one is simply always taking one step at a time" (L 1b), 5), she said with slight laughter in her voice. And on a more serious note she added that teaching with Brynja had not helped her in this matter. The story Linda tells to elaborate on the lesson planning runs like this:

This was in a science lesson, a unit on the body and she was delivering the opening of it and I just thought 'what *is* she doing!' She only said 'what's the name of this?' and pointed to her forehead, and the students said 'forehead', and 'what's this and what's that', and this was her teaching, that's the opening! And half of the class was looking out of the window. I've experienced many such instances, and I sort of think she didn't realize how absolutely important it is how they are planned. However, watching the teaching of Brynja, this experienced teacher, her instructions and beginnings of a unit were valuable learning moments for me in many ways. Sometimes my head was really exploding at the end of the day because some of the things she did and I would like to do, but then there were all these things she did that I will *never* do. I found that I was sort of non-stop in the evaluation mode. School for Brynja was when all the students were quietly working in their fill-in books, each of them in their seats.

Contrary to this I think that teaching is about finding various ways to capture our students' enthusiasm, to appeal to their senses, both visually and figuratively. Let me explain what I mean: I find that the start of a unit extremely important, for example. I want to do that well,

but Brynja didn't seem to be conscious of the value of it, and I found that really odd. So the lessons that I actually planned on my own were the ones each week when Brynja was free from teaching, which meant that I was alone with the whole class and I really enjoyed that. Then I organized the teaching the way I totally wanted it to be; drawing on multiple ideas and teaching methods, using a variety of material and sources, but Brynja's usual reaction to what I did was 'yea, yea, I've done that, been there, so you can take care of this now', which really made me even dive more vigorously into the planning. Well, the fact is I needed to work creatively with my students and I find it great fun. I'm finally out there teaching and I'm so totally interested in this. But I think Brynja found that rather futile and pedant sometimes. I wasn't doing any nonsense or anything, this was just some extra work I put in because I find it extremely important to put up for example pictures or something that catches the eye of these six year old children. I also wanted to do much more project work and be more creative with the students. I have talked to Brynja about this and she just said 'yea, yea, we must do that', and then nothing happend. I *knew* that it would all rest on me.

There are so many projects I wish we had already started, right in the beginning of the school year, for example traffic and traffic rules, and about friendship, some projects like that, but somehow that did not happen. There were so many *such* tasks I just wish we had undertaken, and let the fill-in-books wait a bit. But they must be opened right away, on this page and everybody start! They are okay up to a certain point, but I found that a bit of a harsh beginning for a six year old. I think they need more play and activity, more creativity. Now, for example, is the end of the first term [of three terms] and then we have what we call parent-communication day. The parents will come in and have a look at what their children have been doing in school, and I'm rather desperate, because even though the students have done this and that fill-in book I feel that I don't have enough to show them which I'm really proud of.

The other day I started this assignment where the children chose a sentence from a story and each of them illustrated their sentence, and then I wanted to examine with them a beginning, a middle and an end of a story and all that. Then Brynja took over as I had to teach

somewhere else, and the day after I could see that all the pictures were up on the wall, and it turns out that she did it all herself. She simply cut off this task. So now, I can not tell the parents what the purpose of this assignment was. Yea, yea, it's true, it's all hanging there very neatly on the wall, good pictures, but all of them put in the right order of events *by the teacher!* So I find it a bit sad not being able to tell the parents about this assignment, because Brynja cut it off. What I had hoped would come out of it did not, in fact. The point was also for them to realize what a 'course of events' is. For them, now, these are just pictures on the wall. This wasn't the first time something like this happened and it irritated me when I came in the day after. Another thing with the lesson planning with Brynja is that she never seemed to want to even try to do these projects, which are usually done with grade one, in a different way than what was usually done. Everything was simply such a big deal in her eyes.

In this school, grade one has *always* done the project on Genesis creation in the same simple way; each of them is given a sentence which they then have to illustrate, and put in their Christian Studies folder. I wanted to do this a bit differently and I did. It turned out to be really successful. I divided them into groups, where each group chose one day of the creation, and they worked on all the days with a real variety of material and colors and methods, and it turned out extremely well. But I never got to hear that from her, not until all the other teachers had talked about how neat this was, and they came by our classroom just to have a look. Then Brynja sort of muttered 'yea, this is very good' and that's all. But I'm sure she accepted this. (L 1b) 8-16, L 1c) 5, L 3, 3)

What I would also have liked to do was to plan something with the grade two teachers. Our facilities were great. We had two big classrooms and a third one between the two, which is empty most of the time. I would have liked that we had more flow between grades one and two, used this empty space, do something different sometimes, instead of each grade remaining always in their own classrooms. I talked to them about this, and we agreed to meet in order to plan a unit where our students would work together. We talked about doing a unit on fairytales and folklores, some definite

unit like that, and bring all the students together. When we sat down in the meeting they turned out to be *terribly* negative: This was too much work, there were too many groups, too few teachers, too little time, – they teased out *everything* possible which might work against this. I just sat there and I wanted to put my foot down and say that I'd just handle this myself, do all the organizing and the whole thing, but at this exact point in time I simply did not have the time needed, and I was really irritated because of this, because this can of course be done. We could for example pull in the other teachers who teach these two grades.

This is the only time we sat down to plan something together and nothing came out of it and nothing will come out of it. But I perhaps might have ..., I might have been able to push this through by being a bit pushy and assertive, but I didn't possess that at that particular time. When the principal called me in for a staff interview a bit later I talked about that I found this situation not acceptable, and he just agreed with me. This talk about cooperation is only on the surface, like this 'yes, let's meet by all means, and plan this' and blablabla, and 'let's launch it before Easter' kind of thing, but when one sits down with them there is no vigor. Then this can't be done. It turned out that this way of working is totally new to these teachers, and I simply didn't know that the situation was like that. There are about five, six teachers who can come in and take part, so this can be done. But you've got to have a little faith, be a little positive if it's to work. But then again if you don't, nothing will come out of it. I have tried to break these traditions, but I find that extremely difficult. (L 1c), 6-7)

Towards the end of Linda's first year she felt that what was now left to do was to be able to close it so that she could be proud of her work. She felt that she had learnt a lot this first year of teaching, where she in the beginning was "such a baby" somehow, just floating along. What mattered most for her was to be able to plan the last weeks of school very carefully to bring forth a satisfying closure.

**Comments:** At the end of the first year Linda had managed to reach her students, and she could sense that they felt good in her presence and that they sought her company. In spite of reality being somewhat different to her expectations, Linda saw these experiences as learning



opportunities as it meant that she was learning a great deal about herself and what was important to her as a beginning teacher. As a first year teacher she seemed to me as an almost fully-fledged teacher, but she obviously felt that there was still a lot to learn.

It is notable that to begin with Linda was hesitant in telling how difficult it was to team-teach with Brynja. In our conversation I sensed her difficulty and that gave me a chance to explore it in more detail, and a sort of floodgate opened as the former story clearly depicts. It may not be common for a beginning teacher to be so self-assured in the interaction with a veteran teacher like Linda demonstrates in this telling, but simultaneously respectful. As can be seen, Linda was honest in her dealings with Brynja and acted according to her own conviction; for example when she told Brynja what she thought when she went around with the eraser, because it was Linda's strong belief that this was very wrong. Linda also seems to have been fair in her judgements regarding Brynja, as she made a point of mentioning to me that Brynja was really a nice person and that it was good to work with her in many ways even though she disagreed with her on many issues concerning the pedagogy of teaching and learning. Linda also made a point of saying that she had learnt a great deal from working with Brynja, in spite of their differences, and that she found all that to be important learning experiences. It is clear from the former story that already in her first year of teaching Linda displayed the strength of character, in her relationships with Brynja, which she had attained in her childhood home and upbringing and had become a definite part of the personal knowledge that she brought to her teaching.

Linda found it frustrating when Brynja made decisions without consulting her first. What she is referring to here was her experience from her practice teaching. Student teachers in The IUE teacher education program went out in pairs (and groups of three) and they had to prepare all their teaching together. When they had finalized the lesson plans together they very often split the actual teaching between them, meaning that one of them was responsible for the teaching of particular lessons with the other student teacher(s) in the role of an observer or assistant to the one in charge. This is what Linda perceived team-teaching should be like, and that is what she looked forward to and had hoped for when team-teaching with a veteran

teacher. Therefore, Linda is very disappointed with how their collaboration turned out. I do not think that many novice teachers could or would dare to be similarly assertive in the first parent meeting or in the relationships with a veteran teacher as Linda was – yet respectful of her colleague's experiences.

I would like to draw attention to the phrase 'I don't know' in the former story, which Linda said after she had expressed a very clear-cut opinion on Brynja's conduct in regard to the teaching of Math: "like now ... She is totally freeing herself" (L 1b), 7). One could wonder why Linda *says I don't know* there? What possible affect can that have on the opinion she had just expressed? By saying this she was probably backing off a little, because she did not want to seem arrogant, she did not want to seem like the novice who knows better than the veteran teacher. This could mean that it is difficult for the beginning teacher to criticize an experienced teacher when that teacher is behaving differently from what the novice teacher believes to be right, and when it is the opposite to the novice's ideals and visions. This experience was probably Linda's greatest disappointment in all her first year of teaching. It was also an important learning experience for her which became an additional part of her personal practical knowledge as a beginning teacher. What she learnt was that her pedagogical ideas and visions were not highly regarded among the more experienced teachers (like the latter story on working with the first and second grade teachers also supports), therefore she understood that she would have to be careful not to tread on the veteran teachers' toes by infringing on their spheres.

Like most novices Linda had explicit opinions on how she wanted her teaching to be; how to plan her teaching and the learning of her students, as she explained when describing her vision: "I want to be a good teacher who places emphasis on those elements that we have learned so much about in the IUE, that is to draw on a multiplicity of methods and assignments" (L 1a), 10). These elements were a significant part of Linda's personal practical knowledge because she had experienced them in the classroom of her favorite teacher. Lesson planning has repeatedly been reported as a particularly difficult task for beginning teachers, which all too often results in ineffective teaching and learning in their classrooms. The situation in which

Linda found herself, where she and her teacher partner Brynja did not speak the same *pedagogical language* as Linda puts it, created huge frustration for Linda, as can be seen in the latter story, especially when she found out how different indeed her philosophy was from Brynja's. As Linda did not want to conform entirely to Brynja's 'old school methods', their lesson planning ended up somewhat like this: *I will do it my way and you will do it your way*. This meant that Linda could plan at least some of the lessons, and some units, according to her own ideas and vision, which once again shows her determination when she believes she was doing the right thing.

Interestingly enough, in spite of their differences, Linda gives credit to Brynja because when observing her teaching, it frequently turned out to be a valuable learning moment for Linda. Both in the sense that there are of course number of things a novice can indeed learn from a veteran teacher, as well as in gaining insights into how *not* to do things in the classroom, for example when Brynja started the unit on the body.

Another interesting observation in the latter story is that despite being the novice in the group of the first and second grade teachers, Linda had the backbone to try and gather support from them in order to plan a cooperative unit according to what she believed to be the way to work. Even though she did not manage to drag them along, she did not just leave it there, instead she argued her case with the principal who seemed to support her view. It has already been brought out that Linda wanted to become a positive teacher who dared to try things out. The above stories of lesson planning depict such a teacher, a teacher who was not just all talk but a teacher who really tried to carry her ideas and passions in teaching through. It was her conviction that if you do not try, nothing will happen. The challenges she met in the realities were plenty and it seems to me that she managed them head on with the determination which turned out to be very characteristic for her and was indeed a part of the practical knowledge from her home and upbringing that infused her practice.

Considering everything mentioned, this shows how determined Linda was to utilize every opportunity to learn, how she saw each difficulty, each obstacle and each objection as a challenge to overcome. These elements of Linda's character, who in spite of

difference in age and experience dared to assert herself, manifested itself in the stories she tells from her first year of teaching when working side by side in the same classroom with Brynja.

#### **7.4.3 Dealing with Difficult Students**

“No, I can't say that I experienced any kind of behavioral problems during my first two years in the Heath School”, Linda says when discussing classroom management at the end of her third year. But she did not find that surprising as most of these kids had been in the same kindergarten for years. They had visited their future school as a group several times during their last year in kindergarten. Linda felt that she had been incredibly lucky, as her first group of students were on the whole well behaving children who typically came from a stable background. The same, on the other hand, could not be said about her students in The Ridge School which was a school in a neighborhood in the making, with all the possible growing pains of such an environment. Linda had moved to this area during the spring term of her second year of teaching and sought a position in this school the following school year as it was close to her home. I visited Linda in her classroom late in her third year of teaching, and could immediately see that this was a very diverse group of students, behaviorally as well as intellectually, which she indeed seemed to manage extremely well. When we discussed this she told me that she had been totally taken aback when she met them in the fall, because she felt they were way beyond ‘bad’ behavior; the situation was much more serious than that, as the following two stories reveal:

I got a difficult class with 14 boys and 7 girls. The boys were incredibly presumptuous and rude and there was no line which they wouldn't cross. I have never known a group of children like that, they are incredibly secure in their insecurity by really trying to be tough in their insecurity. I would never have believed that kids would go this far in just being so impolite and totally disrespectful. Not just towards me but also towards their classmates, the school, the environment and simply towards everybody and everything. I'm the fourth teacher who teaches this grade three class, which makes them terribly torn. I had been warned against this class and these kids as well as their parents,

who had been earmarked as well, and I thought 'what am I getting myself into'.

This was a great challenge, and it really became straining. All my tricks that I had been using in The Heath School became totally useless in there, all of a sudden nothing worked. I remember that I came home the first days and the first weeks and I just felt devastated, I simply didn't know what to do. I just saw that this was a group of kids who were completely lost. They didn't know their role nor their place and that created this huge apprehension. Additionally, there was this rivalry between classmates, between classes, so this came from all directions somehow. I could spot the main actors right away, I could soon map the class. This is of course a new neighborhood, and everyone is simply marking their spot. The atmosphere was like this: 'You are my friend and you are not my friend, - will you play with me next month and will you play for the next three months!' They were safeguarding themselves back and forth like this, and it created massive tension. I really had to sit down and think: 'Well now, if I'm to survive this winter, I most certainly will need to make a supreme effort!'

One thing I soon discovered was that there was hardly any information around on these kids. There were some reports, but I definitely didn't find the answers I felt I needed to be able to understand what was really going on in this group. I went to the assistant principal and said that there is something very much wrong in this group, and that I needed more detailed information. Then, eventually, I'm told that the core of the problems ran so much deeper and that that was something I was not supposed to know! Can you imagine! But that was precisely what I felt I needed to know from day one. They were for example much more disadvantaged academically than I could imagine possible, it actually came as a shock to me. So it was a kind of a challenge for me to find out about their understandings and potential, what they knew and were able to do.

Obtaining this information meant that I acquired so much more understanding on how the kids felt, what was really happening and that meant I approached the whole situation very differently. I decided not to use any textbooks or such 'stuff' the first weeks, that could come later, as they were not in that frame of mind. Instead, I

concentrated on their social attitudes and relationships through games, the arts, and simply talking to them, discussing with them, so the first weeks were spent on approaching them, and just getting to know them. These kids were really just unhappy children who needed a grown-up to talk to, someone who listened to them and cared enough about them not to give up on them right away. They would ask me for example: 'Will you come back next week? Will you be our teacher after Christmas' and I just said yes, of course. I also tried all kinds of seating arrangements, in order to reach everybody, and make the most of the space, and I used various discussion methods to make sure that everyone felt safe to express themselves; about school, and how they felt. Like I say, this was more often like support-group meetings, if anything. More often than not, I would end the school-day by letting the children stand in a circle, and have them say something nice to the next person. Little by little, trust and respect was built from within the class. (L 3, 6-9)

The second story is about one of Linda's methods of tackling students with particularly difficult behavior. One of her most challenging students was a boy who had been extraordinarily unruly and rude; he had used bad language which was directed at her. When something like that had occurred earlier, she asked the student in question to leave the room with her so she could talk about the incident privately as she would never talk to an individual in front of the whole class. On one of these occasions, without thinking, she grabbed a book off her desk, and a pen. Once they were out in the empty corridor, she just opened the book towards the middle and started writing vigorously in it:

What I had done prior to this incident was that once out in the corridor, I would ask the student to tell me what had happened and why he was out there with me, which meant that the student did the talking and I listened. They really liked that, but this technique didn't work on those most difficult students in this class. That made me totally desperate. I can't remember how I got this book-idea. I just grabbed the book as I asked him [her most challenging student] to follow me out to have a talk and he did that. This book is rather small, respectable appearing, with a hardcover, not just any piece of paper. I opened it towards the middle, wrote the date and the lesson, so I looked a bit like some bureaucrat, and at the same time I was

thinking ‘should I do this or not’ as this isn’t perhaps a nice thing to do, but I thought ‘yes, he needs it’. While I was writing, the boy asked me ‘what are you writing?’ and I said ‘well, I’m, writing what happened in there just now’ – and asked him to sign it. But first we went through it together so that he could see that it wasn’t my interpretation of the event. It was in a language he understood, and I was not trying to create any sort of drama of the incident. I told him that on the previous pages I had written down our interactions since school started. A bit of a white lie, and fortunately he didn’t question it. I said to him ‘Your situation has now reached the point where we really need to do something different’ – and he just went: ‘What are you then going to do with the book?’ and took a totally different stance than when I had used all these words talking to him, because he was the kind of individual who had stopped listening. I explained to him that now I was in the position that I felt it was better to have everything laid out so that I could look back in order to keep track of his demeanor, good as well as not so good, and that he could also keep a tab on things in the book. And he just says ‘Yea, yea’.

That’s how I started using this book. Every time someone came with me out into the corridor, I just started writing in the book and they simply had to wait until I would finish. I can remember how I looked forward to the time when I could turn the pages backwards and actually tell them: ‘Well, see how often you’re in the book, look, and this is just two weeks. What shall we do?’ They were a bit shocked simply to see it right in front of them. And what happened? Now, together, we could simply read in the book that the exact same situation had arisen again; ‘and you haven’t learnt anything from it. What can we do now?’ That’s how I could use the book, and it turned out to be a success.

This ‘book method’ only did the trick for three of my four most challenging students, all boys. Their behavior did indeed gradually start to change. But not in Blare’s case. He’s very intelligent, and absolutely bursting with energy. He’s very open and verbal, and he knows exactly what the situation is, so it’s been totally brilliant, but challenging to work with him. He had been labeled socially undesirable since grade one, among his peers as well as the teachers –

and not just him but his parents too. When I started teaching this class I decided to pretend not to have a clue about his past schooling. I could sense it right away that he liked that I didn't know the whole story. It's perhaps not a very nice thing to say, but he has a very unfortunate name. Like I said, he's a ball of energy, there is always this noisy commotion and he sort of screams for attention whether it is of a negative nature or a positive one. And his name is Blare.<sup>12</sup> Making a scene and everybody yells 'Blare!' I could sense it right away from the teachers, and simply everybody, that just the name itself intensified the situation somehow, and I just thought: 'Wow, it can't go on like this'. It was then, that I started calling him *Stefan*, he's got two names; *Stefan Blare*. It had been tried the previous year because everyone had grown tired of themselves yelling 'Blare!' it's really unbelievably blaring, and when I started calling him Stefan it had some effect. But Blare being Blare it soon dwindled away, just like the year before and he was at it again. It's funny though, he answered differently to the name Stefan than Blare. Blare was the one who was reprimanded and he was stuck in that role. So I really had to sit down and think about what I should do. I was totally baffled. This is the kind of lad who can make you extremely angry and I simply didn't know that I could become so angry towards a child. All of a sudden I found myself using this 'tone' and I just thought to myself 'now stop, I am not going to be this kind of teacher'. I felt so bad, and I thought that now it was time we had a good conversation, just the two of us.

One day after school I asked him to stay behind as we needed to talk and that turned out to be an incredibly good conversation. Besides being my student, I knew him through soccer because my son is in there too. So when Stefan Blare comes to our house with my son he behaves and is very polite, as he's out of the role which he's in at school. I sensed that it was my strength in our conversation to know him outside the context of school, as it meant that I could approach him more positively; like how good a pal and a friend he was, and how polite he was when in my house. There were many things that I could tease out which I in fact could not have, if I'd just been the

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<sup>12</sup>His Icelandic name is an onomatopoeia for noisiness.



teacher. He was all ears and he didn't know what to say to this woman who was showering him with praise and became a bit awkward.

When I saw he had started listening, I said that on the other hand things did not go as well in the classroom, and I told him that I was endlessly receiving complaints from other teachers, and that I was getting so tired of all this. So I asked him if he just wanted this to continue or if this might be something which could be turned around. Then he tells me, he was so sincere, that this was so difficult because 'I mean Linda, look, when I was in kindergarten I was like this, then I entered grade one and I was like this and then I entered grade two and I just continued to be like this ...' - and I said: 'Yes and now you are in grade three and what shall we do?' I deliberately used we so that he would know that he was not alone in this, that I would stay by his side, and that now we would have to decide how this winter was going to be or at least until Christmas. And he just went 'yeaaah, what do you mean, this is just the way I am'. I replied 'yes, but it's yours to change that, and I can be beside you to help you do that' and I just spoke to him like a friend, and that worked like a charm.

I made a deal with him that each time he would disturb in class, which he constantly did, I promised that I would stop calling out his name Blare and he went 'yeaaah', - 'but I'm going to do something else instead. I'm going to come up to you, from behind, and I'm going to just put my hand on your shoulder and then you will know that you need to loosen up and you need to shape up'. He just went 'yeaaah'. Then I added and tried to let my voice sound a bit exciting 'this I think will simply calm down the atmosphere of the class and at the same time help you because then the kids won't in turn notice that you are being stopped'. And this appealed so much to him that he just said 'yeah, yeah, let's try that'. - 'This is going to be our secret and nobody will know why I'm standing there, and why I'm putting my hand on your shoulder because I will do the same thing with the others in so that it won't be noticeable in your case'. And that's what I have done a lot. I could sense how incredibly relieved he was as here was somebody who approached him in a kind manner and wanted to help him. That's all that was needed. Of course he's still difficult, and sometime even outright annoying and everything, but then I just walk up to him, touch

his shoulder and he stops, he's so bright. This has really worked out tremendously well. I must admit that I have found him kind of amusing and he could sense that, I'm sure. To tell you the truth, dealing with Blare has been a one big, incredible challenge. (L 3, 9-13)

Linda said that all these difficult and distressful cases that surfaced time and again were certainly challenging, but in a positive kind of way though, because at the same time she liked these challenges "as I have obtained this certain kind of tactic I use on these kids that simply seems to work, and when you find that something works then you become more confident and unafraid and that is naturally a huge strength" (L 3, 15).

**Comments:** Linda's attitudes, and her general respect for children, is demonstrated very clearly in the above stories. She remembered vividly from her own schooling what it felt like to be exposed in front of the whole class. Her understandings from that experience made her place high importance on talking privately to children who have for example challenging behavior. Thus, it can be claimed that her own personal practical knowledge from childhood schooling gave her insights which explain how she responded to these children.

It is evident from Linda's childhood stories that she adopted the attitude of being a problem-solver, in the sense that she goes to some lengths in trying to find solutions herself instead of handing them over to somebody else, such as the principal, to deal with. Growing up in a home, where facing up to problems and solving them was *the* matter-of-course gave Linda certain understandings and insights. She was not afraid of dealing with difficult situations. Quite the contrary, she even liked to tackle challenges like when she said: "I kind of secretly find him entertaining". This is an explicit example of how Linda draws on her personal knowledge from her home and upbringing to infuse her practice and has therefore become a part of her personal practical knowledge as well.

In the story of the vision of the teacher Linda wanted to become (see p. 240), she found it of extreme importance to approach the children on friendly terms, making sure that they knew that she was there for them. That is how Linda perceived her favorite teacher who became her role-model, and she remembered how that teacher made

school a good place. The meaning she makes of this experience is that her main purpose as a teacher is to create a kind and pleasant learning environment, to make a difference in her students' lives and to be a positive role model for her students, similar to her favorite teacher. These two stories above provide a distinct picture of how these elements from her childhood schooling have also become a part of her personal practical knowledge. The challenges Linda met in the realities of her third year of teaching reveal how resourceful she indeed turned out to be.

#### **7.4.4 Everybody Needs a Mentor**

Linda had to call for a mentor. Almost three months into Linda's first school year she was finally assigned a mentor. Even though it was not obligatory for principals to assign mentors to novices the principal had told Linda when he hired her that she would get a mentor but it dragged on. More than once did she remind her principal that she did not yet have a designated mentor. To begin with she turned to the student counselor for advice and with her questions or when she just needed to talk rather than to her teacher-partner Brynja. Here is Linda's mentor story:

I didn't want Brynja to be my mentor as well during my first year. That would have been very difficult. We were in such a close working relationship, and sometimes you just need to vent. Perhaps I also needed some advice and just talk to somebody else, someone who was not part of your team, as we were so immensely different as teachers. Probably everyone thought that I was kind of in safe hands, teaching with this woman with all this experience, but we were extremely different as teachers. I didn't want her at all because I often needed to totally vent outside of our work together. So I really had to press the principal to pull this through and in the end I had to choose a mentor myself! I felt it was difficult to be put in this position because I didn't know these teachers. The principal should in fact make this decision, he has worked with these people and knows them. He could at least say to the novices that this teacher or that one is apt for the job and then you could perhaps choose. In the end I chose one of my colleagues who was teaching grade three. It was a teacher who I saw as someone who seemed closer to me in the way she was teaching. I had

glanced into her classroom and saw she had many ideas and she was into creative work and that she was really efficient and nice, so I was really glad she was willing to be my mentor. But mind you, I don't think that one should have to ask for a mentor, let alone choose one yourself not even knowing your colleagues. I think that when you start your teaching a mentor should already be there for you, so I was dissatisfied with how it was resolved.

I think it is very important that a novice teacher receives a mentor who is willing and ready to assume that job; as it must be someone you can turn to, who is willing to address the problems with you, and wants to help you. Another solution could be peer support. Four of us who graduated together have met on a regular basis. Simply meeting and chatting together, all of us in the same place is a huge support. So it's not always necessary to call for a veteran teacher who may just say 'yea, it's not good to do this like this, it should be done like that'. It can also be beneficial to vent at your own level, I find that massively supportive. Then it would perhaps not be a bad idea to have small teams of beginning teachers within each school who then meet teams from other schools, and then you're naturally connecting schools. This could even be in connection with the IUE. In spite of this I want to say that I really liked my first principal. He was always supportive, and I often turned to him for advice or approval of what I was doing, especially during my second year of teaching. But I soon got the impression that you sort of had to seek the support yourself if you felt you needed it. I was perhaps undertaking a big project and hardly had a clue as to what I was doing, but went ahead anyway, then I just 'grabbed' my principal if I felt I needed a kind of reaction to 'should I continue with this or not'. So I just sought the support and I always got it.

This was definitely not the case in my second school, the Ridge School where I, the third year teacher, was considered the veteran teacher on my team as the other two teachers were in their first year. At the first staff meeting in the fall it was announced that there was this experienced teacher who would lead the grade three team, and I remember I looked around thinking; '...yea, who's that?' And then I heard 'Linda!' I got butterflies in my stomach and I thought: 'Oh, my god, I'm not a veteran teacher after two years!' But then there we

were, the three of us, and they were naturally just starting. Even though I was considered the veteran teacher on the team of the grade three teachers, I definitely needed some support because of the extremely difficult class I was assigned to. I simply couldn't pour this over the novices, so the only one I could turn to for venting was my husband! I often remember coming home and I literally cried because I was so angry, I was so frustrated, and totally exhausted. I had never experienced that as a teacher before, but fortunately I have a husband who I really could talk and talk and talk and talk to and he would always just sit there and listen and listen and listen. That naturally helped a lot, which then again meant, that I came in reasonably geared up the following day.

In the spring term of that third year there was a staff interview with the principal and I had made a list of things I wanted to talk about and what I felt needed to change. Supporting teachers in difficult situations was one item on the list. This was supposed to be a 10 minute interview but it lasted for almost two hours as I felt very strongly about this. The fact that there is no support is of course absolutely appalling and especially in this new school where the majority of the teachers are novices! Then again in Heath School, I could always count on my principal being willing to talk to me and support me, his door was always open. But this principal was not as inviting which of course might be due to his own lack of experience as a leader. I know for sure that I my pleasant teaching experiences in Heath School was something I could fall back on during the difficulties of my third year of teaching. Then I've naturally been taking part in this present research and these interviews and our conversations have worked extremely well for me, just this introspection and analyzing my work. This has made me particularly conscious regarding everything that I have been doing. Therefore I jumped at the opportunity of continuing to participate in this research and I thought 'yes, that's what I want!' because I can feel how good this has been for me. (L 1b), 1, 12, L 3b), 2, L 3a), 2-3, 14, 21)

**Comments:** There are several notes I would like to make here. Assigning a novice teacher a mentor who is the closest colleague is not considered a good arrangement in general. Linda put it well when

she said that the reason she did not want Brynja to be her mentor was her need to give vent to her feelings of the frustrations which their team-teaching created for her. It turned out that during Linda's first year of teaching the emotional support was vital for her, therefore she needed a mentor who did not have vested interest in what was being said, which a teacher from her own team obviously had. Linda's ideas on mentoring are interesting. Especially her idea of the peer support. Having small teams of novices from different schools as support groups could be very effective, I believe, but such teams should however, have a mentor who leads each team in order to avoid the danger of them just chatting away.

In spite of being a novice, Linda did not hesitate to follow up on what the principal had said in the employment interview. She was not afraid of authority, she spoke her mind, she reminded her principal of the mentor issue, though never in a manner that was offensive or obtrusive as can be seen. Linda's friendly, smiling presence made her very easy to get along with, which then helped her in all her interactions with the principal. His door was always open to her, especially in her second year, so in a way he was her mentor during that time.

Even though Linda was considered the veteran teacher on the team in the Ridge School, she was only in her third year of teaching. Having such a demanding class and receiving no support made her frustrated with the principal. But at the same time she wanted to be fair towards him, as he was in a difficult situation being a principal in a new school, situated in a new neighborhood. Still, she was critical of how things were run in that school, so she prepared their meeting carefully which shows once again her determination and professional attitudes. It could not be attributed to the principal that teaching this class did not break Linda down as a teacher. Her major source of support that year was her husband, who was ready to listen and give good advice. Additionally, if she had not been prepared to take professional risks and if she had not been so resourceful, as her stories clearly show, teaching this class could have made her decide to leave teaching. In spite of these severe difficulties she did not. Instead, this exhausting experience appeared to have made her stronger and more determined to do a great job. Once again it can be seen how Linda's personal knowledge from her home and upbringing surfaces in her

practice. Therefore this personal knowledge has merged into her personal practical knowledge. Linda also ascribed her surviving teaching this class to her participation in this research. Telling and retelling stories of her own practice made Linda able to create new stories to live by.

Linda's experience of her vision in the early years of her teaching was, if anything, more of a disappointment. She had had great hopes. She had hitched her [teaching] wagon to a star, but instead of reaching that star, preferably instantly, the thread that was tied to it seemed to stretch, and so did her vision. However, she did not relinquish, instead she seemed to realize that it would only take longer than she had hoped for.

Validating self as a teacher is the content of the stories in the following passage, where three stories tell of how Linda began to build and develop her identity. They are about her joys and successes in the classroom.

## **7.5 Validating Self as a Teacher**

Realities in the early years of teaching were not only characterized by difficulties, there were also experiences of joys and successes. The three stories below demonstrate how Linda validated herself in the early years of teaching. They reveal a young teacher who focuses her full power of all she is on what she has a burning desire to achieve in order to develop new practices and help her students to learn.

### **7.5.1 When Fruit of One's Labor Is Success**

The second year was a good year for Linda as she was able to try out many of her initial ideas and teaching methods. She continued teaching her first class, now being grade two, and she was on her own. She expressed her feeling of joy and relief having the chance to experiment on her own, away from the traditional older teacher. She had put absolutely everything into her teaching, and she felt that she was rewarded at the end of the year when she was saying good-bye to her students because she was moving to another school, as the following story describes:

Most of the parents or rather the moms were there with their children and there were tears in their eyes, they didn't even take down their sunglasses! I have never experienced anything like this. What can I

say, this really was something special. The mother who gave me the farewell present couldn't speak any more, she just said: 'You know, I can't do this', she was tearful and her chin quivered, and I had never known anything like this. Somehow, at that moment I felt that I was perhaps ..., that the kids did feel good in my classroom. And that was a really good feeling. Yes, this second year of teaching I did learn a great deal about myself as a teacher. I feel that I kind of gained self-confidence as a teacher. I found out where my strength lay as a teacher. I truly believe that my zest for teaching, my sort of clear ideas of what I wanted and my general ambition to do nothing less than my best have helped me to achieve this, and really helped me in this development. But it doesn't come for free, I can tell you, it requires enormous labor almost to the extent of blood, sweat and tears; like when the principal was meeting me coming into work really early on Saturday mornings he said 'I won't let you in. It's your day off!'...[Linda says this with a cheerful laughter], so I had to back off a bit. Naturally, this was too much.

But, mind you, the second year didn't get off to a good start. My class was the only class in grade two. I was really happy to be on my own even though it meant teaching 27 children and three more after Christmas, in a one class. However, the parents were apprehensive. I was succeeding the veteran teacher, and the 'rock', was gone. Even though I had done my best last year, during my first year, the parents regarded Brynja as a bit of a safety net, being the experienced teacher. I don't think they perhaps really realized that what the kids talked mainly about, and what they enjoyed most was what I had brought about. I wasn't at all fearful of continuing teaching the class on my own, but when I was greeting my class on the very first day of school I was attacked by the parents! About 40 parents came with their children and they were sort of telling me 'who do you think you are!' So there I was, all of a sudden in front of 40 parents and they..., I just had to convince them that I could do it.

That's how I started that second school year. I was rather crossed with them even though I didn't show it, because I knew that I could do it. To feel this amount of distrust puts you on guard and I was really going to show them that I could manage perfectly well. Honestly, this



condemnation on behalf of the parents made me put all my effort into the teaching. I literally worked day and night, as well as week-ends from August until December; Saturdays as well as Sundays, I simply immersed myself in work, so naturally it paid off. Already few weeks into the school year I started to receive notes, phone calls and comments from the parents, saying how pleased they were, and that was really good as you can imagine, 'cause I needed that. Drowning myself in work like that didn't only make the principal comment on it, my father also gave me a serious talk, reminding me that there was more to life than teaching and these children, ultimately reminding me that I had my own son to think about as well. I was a single mother at that time, and my son spent every other weekend with his father, so those were the weekends I totally utilized!

But being in this situation, on my own, with my own class of children meant I really took off; now I could absolutely do what I wanted to do. It meant that finally I was in fact able to reach my goals. Teaching was so much more enjoyable, there was more creativity and so much more fun. Teaching must be fun, and I could sense that the children felt that too. The atmosphere in the class was noticeably different. I found it extremely gratifying for me to have an idea in my mind, which I could actually carry out to the very end, which I could see take off and become something exciting! I am really satisfied with this school year. But I actually worked very hard at it. (L 2, 1-2, 6-7, 15)

Linda laughs at this reminiscence, and adds that by Christmas, when she had really felt that everything clicked and the ball was rolling the way she wanted, she was utterly exhausted.

### **7.5.2 Success Is Doing Ordinary Things Extraordinarily Well**

Linda did many projects with her students, many of which drew attention from her colleagues. She was very innovative, and often daring in the way she worked with her students, as the following story reveals:

The class was sitting in front of me in the home corner, there was discussion time when suddenly this idea just came up and I decided, on the spot, to give it a try instead of chewing it over at home and prepare it carefully. I just started and this whole thing became so

much bigger than I somehow intended. I can remember that the principal came into my classroom and shook his head and asked what on earth I was doing! At that precise moment I was standing on a ladder against one of the walls, the classroom was in total chaos and the children were actively working all over the place. I asked him kindly to leave and come back when the work was done and talk to me then. He had actually come to my classroom because I had finished all the paint in the school and all the paper, I'd cleaned everything out. Without asking! I was simply so excited that I had just forgot to let them know. I started the project by improvising with the kids and this is the upmost enjoyable project I've ever undertaken with my students. I called it *Our Fairytale World*. Following the discussions in the home corner I divided the students in groups of girls and boys and we continued spinning from their ideas. There were 15 girls together and 15 boys together, and we could place them in two different classrooms, as we had an extra one. This could work because the assistant teacher who was working with me after the New Year, was willing to spin with me. I asked her to take one group into the other room, and the only thing I told her to do was to take some paper and a pencil with her and jot down the kids' ideas which had been aroused in the discussions. We were sort of their secretaries, they made up the story.

After this lesson she came over and asked 'what is happening?' and I said that we'll just start and see what comes out of this. What I did was I wrote down everyone's wishes, like 'I want a teddy-bear fairy tale, I want a princess fairy tale, I want an elf fairy tale', etc. and the girls brought in all these cute and beautiful princesses in pink dresses and cute shoes and teddy-bears and elves and such, but varying according to each girl. The boy's world was very different. They wanted lizards and dragons and wizards. When we had written down all the ideas, in separate groups of boys and girls, I said that now we needed to create a fairy tale from all these ideas. This meant that each child had their own character in the story, in a mutual fairy tale of girls on one hand and boys on the other. Then I told them that tomorrow I'll read the whole story to each group. This meant that they were extremely excited, and there was this huge secrecy. The girls were not to know what the boys were doing, and vice versa. Then they naturally made

all the characters and the whole environment, palaces were made and houses and animals and swords and all kinds of artifacts, and the like. It was so interesting to see the difference, there was so much more happening with the boys, there was much more confrontation and brawl, but the girls had a nice valley and everything cute.

A cliché one has heard so much about, the boys are like this and the girls like that, and it was there, all right. And that's the precise reason why I divided them into all girls' and all boys' groups. It was also interesting for them simply to see how very different their worlds were, and that that was okay. They made everything for their fairy tale world in separate classrooms, and just this secrecy made them work really hard at it, and it encouraged them to do a very good job and make cool artifacts. I designated an entire wall in one classroom to the landscapes of their fairy tale world, from the ceiling down to the floor; I even took down some shelves. I simply just covered the whole wall with craft-paper. I divided the wall into two parts, one for the girls and the other for the boys, and then we put everything up there. The students felt this was so huge, so grand and so exciting. And then of course there was a grand finale, the fairy tale world festival, with guests. There, all of them did a presentation of their characters, and the stories were read out. There were all kinds of smaller tasks and assignments integrated into this project, which had to do with writing and reading and reading comprehension, and the like. So this really grew in my hands. We used two weeks for this project and devoted all the lessons to it. This was such a project which was not possible to put on hold, you couldn't say to the kids 'let's continue next week', they were so extremely excited. We simply pushed everything else to the side, knowing that we could come to that later when this project had been brought to a close. (L 5, 3-6)

### **7.5.3 Success Is not a Destination, It Is a Journey**

The emergent curriculum is Linda's passion in teaching. Following teachers' manuals or teachers' guides is something she finds difficult. Here is how she explains that:

I read the teacher's guide of course but too often I find them rather traditional and the teaching ideas neither inventive nor creative enough. However, by reading them my imagination is turned on and I

often get new ideas on how to do things. Like sometimes when I had for example already started a task and the students had already begun working on it, I could see how they functioned. Then I might just change course on the spot because this was not the way I wanted it, and I might take them somewhere else. I could do this because I was alone and didn't have to make any compromises. For example, when I was doing a unit in Geography on Iceland. According to the teacher's guide the students were to trace the outline of the country on paper. I decided to try that, but when I saw that this was not working for them, that they simply didn't understand what this was, I immediately changed it. I could see that they needed to do something concrete, that they needed to work with the Geography of Iceland through some creative, tangible activity, so I let them recycle paper to make a paper-mass, brought in a massive fiberboard and they made a big map of Iceland by shaping it with the paper-mass. They shaped the glaciers and the mountains and the fjords and the valleys, then they painted everything and we had great fun. It made all the difference letting them make or shape their country with their own hands. Now it was exciting to work with the map. But having to trace something they have never seen, that didn't work at all. So this is one example of what I changed on the spot. I started really from scratch.

Another thing which is extremely important to me is finding ways to make space for the emergent curriculum. I feel very strongly about having my students actively included, and involved in developing ideas with me on new projects and units. I often use a question starting with 'What if ...?', or I ask them what they already know about the issue and then I ask them 'what do we want to know more about it?' Then it is like their own project. They see it totally differently if you do it like that. Anyhow, it works really well for these young ones, and that makes me very happy. I always write down their ideas, and later I would take them out and we would examine them together, for them to see what they have learnt. I really like that. Sometimes they ask me: 'Aren't you going to ask us now ...?', which means that they have become familiar with this method, and would definitely not want to miss out on this. They find this really exciting. (L 2,8-10)

**Comments:** All these three stories show that Linda emphasized the importance of being be actively involved in finding pedagogical solutions in order for her to reach her goals. She needed to feel that the projects and the assignment were important and she was convinced that her students will learn from them.

The first story tells of a very ambitious teacher who is unwavering in her zest for teaching. Already in her second year, Linda accomplished things in teaching which may be considered quite rare for a novice teacher. For sure Linda is artistic, which she takes after her father. She tapped abundantly into that in her teaching, where she found multiple ways to express her creative thinking, and enjoyed that thoroughly. She turned every stick and stone in order to find solutions, in order to channel her creativity, her enthusiasm and innovativeness. She did not gloat at her successes, she was modest when she spoke of them, and she definitely owed it to the hard work and devotion she put into it. It is work, work, work from morning till midnight, she told me.

When Linda talked about the goodbye moment at the end of her second year in this story, she sounded genuinely pleased, it had made her indescribably glad, and she felt that she was reaping a bountiful harvest for which she had prepared the soil with hard labor. The attitude of the parents at the beginning of the second year made her determined to succeed; she told me that she was going to show them that she could do this, and that she definitely would. Linda's childhood stories show how she dealt with extreme challenges, and her responses to these provide a foundation for the development of her strengths. The fruit of her hard labor was indeed validated by her successes during her second year of teaching.

During this year Linda managed to bring fully into her practice the knowledge of teaching she acquired from her favorite teacher in grades four through seven, as the childhood story *A Pleasant Surprise* shows. Clearly, this experience has become an integral part of her own personal practical knowledge. The story of fairy tale world is a vivid example of this, and what Linda was capable of doing, once nothing was there to restrain her. As has been shown she did not reveal her full capacity during the year of teaching with Brynja, which might have been out of consideration for her. She could easily have been the leader in the so-called team-teaching, and simply taken over the lesson

planning and teaching. More often than not, she might have had to avoid the temptation of cutting in on Brynja's teaching or taking it over altogether. But she did not. Most likely it was out of respect for Brynja, her age and her experience, but mainly because Linda never appeared to be arrogant, nor the person who would order others around.

The fairy tale story also illustrates what a novice teacher, who possesses the determination, the strength of character, strong pedagogical vision and the stamina, to mention but few of Linda's qualities, is capable of, so early in her career. Surely, it involved a great deal of hard work as well, and commitment, not to mention the willingness to devote the time needed for all the preparation and planning. Listening to Linda's stories during our research relationship, her devotion was obvious, but she always made it quite clear that her successes were for the most part due to the hard work she put into it. Before Linda started teaching she said that she had "this huge ambition to do well", that she hoped she would have the guts to venture because when she knew what she wanted she usually proceeded without hesitation. I have already made the claim, in the poem, that Linda had "jumped" almost full-fledged out of her teacher education program, and during her second year of teaching she indisputably exhibited what it takes to become the teacher she was, like the story of the fairy tale world reveals. This story is in fact a very good example of how the emergent curriculum appeared to be almost part of who Linda was as a teacher: An idea came up in a class discussion, and on the spot Linda acted on it and developed it with her students. One could claim, that ordinarily it would take quite an experience in teaching to be able to 'jump in' and improvise like Linda does here. In this story Linda shows that she had already mastered the necessary pedagogical and instructional skills needed to carry such a task through with her students, and bring it to a productive end. Further, as has been maintained, Linda's childhood stories have shown that e.g. innovative progressive teaching was a distinct part of the personal practical knowledge which she carried in her sack into teaching.

Moreover, it is important to observe that Linda's principal appeared to have recognized her capacities as a teacher. Linda described how he supported her in every way; that he challenged her

and encouraged her. This kind of support from the principal was of great importance to her and it urged her to continue further down the professional path she was creating. By being a positive risk-taker, as the above stories reveal, Linda took her teaching into avenues where she could express her creative thinking, where she worked with her students, thus showing her respect for them and their ideas. Linda validated her success in teaching by doing what could have been just an ordinary project, by doing it extraordinarily well.

The third story explicitly shows what a good understanding Linda has of how the emergent curriculum can work, how she can take her students' ideas and turn them into a meaningful learning. Further, it reveals how Linda has developed her understandings of this and her ability to put them into real practices, activities and assignments for her students. Moreover, Linda recognized, that in order for her to help her students to learn she cannot take any short-cuts, it is a journey. By recognizing that successes in teaching is not a destination but a journey, Linda is validating herself as a teacher.

In the following passage there are two stories which depict how Linda managed to turn the chaotic situation in her classroom around and how she found in herself unknown strengths in her relationships with the parents.

## **7.6 Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences**

This section tells how Linda managed to realize her vision on making a difference in her students' lives. It reveals her relentless positive outlook on issues and situations.

### **7.6.1 When Difficulties at Hand Are Tasks to Tackle but Not Impossible Problems to Solve**

Linda moved to a neighboring town during the spring term of her second year of teaching (see p. 256). As she found it both time consuming and expensive to drive back and forth every day she decided to discontinue teaching at the Heath School and got a teaching position in a new, much bigger school. It was in a neighborhood 'in the making' as opposed to the small, stable and deep-rooted Heath school in its established neighborhood. Here is Linda's story about this transition:

The Heath School was sort of like my home. I felt extremely good there, both within the group of teachers, and also with my children, like I call them, still today, I really connected with them, as well as their parents. It was a bit strange leaving a place where you are really happy, and surely it was more difficult as I really regretted leaving them. In this new school I entered a totally different world. The teachers at the Ridge School were of course also new in the school, as well as to each other, and many of them were beginning teachers as well. This made me, the third year teacher, the most experienced teacher on the team in grade three, where I was going to teach. There were three classes in this grade level, and I found it challenging, but also exciting. There I was, a bit alone, coming from this sort of protected environment of the Heath School, where it was a bit like 'yes, this is how we do it here...', but of course you can diverge from it but we always ticked in tempo. In the Ridge School however, you just came in, and you could do whatever and however you liked. There was no set program in there, instead you had to edge your way through. I found that incredibly exciting.

At the end of this year, my third year of teaching, under these challenging circumstances, I felt content and yes, I would say that I am rather a good teacher, because if I take a good look at me and my class in the fall on one hand, and then now at the end of the year on the other hand, I must have been doing something right because I can see how good they feel. What I find most important in my teaching is for my students to feel good in school, that they all feel good together, because it was a bit shocking for me last fall to see how badly they felt and there were so many complicated cases, family connections and such. My third grade class turned out to be a group of children who really disliked school, many of who were already failing in school. Most teachers had given up on them, and the first weeks the class simply waited for me to do the same. Their behavior was absolutely in accordance with that attitude.

The previous fall when my colleagues were pitying me for having this or that incredibly difficult student in my class, and they were already in the 'oh, this will be so difficult' mode, I thought to myself, 'Well, I'll perhaps be irritated for like two minutes, but then I was already



looking forward to tackling them'. It's so important to look at things as an issue to solve instead of as problems. To be quite honest, my greatest learning experience this third year of teaching was having to step back and examine myself as a teacher, because nothing I had done up to that point worked in this situation. Therefore, I felt I had to start all over. I remember thinking 'this doesn't work at all, what the hell do I do now!' As these kids had not had any set structure, who were extremely unrestrained in their behavior, rude, arrogant and demanding, I felt that the first thing on the agenda was to win their trust. This involved making a great effort at being always completely self-consistent, no matter what, and showing almost unrelenting firmness in dealing with some of my students. I had to show a kind of *toughness* I would never have believed I possessed, but at the same time try, in a kind way, to tell some of them really off, because they didn't understand anything else. Having to go this far for some of them to really listen, was of course absolutely terrible, I can tell you! (L 3a), 1-3, 14-15, L 3b), 17-18)

### **7.6.2 Going from Strength to Strength with the Parents**

Linda felt very strongly about the parent-teacher relationship, and she often commented on the importance of positive relationship with them. One way of doing that was to keep the parents well informed on her program, and what her expectations were. She always tried to stay firm with the parents, and show them that she was a good professional, who would at all times bear her students' well-being in mind. Following are three stories that depict this.

The initial story is of Linda's first meeting with the parents of Blare, the most challenging student she had ever had. Prior to the meeting she had made a contract with Blare regarding his extremely disturbing behavior, and he was already showing some progress. This meeting was a regular parent-teacher conference, held some weeks into the fall where the student arrives with his/her parent(s). Linda planned this meeting extraordinarily well. Much to Linda's appreciation both of Blare's parents came to the meeting. She was ready to meet them, armed with the negative comments she had received from other teachers, which were plentiful, as well as a few positive ones, most of which had to do with his good grades. No

wonder, as Blare was undeniably very intelligent, she told me. As Linda walked towards the parents to greet them, she was thinking whether she should start by listing up all the complaints and everything she should not avoid, in order to get that out of the way. Here is her story of how she handled that:

All of a sudden I just saw how they came in, tired somehow, and prepared to receive all the complaints as usual. They sat down, the father crossed his arms in a defensive manner and I just thought 'well now, this is how the situation is. I think I'll set the complaints aside, and just sort that out with Blair'. So I changed my approach on the spot, and talked only about the things their son had done well. I could do that because he really had made some progress, so I wasn't saying anything he didn't deserve. I simply didn't tell the whole story. I mentioned in passing, that the fall term had been enormously difficult, but now we were beginning to work together really well, and that we actually had good times together. I really praised him. His parents just sat there and stared in silence. This was in fact a bit comical. I could see how genuinely relieved they were. The boy perked up all of a sudden, seeing mom and dad finally happy about him, and so proud. I can remember how moved I was seeing this, it was most enjoyable. They thanked me for the meeting and said that now there was somebody, a teacher, who their son liked very much, and that he felt she was a friend too. Someone he could turn to, so they were very happy. I was of course glad to hear that from them. The mother came into the school few days later, to tell me that her husband was overjoyed, and was saying 'now things will change, now something is happening' - so I had given them a little hope, and they were at last ready to work with me. This is indeed the most memorable parent meeting I've had. (L 3a), 13)

The second story tells of Linda in her second year talking to the parents in the yearly introductory meetings in the fall. It is about Linda's concern regarding the attitudes the parents had expressed the first day of school that year.

Like I told you before, in my second year of teaching I began the introductory fall meeting with the parents by expressing my concerns regarding their challenging manner towards me the first day of school. As you may remember, that day about 40 parents turned up with their

children and basically attacked me for imagining that I, a second year teacher, could teach and manage 27 grade two children alone. Who did I really think I was! Well, I had really looked forward to meeting the children at the end of summer. I had moved to this neighborhood during the summer and they were always coming by my house, so I had met them all before school started. I found it extremely exciting to be their teacher again; this is simply a wonderful group of children. And it was the same with the parents, I was not apprehensive to meet them, even though I was going to be alone teaching all these children, it was just enjoyable.

But that first day of school I got this massive reaction from the parents; 'what I in actual fact intended to do, why I didn't do anything about this situation and have somebody with me, as I had only taught one year', and all this was so negative. Of course the children heard this, they were all ears and every word from their parents sank in, so I was crossed at the parents. Therefore I started the introductory fall meeting where the parents come without their children, by saying that that day had neither been the time nor the place to address this matter in front of the children and I said to them: 'I will not have that *at all*! And I do not want to hear from the children about some discussion at their dinner tables about this new young teacher, her inability and then when the children walk into school the following day, there she is, this teacher, who can't do anything'. And I said 'this just isn't acceptable'. In addition I said to them: 'Please allow me to get started. We have nothing at hand to discuss at present. If it will be something you want to discuss with me, then let's use the phone or e-mail me or let's set up a meeting. At any rate, allow me to begin the school year'. Yes, they sort of took one step back. It's a bit odd speaking to the parents like that. But at the same time I received some respect from them and some trust.

It really came as a surprise to me to discover this strength within me, to be able to speak in that manner to the parents, I simply didn't know I had it in me, because I'm not particularly strong by nature, not at all. But in the role of the teacher, yea well, as a teacher I'm like that, obviously. It's kind of strange and it was very surprising to realize that

I could really confront the parents in that way and be confident enough to do that well, if I'm quite honest about it.

After this meeting I went on a full swing and that's how I started the school year. I was totally going to show the parents that everything was going to be okay. Perhaps I simply should have relaxed a bit, I probably would have, had I been more experienced. But of course once I was at home I thought 'hang on, perhaps I can't do this after all', that's how I felt immediately afterwards, and it was really painful to face a distrust like that. I mean, I know that my students are happy in my classroom, they are at the age when they express that fully. You can sense that right away, they are so open and honest in that regard. Consequently, when I got home I opened my sketchbook and started to jot down ideas and everything that I intended to do and all of a sudden I felt it was not so bad that the school year started like that. In actual fact, I needed all my strength in this classroom because in a way, or technically somehow, this was my first year of teaching and I was alone, there was not another class in that grade level and I was not working with anybody else, at least not until after Christmas. (L 2, 4-6)

The third story brings to light Linda's dealing with difficult parents. Reflecting on what she finds difficult, most often it had to do with parent related issues, this 'endless parent hassle' [foreldravesen] like she put it. A good example is the story about the boy who, in the middle of a lesson, announced that his mother finds the morning refreshment-time-system completely absurd. This is how that story goes:

He was totally agitated; boldly and loudly announcing 'my mom thinks your system totally sucks!' At precisely the same second there is a knock on the door. At the door is his mom, standing right in front of me, and I naturally seized the opportunity, invited her to step inside and observe our morning-refreshment-time. The thing is that by that time I felt I was on the right track with my grade three students regarding the morning-refreshment-time,<sup>13</sup> because I had put up a system which is very simple but effective. I had made a bar graph with pictures of various fruits and vegetables. At the end of each morning-

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<sup>13</sup>In most schools in Iceland, by mid-morning, students consume the refreshment most of them bring with them to school.

refreshment-time we would count the points; who had a cucumber and it is put in the appropriate column, who brought tomatoes, apples, etc., and we were simply doing math and having fun. I had promised them that by the end of each month I would bring in the fruit or veggie which had received the most points and we had a cucumber-festival or an orange-festival. Monthly I was shopping barrels of stuff in the Bonus-store! I also put in for example a spinach-column and a broccoli-column, more or less so that they would find it okay to bring that to school as well. And they enjoyed this.

It's explicit in the school rules that students are only allowed to bring a healthy drink, fruits and vegetables for the morning-refreshment, which, by the way, I completely agree with. But unfortunately not everyone abides by these rules, neither parents nor some of the teachers which means that this boy may have had a brother in grade 5 with a teacher who allows students to bring all these sandwiches and stuff which obviously produces a definite problem. Anyhow, this mother found it totally absurd that I had an opinion on this matter or was even controlling, as she perceived it, what her child would bring for the morning-refreshment-time. And she was really angry because she thought that her son didn't eat this and he didn't eat that, and then that same child sits in front of you during refreshment-time and gobbles all these fruits and veggies. Gets bites from his classmates because he didn't bring anything, and then of course all this stems from the parents and their attitudes. This is what I mean when I talk about 'parents hassle'.

Anyway, back to the door, where the mom was standing. It's a perfect timing I thought, she was bringing in his swim gear, and I just said 'well, great that you are here! I must invite you in, do you have 10 minutes?' and she goes 'Yeaah'. Then I said to her: 'Your son was just telling us what you think of the morning-refreshment-time system, that you're somehow critical of it. So now I would like to show you how it works'. Precisely at that moment the kids were exploring who brought what. One student asked who brought e.g. apples and another one counted the raised hands and the third one ticked it off. Right there she understood what this was about, and she half backed down,

and was simply a bit ashamed. Perhaps the previous day had been a bad day for her.

I want the parents on my side, it takes a lot of effort to reach the parents, to win them over. I feel very bad if I sense that some mother, like this one, is irritated at home because of something I'm doing. I think that deep inside she wasn't really irritated because of what I was doing, something else was underlying, and it gave her vent to her feelings to complain about me at home. I really felt distressed when that boy threw this remark from his mother across the class. If the mother would not have arrived exactly at that moment, I would have phoned her that same day because I don't want the parents to be dissatisfied at home because of what I do as a teacher, I want them on my side, I find that most important. But this is, of course, a very difficult student, and it has turned out that many things were wrong in his home. This episode was perhaps odd and a bit disheartening but I managed to have her relax a bit there. (L 3a), 16-17, L 5, 14-15)

Linda feels that she had been managing the parent relationships quite well in spite of a particular group of parents who she found in many respects very difficult to deal with. She found it slightly odd having to be in the position of being very firm with the parents. Linda feels that it is of utmost importance to be just as self-consistent in her relationships with the parents as with the students, especially while building relationships with them.

**Comments:** The former story tells of a teacher who has the guts, devotion and positive attitudes to make a difference for the children in her third grade class in the new school, where she, the third year teacher, was the most experienced teacher on the team. With hard work, determination, kindness, and what seems to be relentless self-consistency, not to mention strength of character, Linda manages to turn the behavior of this class around. When I was in that classroom in the early spring of her third year, it was obvious that this was an extremely demanding class, of which she had a very firm, but positive control. It was also clear, that her success with that class was due to how she interacted with the children, how she prepared her program; It was her organizational and teaching methods, as well as all the inventive, creative and interesting assignments and projects she

prepared for and with her students. Linda was faced with severe behavioral difficulties from day one that school year, but as the story shows, she saw these difficulties as tasks to tackle, instead of impossible problems. A very good example of that was her reaction to her colleagues' words of warning. What I saw in this classroom was a teacher who knew that it takes hard work and it demands stamina to succeed. Her classroom displayed in multiple ways how she had developed practices that would best fit this group of students. She had designed a project on friendships, and what it meant to be a friend, as well as a project on building self-esteem. I know that these were "home-made" projects, tailored to this troubled group of students, which show without a doubt how Linda was developing her practices and creating relationships.

What is particularly interesting in the three parent stories is how well they show Linda's determination, her courage, and how firm she can be with parents, yet stay polite and professional. It may be quite uncommon for a novice teacher to be so self-confident and assertive in the presence of the parents, and in dealings with them. Additionally, the story of Blare's parents shows how sensitive Linda was to their feelings, and how quickly she was able to react to the situation at hand. It came as a surprise to Linda to find this inner strength, and she attributed that to the fact that in the role of the teacher she could be strong and strong-willed, which she thought she normally was not. But knowing Linda, both as a student teacher and her first years in teaching, it could be said that she is possibly underrating herself by saying that she normally does not show this strength.

Once again it can be seen how her childhood stories explain how she reacted to and treated people, how her background and upbringing, i.e. her personal knowledge, supplied her with insights and understandings that benefitted her as a teacher. These are explicit examples of how Linda's courage, persistence and resilience have become parts of her personal practical knowledge and how she acted this out in her relationships. All the above stories exhibit well how Linda is developing; how she progresses from one success to higher levels of success both in her practices as well as in developing relationships with both her students and their parents.

In the last section of this chapter there are three stories about re-creating the story of self as a teacher and about re-constructing identity through the development of professional practice. The purpose of the very last of Linda's stories is to bring her classroom practices alive.

## **7.7 Re-Creating Story of Self as Teacher – Creating a World of Adventure**

The stories of Linda have depicted a teacher who was determined from the day she set foot in her teacher education program to do everything in her power to push for her vision, her ideals in teaching and learning to come true, so that she could look everybody in the eye and say that she was a good teacher. And every step of the way she was ready to take (positive) risks, to turn every stone, and to work endless hours in order to make this happen, and to be able to create a world of adventure in her classroom. Indeed, her talents, her creativity and her passion for doing nothing but her best were driving forces. At the same time she longed for teaching with a soul-mate, someone who shared her ideals, and who was just as eager in putting them into action.

### **7.7.1 Being Totally there for Them – Linda's Passion in Teaching**

In Linda's metaphor of the abstract painting there are multifold brushstrokes, both bright and colorful that can be seen, which represent the emphasis she places on the wellbeing of her students, and on viewing the classroom as a community. At the end of her fifth year we talked about visions and ideals of teaching and what could be said to have worked best for her. This is how Linda explained what this meant to her:

I believe that feeling good together in the classroom is the starting point of all learning. Mutual respect, warm attitudes, feeling secure and yet setting limits. Now, when reflecting on my years of teaching, I think I might say that the way I was able to reach my students is what I feel best about. I think that the main reason is because I have given myself the time needed and also that I make sure that my students are in this with me. Like I say, when I receive a new class I place great emphasis on establishing good relationships, everything else comes



after that. I'm not the kind of teacher who marches into the classroom and looks over the class saying 'open your books on page ...'. I am more of a friend, and I think that they can sense my affection for them. I want to be with them and I want them to know that. I make a point of telling them that. I absolutely love to work with children, this is what I want to do, and perhaps they do sense that as well. I've always made it an issue that they knew that I'm totally there for them and that I have this ambition on their behalf. I want them to feel good in my classroom, I want them to succeed, and that they can see progress themselves, and know that they have got the hang of something.

I prepare my teaching carefully; usually I plan every step of the way, from the outlining of a project, a unit or an assignment to the evaluation of it. I take care that everything that goes into the hands of my students is 'eye-catching' and I take care to have all the teaching sources or materials ready and at hand. I always work extremely hard at this and I believe that one reaps in accordance with what one sows. That's what I think. Mind you, in my experience this way of working has given me freedom to change everything on the spot if I've seen fit.

I do also find it important to talk about relationships with my students. I talk about my feelings as well as their feelings and that it is our shared responsibility to create a caring classroom atmosphere. I've told my students for example, that it is always a kind of a motto in my classrooms that no one goes home at the end of the day unless they felt good. Nobody goes home with a knot in their stomach because of something that happened in school. Instead, we have this rather powerful tool, our mouth, for talking, and we should use it. My students have become really good at talking about how they feel and if something came up it was discussed. I did not scold them. Instead, I let those involved, if they had been fighting or whatever, discuss what had happened, in class meetings. The others would listen in, because it's a learning moment for them to see how they resolved it. And it was absolutely great for me to sit in on these discussions.

So they know I'm their friend – but I make sure that they know as well that the teacher is the person who sets the limits. Even though I'm their friend and that I'm fond of them and all that, they do know that I'm very assertive, that there *are* definite limits. I make sure that they

know that there are these definite boundaries and that they have quite some freedom within it. My experience has taught me that I have to be self-consistent at all times. However, I also know that the cause for certain behaviors might be that they're tired or that something happened at home. So I tell them that I can take that into account but in order for me to do that they have to tell me about it, we have to be able to talk to one another which has resulted in them really telling me if something is wrong.

Usually I've begun the school day by chatting with my students about how they feel, how they slept, how they want this day to be. We talk about that we are beginning this school day and that at the end of the day it's in our hands how it will turn out to be. We say to each other 'yes, this will be a good day in school. It will be enjoyable, we are going to do a good job and if something is wrong we'll help each other out'. This has become a kind of mantra in my classrooms, and I'm certain that this approach has been genuinely beneficiary for all of us. The greatest reward in my teaching has been my students' joy and their openness in telling me how they feel in my classroom. (L5, 7, 9, L2,19, L 3b), 21, 25)

### **7.7.2 Still in the Making – Creating and Re-creating Identity as a Teacher**

Five years after her graduation as a teacher, Linda said that in many ways she already was the teacher she had envisioned back then. Her journey to becoming the teacher she intended, had been a genuinely pleasant one, she said, even though she now feels that she has only just set out on that journey. She had to take a leave of absence two months into her fourth year of teaching, as there were medical complications due to her pregnancy. She was pregnant yet again just before the start of the following school year, so she could not take the position she had applied for (for the same medical reasons as previously), this time in her hometown, as she had moved there with her family. Here is Linda's story about this journey:

Yes, in many ways I'm already the teacher I wanted to become back then. Perhaps it's a bit foolish to say this, I don't know, but it has been going well and one finds somehow if things are going well or not. Naturally, I just proceed according to my conviction, my heart, I

follow that a bit. Then naturally, I feel good about what I'm doing. But of course I could sense quite early on how the kids were taking it, and they do reward you for your efforts in your teaching. I've loved my job right from the beginning. I was already experimenting with my teaching back then, using the teaching methods we learnt about in Kennó, and I often found it terribly difficult to control the flow of ideas; I was like that right away, somehow. Sometimes I was just tired not being able to shut it off. I remember I was perhaps out running when I had to hurry home to jot down all the ideas, my mind dwelt on this, I was always on the outlook for how this or that would come in handy in my teaching. Sometimes I would have liked to be able to just go in there and teach and the day is over, go home and something like that. Sometimes I would just really have liked to be a bit free from this. But right from the beginning, when I was working with that teacher who already in the fall was looking forward to her retirement in the spring, I was very concerned about the effect a burnt-out teacher may have on the students.

We as teachers are trusted with a group of children and it is a delicate matter teaching them. As you know, everything you do and everything you say can have an effect, we are certain role models, so the responsibility is really great. It's perhaps totally different to be burnt-out sitting in front of a computer, with a job where you only have to confront one or two persons each day. On the other hand it gave me perhaps some extra intensity seeing everyday what it's like to be burnt-out or dispirited in your job. It must be terribly difficult. The kids pull everything out, whether it be negative or positive. I have learnt really a great deal about myself. What's perhaps most important is to experience this self-confidence as a teacher. I learnt about my strengths. That is very satisfying. It's really such a good possession to carry into the future when you encounter something unexpected, and perhaps difficult, and find that you can just tackle it, on the spot, and it works.

Then I think that teachers must absolutely try their own methods and ideas, because there are so many ways to work on the same problem and assignment. I'm positive that teachers, as well as their students, would get much more out of teaching and learning, if they would dare to explore themselves a bit. In that sense, I'm in fact not much

different now from when I started, because back then I was also exploring possibilities. I don't think that I've reached a point where I can say, 'yes, now I am completely able to do this or that'. Of course I'm perhaps more conscious about teaching, and naturally more experienced, but I, myself, I'm not much different, I think. Well, but of course, I'm still in the making, I'm still sort of exploring myself as a teacher. I mean, I'm only just starting! (L2, 16, L5, 24, 27, 29)

### **7.7.3 Capturing the Visual and the Metaphorical – Linda and Her Classroom**

When I walked into Linda's classroom I entered a world of visual adventure. It was evident that she had put a lot of work into designing her classroom. All the necessary instructions were beautifully laid out. Whether it be descriptions concerning the organization of the learning centers, the directions on how to work independently on various tasks, or the display of the rules that she had created together with the class. It was obvious that she had thought out every single detail, it was both eye-catching as well as of quality content. Going into her classroom, the meaning of her words "I find it extremely important to teach successful work methods procedures and completing a task or an assignment" (L 3b), 9) came to light, right there in front of me. When looking around in her classroom, it was apparent that she took it very seriously to be a role-model for her students in these areas. The works of her students were on display on the walls, from the ceiling and in the windows. They showed that creativity was highly regarded and it demonstrated the multiplicity of assignments and tasks. Here is one last story where Linda explains how she understood the concept of her classroom:

I think of my classroom as a small community, where there is this warm approach, where you listen, show empathy and all that. One of course needs to capture the visual and the metaphorical somehow, when teaching these young ones. It's extremely important that these tiddlers find that they are safe and feel well. If not, then they do not learn anything. I sensed that this foundation needed to be intact when I was for example coming to a new project or assignment, when teaching something new. Such things as an interesting start of a unit, something that captures their attention. Start with something that's enjoyable. The most important thing is the wellbeing of my students

in my classroom and making the most of their imagination and creativity. (L 2, 6)

**Comments:** The first story of Linda's passion in teaching shows the ground on which Linda stands as a teacher. She placed this great emphasis on building trust and good relationships; on listening to her students' voices, on including their ideas in the teaching and learning, on setting clear boundaries for behavior. Further, she focused on always being self-consistent in her dealings with the students, but simultaneously being sensitive to the feelings and situations of individual students. Moreover, she insisted that you harvest in accordance with how you prepared the soil, which may be called a kind of a motto in her teaching. Linda understood that in order to become good in something, you need to work extremely hard at it, and that is what she did. Most of her stories demonstrate a hard working teacher, who has the presence, the attitudes, the pedagogical understandings and insights, as well as the instructional skills, that makes a successful teacher. As can be seen throughout Linda's stories her main passion in teaching was to be totally there for her students.

In the beginning Linda's determination to become nothing less than an excellent teacher was discussed, and how she saw learning experiences everywhere and in everything. At the outset of her teaching, Linda's painting was virtually dry. Viewing this in the light of the teacher I saw Linda had become at the end of her fifth year, I would not agree with her when she says, in the second story, that it was foolish to say that in many ways she was already the teacher she intended, which was to become a teacher who makes a difference in her students' lives. As revealed earlier, Linda's students as well as their parents showed their appreciation on various occasions, because she had made a difference in their lives. Yet, by saying this, Linda was not making an inappropriate or immodest reference to her qualities and achievements. She acknowledged that she was nevertheless a teacher in the making as well, and that she was still exploring herself as a teacher. Linda's journey has certainly been a rewarding one. The previous stories of Linda have indeed shown how she, in order for that to happen, turned every stone to seek solutions, and had not seen every obstacle in sight as a problem, but as a task to embark upon. Linda's childhood and teenage stories explain from where her unusual

commitment, her strong mind and her *relentless* devotion derived; this is the personal knowledge she carried with her and as has been laid out in her stories of teaching, became important parts of her personal practical knowledge as a teacher.

In the third story Linda describes what her classroom means to her. Her classroom reflects her own imagination and creativity and her profound need to express it in her work. It demonstrates that she has learned what it takes to create a caring community where every student counts. At the dawn of Linda's teaching, she expressed her wish to become a teacher who places emphasis on the multiplicity of teaching methods and assignments, to be a positive teacher, to be open and encouraging and a teacher who creates a pleasant learning environment. In Linda's classroom various components of her emphasis, vision and ideals in teaching and learning come together, and create a coherent whole.

Linda is, by her stories, validating Connelly and Clandinin's claim when they say that by participating in a research, the telling and retelling of our experiences, it "offers possibilities for reliving, for new directions and new ways of doing things" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). These words opened my eyes to the possible effects that participating in a research like this one might have on the participants. At the end of her third year of teaching, Linda started our conversation by expressing great pleasure in participating in this research, as she had found that it made her think about her teaching differently, it made her evaluate what she was doing each time and that she felt that it resulted in her becoming a reflective practitioner as "there are things that I hadn't really thought about, and getting questions like these puts you somehow on guard" (L 3b), 18). She described to me how, before our conversations, she would ponder what I might ask about, how she would react and where our conversations would take us. Then during our talk, she would discover a mass of things she had not really seen before – and then after our chat, she chewed over how she might have responded, perhaps differently. This had been her experience every time during this three year period.

Linda and I met twice at the end of her third year, as she had a lot to say, there were so many things to discuss. She told me that she had not been able to sleep the night after our meeting as she was so

excited, her mind was ‘glued’ to our conversation. Over and over again she thought about her responses; if she should have or might have answered differently – and that she was so eager to talk about her experiences and her teaching. Therefore she always looked so much forward to our meetings. These comments from Linda made me add thoughts about participating in a research project to the list of things I wanted to talk about with my other participants. Then at the end of Linda’s fifth year we talked about this again and she said: “Yes, taking part in this research has made me just more critically aware as a teacher. I don’t think that teachers are much like that. I think that many teachers really lack self-confidence, the guts to try. There is nothing that can happen, except that you will gain something – if you look at it that way” (L 5, 28). What Linda means by this last comment is that by participating in a longitudinal research project, she had been given the opportunity to talk so much more intensively, and extensively, about her teaching, thus making her thinking explicit. Which was more than teachers in general do, and that had in return given her the self-confidence she feels is greatly lacking in too many teachers. Telling and retelling stories of her lived experiences will influence Linda’s future experiences.

Linda’s substantial stories through the five years of teaching have conveyed how she has brought her experiences and knowledge from her home and upbringing, her schooling and her teacher education into her practice, thus it has indisputably become a part of her personal practical knowledge. Concurrently, she is still in the making as she says herself, which means that by continuing to tell and to re-tell her stories, she will keep on creating and re-creating her identity as a teacher throughout her career. Or as Linda puts it herself at the outset of her teaching: “I intend to make a point of continuing my education, to read up on stuff in my field and not to stagnate on my job” (L 1a), 9-10).

### **7.8 Bringing Linda’s Stories to a Close – Summary**

In this chapter I have offered a view of Linda’s abundant stories of the development of her professional practice and her professional identity. They tell of her experiences in her first five years of teaching and of the meaning she made of these experiences. The stories show the development of a teacher from graduation, her early years of teaching,

through to the end of her fifth year. Linda talked about her expectations shortly after she got her teacher certificate, about wanting to become a good teacher who places emphasis on the elements she had learned about in the IUE. Linda knew what she wanted from teacher education, she liked the readings, and she tried to envision it in practice every time. Linda expressed her wish to be able to trust her gut feeling when there was something she wanted to try out, that she would truly dare to do things in order to change and improve teaching and learning.

The challenges Linda had to deal with when she was faced with the reality in the classroom during her first year, were the different pedagogical visions between her and the teacher she was team-teaching with; the teacher who already in the fall was looking forward to her retirement in the spring. Linda's concerns were mainly the difficulties in their collaboration, which Linda found extremely stifling, because she was not even close to doing what she intended. Linda felt she was being placed into a certain framework by this teacher, within which she was supposed to work. Linda was also very concerned with the effects a burnt-out teacher can have on the students. She often felt that her colleague was unprofessional in how she carried out her teaching, even to the extent that Linda was rather embarrassed on her behalf. However, the greatest challenge Linda met with in her early years was teaching the grade three class in her third year of teaching. The situation was much more serious than she could have imagined.

However, there were joys and successes as well. The second year was a good year for Linda, where she continued teaching her first class, now grade two, and she was on her own. She expresses her feeling of joy, and relief of having the chance to experiment independently, away from the traditional, older teacher. She put absolutely everything into her teaching that year, and she felt she was rewarded at the end of the year, when she was saying good-bye to her students (and the parents) when she was moving to another school. She said that she had learned a great deal about herself as a teacher, that she had gained self-confidence as a teacher, and found her strength as a teacher. She felt that her zest for teaching, her clear ideas



of what she wanted, and her ambition of accomplishing nothing less than her best, had helped her achieve that.

The following is a summary of the way in which Linda's stories have shown how she brought her personal knowledge from her home and upbringing, and both her personal and practical knowledge from her childhood and teenage schooling, to her teacher education and into her own teaching, making these experiences parts of her personal practical knowledge as a teacher the first five years of her teaching:

- her the personal practical knowledge of her favorite teacher from grades 4-7 merged the image of the teacher she initially wanted to become
- the experiences from this teacher's classroom, who believed in the individual's right of self-expression, fostered friendships, was creative and innovative, also figured into her teaching immediately from the beginning, but especially in her second year
- the positive experiences from her beloved teacher affected the importance she placed on making her fondness and positive expectations explicit to her students and how she constructed emotionally and physically secure frame for them to move within
- the negative experiences of the teacher who pitied her and expressed that pity in front of the whole class, affected the importance she placed on always dealing with difficult student behavior privately
- the positive experiences of having a teacher who she felt knew exactly what she was doing, influenced the importance she placed on extra careful lesson planning in her own teaching
- she brought her personal knowledge, from her home and upbringing, of how her mother, and later her father, dealt with hardships, into her teaching making her more insightful towards her own feelings as well as the feelings of others
- she also brought her personal knowledge, of severe difficulties from her home and upbringing, into her teaching which manifested itself in her determination to view all obstacles as tasks to overcome and that she would not let anything get in her way when she knew what she wanted
- the negative experiences of the so-called "salary-nagging" and negativity in the staff-room figured into her professionalism making her determined to become a positive teacher
- her positive experiences of being brought up in the home of an artist which attributed to Linda's vision of the multiple artistic and creative dimensions of teaching

## Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

- her personal and practical knowledge from the grade 4-7 classroom of progressive teacher, affected the emphasis she placed on creativity, creating a rich learning environment, and exploring new territories in teaching and learning already in her early years

Linda's journey towards becoming the teacher she intended has been a genuinely pleasant one, she said at the end of her fifth year, even though she felt that she had only just set out on that journey. Linda brought her personal practical knowledge of her favorite teacher into the image of the teacher she initially wanted to become, as can be seen from her childhood stories. She brought that image to her early years of teaching. Linda has been working with that image, and as her stories have shown, she indeed was a gifted and talented teacher who 'jumped' almost fully-fledged out of her teacher education program, simultaneously however, there was still a lot to learn. By telling and re-telling her stories of daring travels in her early years into the adventures of teaching, where she was ready to take positive risks, because otherwise nothing will change, her personal practical knowledge has developed so that she has been able to turn her difficulties and dilemmas into successes, therefore been able to re-create her identity as a teacher. Hence, Linda's stories tell of a teacher whose vision of teaching was realized, i.e. it was strenuous, yet simultaneously enjoyable, and the classroom a small community, governed by certain rules, where the teacher in conjunction with the appropriate atmosphere provided for fruitful education.

Linda envisions that she will continue to explore herself as a teacher, since she had not reached the point where she could say that her abilities as a teacher were unconditional. Linda is very passionate about the wellbeing of her students, about creating a classroom community where there is a warm approach, where there is mutual respect, yet where she simultaneously set limits. As has been shown, Linda is a teacher who will always follow her conviction and her heart. The star Linda hitched her wagon to at the outset of her teaching is, at the end of her fifth year, as close as one can possibly get, and she acknowledges that the star is an object that always moves further ahead as one approaches it. That is the way it is and that is the way it should be.

## **Chapter 8 – Discussion of Findings**

In the three preceding chapters I have offered a view into the experiences of the first five years of teaching of three participants in this research. My intention for doing this research was to explore through narrative inquiry the experiences of beginning teachers, and how they come to cope with their first five years of teaching in grades 1–10.

This study provides insights into their expectations, concerns and dilemmas, joys and difficulties, successes and failures, how they endured the entire process – and in so doing how they created and re-created their identity as teachers. The research questions addressed the way they experienced their first five years of teaching and how they worked with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become. The themes and sub-themes that arose in conversations over the five years of research relationship with my participants connect with my research questions. The central themes that emerged from all the stories were as follows: 1. Early childhood experiences – the origins of the individual, 2. Becoming a teacher, 3. Experiencing the vision in the early years – dealing with challenges in the realities, 4. Validating self as a teacher, 5. Developing practices – positive and negative experiences, and 6. Re-creating story of self as teacher. Accordingly, in this chapter I will reflect on and discuss the stories in relation to the themes, and in the context of the literature in question. I shall first however, revisit my research questions, then follow these up with an account of the six themes as enumerated above.

### **8.1 Research Questions Revisited**

This study was intended to provide insights into the meaning, that beginning teachers make of their experiences once they enter their chosen profession. That said, I reiterate the research questions I departed with on this journey:

- 1) How do beginning teachers experience their first five years of teaching in Iceland?

- What are their expectations, concerns and dilemmas, joys and difficulties, successes and failures – and how do they deal with it all?
- How do they develop their embodied knowledge of creating and managing relationships with students, colleagues and parents, and creating classroom community?

2) How do beginning teachers work with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become?

- How do they create and re-create their identity as teachers?
- How does their personal practical knowledge develop through their first five years of experience in teaching?

In this thesis I provide findings through the comprehensive stories that have sought and clarified the experiences and the meaning which the participants made of their experiences. The detailed stories have illuminated how their personal practical knowledge developed through their first five years of teaching, how they have worked with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become, and thus how they have created and re-created their identity as teachers. In this chapter I will draw on themes which connect with my research questions in the context of the literature reviewed, and in the final chapter, Bringing the Journey to a Close: Conclusions, I will sum up the major contributions of this research to the existing body of knowledge.

In the second section of this chapter experiences from the participants' childhood, both from their home and schooling, will be discussed in order to explain the origins of their personal practical knowledge.

## **8.2 Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual**

The purpose of this section is to make explicit the strong connection between the participants' childhood and teenage experiences, from their upbringing and schooling, and what emerges as their personal practical knowledge. In so doing I wish to demonstrate how this thread weaves itself from childhood into their adulthood and forms the basis for their views, values and dispositions towards teaching and learning, and, last but not least, how this affects their professional practice throughout their early years of teaching. This thread was the

building material out of which their original knowledge of teaching and learning was shaped, and which became the foundation for their personal practical knowledge that they brought with them into their teacher education and later into their own teaching. As a result, it is essential to establish this connection.

The childhood stories in this study have brought into light that my participants possessed knowledge from their homes and their upbringing, and from their own schooling which affected their daily practice in the classroom; both personal and practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985), and what is more, the stories have fleshed out *how* this knowledge affected their professional practice. Hanna for example brought from her home and upbringing the personal knowledge of her mother's negative attitude towards mathematics which made her insecure and reluctant to teach mathematics, and likewise her mother's positive disposition towards the Icelandic language (mother tongue) and literature, making them her favorite subjects to teach. Jon brought with him his personal knowledge of the importance of being socially active, which manifested itself in his desire to have a voice, not least among his colleagues, and later in the fourth and the fifth year, to be able to relax in the role of the teacher and be more sociable with his students in the classroom. Linda brought with her the personal knowledge of how her mother, and later her father, dealt with hardships, which manifested itself in her determination to view all obstacles as tasks to be overcome and that she would not let anything get in her way to obtain what she wanted. The severe difficulties she experienced in her home and upbringing made her more insightful towards her own feelings as well as the feelings of others. These examples demonstrate clearly how the participants brought the personal knowledge from their homes and upbringing to their teacher education, but specifically into their own beginning teaching, and ultimately making these experiences integral parts of their personal practical knowledge. These examples not only show that a connection has been established but, the stories have laid out in detail *how* the influences of this personal knowledge did affect these persons' classroom practice. By establishing this connection so clearly, this research has made a contribution to the existing body of

knowledge regarding the development of personal practical knowledge.

All three participants have undergone pleasant as well as unpleasant experiences during their schooling years. Their negative experiences; such as Hanna's reminiscence of being afraid in school most of the time; Jon's memories of distrust toward the new principal with regard to the broken window; and Linda's negative recollection of the teacher who pitied her, - provided each of them with special kinds of understanding they brought with them to their classrooms as beginning teachers and it evidently affected their actions and the relationships with their students. These experiences are what Connelly and Clandinin (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) as well as Johnson (1989) claim is the personal part of the term personal practical knowledge, which is both emotional and moral. Similarly with their pleasant experiences an example is Hanna's experiences of the teacher in grade 10 who brought her to an understanding of the importance of a good relationship with a teacher, who became her role-model; Jon's experiences of the math teacher who neither told jokes in order to gain popularity nor had to raise his voice, and yet made sure his students were learning. Another example are Linda's experiences of her middle grade teacher who provided her with an understanding of how important it is for a teacher to make her fondness and positive expectations known to the students; a teacher who Linda felt knew exactly what she was doing. Moreover, the findings establish that the participants' positive experiences provided the personal part of the term personal practical knowledge as well as the negative ones. Here I wish to add that this personal part of their personal practical knowledge manifested itself in their professional practice, especially in the turmoil and difficulties of the early years. All such experiences, both negative and positive, are important constituents of every teacher's personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly & Dienes, 1982; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986; 1988) as they color their attitudes towards teaching and learning. It is vital to make the connection to those experiences for the teacher to furnish meaning of her or his practice.

This study shows that establishing this connection is crucial since it is the ground on which a teacher can build further development of his or her teaching. This is in agreement with Elbaz (1981; 1983) as the understandings which my participants drew from their experiences shaped and directed their work of teaching. Further, the experiences from their schooling can be attributed to certain ideas concerning the kind of teacher they wanted to become after having graduated from their teacher education program. Additionally, in order to keep the teller clearly in focus (Elbaz, 1991), because much of teachers' knowledge is tacit (e.g. Connelly & Clandinin, 1996, Elbaz, 1983, Pope, 1993), I presented their childhood experiences as a prose. Throughout our five years of research relationship I repeatedly asked my participants about the emotional aspects of their teaching, and invited them to reflect on how they felt in a given situation. As a result, the thread that ran from their childhood, both from their homes and their schooling, to their knowledge of teaching as beginning teachers was brought into focus. This was the kind of knowledge Johnson (1987, 1989) refers to as embodied knowledge, as became evident during the first year of their teaching. This embodied knowledge surfaced as the practical part of their personal practical knowledge from their homes and childhood and adolescent schooling.

The knowledge from the participants' schooling was the knowledge of the student observing her or his teacher using the more traditional approaches to teaching, where the content of the lessons was delivered through drill and practice, seat-work with fill-in-assignments, workbook work and question-and-answer sessions after having read parts of a textbook text together. The participants were very familiar with these teaching methods in light of the fact that they had experienced them in their teachers' classrooms during their 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling. In the turmoil of dealing with the challenges emerging from the realities of the first year these were the teaching methods Hanna and Jon resorted to, or rather copied, for the most part. Hanna said for instance: "Very often I was just letting them do loads of traditional seat-work and yes, relying a lot on the textbook" (Hanna, p. 133), and Jon said: "I'm too often too dependent on the textbooks ... I find it really difficult to do something different than simple fill-in assignments ... [and] some workbook

work” (Jon, p. 187). Then already during their second year, but especially during their third year, Hanna and Jon acquired the ability of filtering out these traditional teaching methods. Through validating themselves as teachers they managed to bring into play the practical knowledge of the multiple teaching methods they tried their hands at during practice teaching in their teacher education programs.<sup>14</sup> By the same token, Linda could draw on the innovative teaching she experienced during her schooling in the class with her favorite teacher in grades 4–7 already in her first year as her detailed stories have depicted. Linda said for example: “The lessons that I actually planned on my own ... [when] I was alone with the whole class ... I organized the teaching the way I totally wanted it to be; drawing on multiple ideas and teaching methods, using a variety of material and sources” (Linda, p. 249). Linda’s stories also depict how during her second year she blossomed as a teacher because nothing stood in her way, i.e. she was the only teacher in the second grade, therefore she did not need to negotiate her ideas and visions with what she felt were reluctant teachers.

In view of all this, in my research I found evidence of a much stronger connection between personal knowledge, both from my participants' personal life and from their childhood and teenage schooling, and their professional procedures, than in the literature I reviewed (e.g. Beattie, 1995b; Clandinin, 1985, 1989; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1996, 2000; Craig, 1995; Elbaz, 1981, 1983). These findings are important because they add considerably to the understanding of the term personal practical knowledge as well as providing it with greater depth and extension.

### **8.3 Becoming a Teacher**

The reasons for entering teacher education varied greatly between my three participants as their stories reveal. Linda was determined to become a teacher right after graduation from *stúdentsspróf*, however she took a detour, but while working in a kindergarten with the oldest children she became increasingly resolved. Hanna's decision to become a teacher was not made until she had found a university which

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<sup>14</sup>See this more fully in their stories: Hanna, pp. 142–147; Jon, pp. 196–203; and Linda, pp. 267–275.



was in accordance with her desire for a small university that put emphasis on creating a friendly, constructive community among students and teachers. Jon, on the other hand, did not decide to become a teacher until at the very end of his last teaching practice. However, once the decision had been made, their expectations of teaching were closely linked to the reasons as to why they wanted to become teachers in the first place, which is in congruence with the research literature (e.g. Bluestein, n.d.; Johnson & Birkiland, 2000, 2003; Steingrimsdóttir, 2005). As in those studies, the expectations of my participants consisted of mixed feelings of anticipation, excitement and apprehension. They were certain that teaching would be socially worthwhile (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007), that they would establish good relationships with students (Hobson et al., 2009), and further, that they are morally responsible to and for their students (Soder, 2004). When these three participants had made the decision to become teachers, regardless of when that decision was made, they began to visualize themselves as teachers, and, as the findings reveal, the connectedness with their own favorite teachers and the ideas of what being a good teacher entails simultaneously emerged.<sup>15</sup>

Similar to Nieto's (2009) research, my findings show that much of the motivation for entering teaching had to do with attitudes and values, such as the hope of changing students' lives, passion for social justice and love of subject matter, and I can report like Soder (2004), that the reasons for which my participants wanted to become teachers were rigorous and morally justified. Despite the negative aspects of teaching which my participants were explicitly cognizant of, they wanted to enter into teaching because of “its own moral grounding, its own demands, its own rewards” (Soder, 2004, p. 15). As with Bluestein (n.d.), each of my participants sought to be competent in their classrooms; Linda and Hanna longed to express creativity and joy, but Jon talked about being respected and viewed as a valuable addition by the school staff, and all of them envisioned themselves as enjoying their job. Last but not least, my study reveals the excitement of the beginning teachers of realizing their dream, their vision of the

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<sup>15</sup>See this more fully in their stories: Hanna, pp. 126–127; Jon, p. 180; and Linda, p. 240.

good teacher they all longed to become (Bluestein, n.d.). Linda wanted to be a good teacher who emphasizes a multiplicity of methods and assignments which she had learnt about at the IUE; Jon wanted to be a teacher, remembered by his students, not because of his entertainment value, but rather because they had learnt something substantial; and Hanna wanted to be a successful teacher, a role-model for some, and she wanted to make a difference in her students' lives; to touch their souls.

All three participants felt teaching involved vast responsibilities, that the planning and preparation called for a lot of work, they were certain that establishing good relationships with their students would not be a problem, they acknowledged the importance of creating a good atmosphere in the classroom, and as in several studies reviewed (e.g. Bluestein, n.d.; Johnson & Birkiland, 2003; Steingrimsdóttir, 2005), all of them looked forward to the task ahead. But there were doubts and concerns as well that teaching would also involve bad times like Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) contend in their study. Jon, for example, had doubts regarding his ability to be imaginative in his teaching, and Hanna was convinced that there would be extremely difficult days as well. The findings of this research confirm that the expectations of my participants were in agreement with the findings in the literature reviewed.

As my study shows, the participants enjoyed their time at the IUE and thought it offered a good teacher education program. Nonetheless, they were critical of it as well, although, not to the extent that they found it contained "huge gaps" like Fullan (2001) claims exists in the USA. Their criticism was more in line with Hobson's et al. (2009) as well as Ingvarsdóttir (2007) and Jónsdóttir (2005) in that they were skeptical about the value of some of the theoretical courses, i.e. courses with more or less identical content: "Too often we were doing the same thing twice in some of the courses" (Jon p. 178), and the participants found the balance between theoretical and practical courses to be somewhat deficient, as some in Hobson's et al. (2009) study did not. On the contrary, they wanted more practical pedagogy, especially practical courses regarding problematic student behavior and students with special educational needs (Jónsdóttir, 2005).

Besides this, they called for an extended internship (Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1999, Jónsdóttir, 2005).

Like Darling-Hammond and Ball suggest as well as Fullan (2001), the participants in this study felt that the teacher education program should be longer, at least four years, and they felt very strongly that the practical pedagogical courses, which dealt with being a class teacher, working with parents, assessment, understanding diversity, constructivist pedagogies, that were in fact elective courses, should without any doubt be core courses. Despite the criticism, my participants expressed that they were also aware of the fact that teaching ‘everything’ is impossible and similar to what Hammerness et al. (2005) conclude, my own findings show that the participants felt they would need to further their development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for optimal teaching (Hammerness et al., 2005). As a consequence, they would need to continue learning after graduation since being a teacher calls for lifelong learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hammerness et al., 2005; Ingvarsdóttir, 2002). Hence, my study fully supports Fullan (2001) and Bullough’s (2004) claim that it takes time to learn to teach and that beginning teachers learn to teach primarily by teaching, which means that the early years of every teachers’ career dramatically affects their potential to develop the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become.

### **Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years – Dealing with Challenges in the Realities**

As has been reported in a number of studies, the first year or even years of teaching were characterized by difficulties, and sometimes severe difficulties (see e.g. Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Fullan, 2001; Goodlad, 2004; Gordon & Maxey, 2000; Halford, 1999; Ingvarsdóttir, 2009; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Marti & Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1999). It is fair to say that the findings of my research also report difficulties, even to the extent of exhaustion, and by using the in-depth narrative methods and following the participants it further uncovers how this struggle affects them emotionally and morally. I divide this discussion into two of the sub-themes that emerged out of our conversations in relation to their experiences, once they had entered the reality of their classrooms: The Reality of

Teaching (lesson planning is part of this discussion); and Mentoring and Supporting Beginning Teachers.

#### **8.4.1 The Reality of Teaching**

As mentioned earlier, the thread that ran from the participants' 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling was the fabric out of which their original knowledge of teaching and learning was woven, and which became the foundation for their personal practical knowledge that they brought with them into their teacher education and later into their own teaching. In this section I will pick up this thread with the intention to show how it wove itself through their early years of teaching.

The stories demonstrate that each of my participants experienced difficulties and tribulations similar to what the literature on beginning teachers reports (see above) however, their difficulties were more disparate, as their stories reveal. Their experiences can certainly be identified as the reality shock Rogers and Babinski (1999) describe, and they sometimes felt they had been thrown into the deep end and left there to sink or swim, echoing what Feiman-Nemser (2001) has illustrated.

Hanna was assigned the most educationally needy students whom no one else wanted to teach, and she certainly felt that during the first year she merely learnt coping mechanisms as opposed to good teaching, which agrees with what Darling-Hammond (1998) has observed. It is safe to say that Hanna moved through all the phases Moir (1999) argues new teachers experience: From anticipation, to survival, to disillusionment, to rejuvenation, to reflection. At the end of her first year Hanna was exhausted, yet she had survived it (see e.g. Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2012; Huberman, 1992, 1993); she was not defeated as she was determined to continue teaching the same class the second year. The reality for Jon was quite different. Thus, the role anxiety (Hobson et al., 2009) Jon was experiencing manifested itself in a lack of confidence in his relationships with parents. Besides, even though Jon was considered skillful in human relations, he was overpowered by the dynamics of the classroom social environment which Goodlad (2004) refers to as one of the contradictions many novices experience. Having to teach outside his area of expertise, grade eight mother tongue, which Johnson (2006) postulates to be a

great cause of stress for beginning teachers, added to Jon's lack of confidence and was a matter of considerable concern. As for Linda, working with an experienced teacher was her greatest disappointment in the first year. Her stories show that this was a teacher who did not share her ideas and visions, and sent out a clear message of *this is how it is and this is how it should be*. Eberhard et al. (2000) talk about the importance for beginning teachers to have the opportunity to observe model teachers and work with effective mentors, which however did not turn out to be the case for Linda because her relationship with that teacher was challenging indeed (Hobson et al., 2009). This veteran teacher was reluctant to change anything, reluctant to use new teaching material and refused to take Linda's ideas into account. Consequently, the experiences of the first year of teaching did not meet with Linda's expectations at all (Eberhard et al., 2000).

As the stories of the young teachers in my study have shown, the reality of teaching also brought them painful feelings akin to what Huberman (1993) found in his study of 163 participants. Like in Huberman's study the painful feelings were caused by extremely difficult students, which both Hanna and Linda had to deal with, though in different ways. Hanna had to confront an excessively unruly class her first two years, and during her third year, Linda had to deal with the challenging and torn children in her grade three class.<sup>16</sup> There was also trial and error in the classroom as in Huberman's (1993) study, which Jon experienced intensely through difficult incidents such as his inability to plan quality lessons and when the other math teacher was too generous with grades. Then there were tensions and uncertainties encountered, as Huberman (1993) discovered, which Hanna experienced when dealing with difficult parents who turned against her and blamed her and the school for everything that had gone wrong with their children. All of them experienced the workload as being too heavy, teaching being too pressured and stressful, and dealing with constant misbehavior of disruptive students made their work too difficult, especially in Hanna's case, which Kyriacou and

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<sup>16</sup>See this more fully in their stories: Hanna, pp. 129–132; and Linda, pp. 256–262.

Kunc (2007) identified as being influential factors in beginning teachers' commitment towards teaching.

The participants in this study often wondered whether they were up to the challenge of teaching (Huberman, 1992), like Hanna, who said she did not like herself as a teacher; the tension between the vision and reality was too overwhelming. She was painstakingly aware of deficits in her classroom management skills, and she expressed the wish that her students could feel that they could trust her as she could her favorite teacher, who was Hanna's role model. Further, as is quite common for novices, they wanted to challenge the prevalent knowledge and conventional wisdom (Nieto, 2009), or their school culture: Linda, for instance, had the courage to question the actions and behavior of the veteran teacher on her team. Even though Linda was self-assured in the interactions with that teacher, she was simultaneously respectful, acknowledging her wisdom in certain areas, as her stories reveal. All three participants in this study were survivors, surviving their painful beginnings; a beginning that echoes one of Huberman's (1993) phases which he outlined in his large-scale study. In spite of negative experiences to begin with, contrary to what Gordon and Maxey (2000) observed who argue that such novices may never reach their full potential as teachers, Hanna, Jon and Linda became stronger by each year.

What is more, and as Huberman's (1993) study exemplifies, the participants in this research found it hard to confront the complexity and simultaneity of instructional management, like Jon who experienced an inner conflict between his newly acquired vision from his teacher education and the experience, or rather the practical knowledge, from his own schooling. On the one hand, he wanted his students to work in cooperation, which usually does not take place in silence, and on the other hand he was still 'hanging on to' his knowledge of schooling from his own experience, with the memory of his favorite teacher fresh in mind, who was in control of his classroom seemingly without any effort. This story manifests an explicit example of the conflict most beginning teachers truly struggle with: The conflict between the personal practical knowledge from her or his own schooling and the newly acquired knowledge which the beginning teacher is trying to 'fit' into her or his new vision of schooling.

Therefore this is a clear example of a beginning teacher's feelings when struggling to fit the new knowledge into the pre-existing practical part of her or his personal practical knowledge.

Lesson planning was an area of difficulty which my participants were faced with time and again during their early years. The research demonstrates that it proved more difficult than one would expect in spite of the fact that they all had to carefully prepare their practice teaching each time, lesson by lesson, as Jon explains: “We had to make this huge lesson-planning folder in our first year, where every single lesson was carefully prepared, because it teaches you what careful lesson planning and organization is about” (see Jon, p. 179). They certainly had their work cut out for them, even more than one could foresee. Hanna hit the nail on the head when she said that there “never [was] enough time to plan interesting lessons” (see Hanna, p. 132).

In keeping with what has been discussed above, these young teachers said that they had received good preparation in planning lessons during their teacher education program, in connection with their teaching practice. However, once in the reality of their own classrooms they fell back on the practice they knew so well from their own schooling as has also been discussed above. Like Feiman-Nemser (2001) contends, my participants additionally stuck to whatever practices which enabled them to endure, even though they knew they did neither represent the 'best' practice in that situation nor their ideals and visions. These were primarily the practices which were part of both the personal and practical knowledge from their childhood and teenage years in school. Ultimately, the findings reveal that all the new innovative and creative ideas and instructional methods they were exposed to in their teacher education, gave way to their personal practical knowledge of their own schooling experiences as they virtually copied the teaching methods which their own teachers had used in their classrooms. This occurred despite that in their teaching practice these teachers had tried out new innovative and creative ideas and instructional methods, which they were also very excited to use in their own classrooms.

I propose to compare the effect of the personal practical knowledge from childhood and teenage schooling to the knowledge of people who have been scrupulously trained in first aid and who know

how to apply it in hazardous situations. The people in question face situations where they must utilize this knowledge and training and are able to act accordingly without hardly any deliberation. Then the methods evolve and change by virtue of new knowledge. Given the fact that these people do not receive equivalent training in the new methods for example on CPR and breathing resuscitation, they will continue to use what they had previously been trained to use since, in a given hazardous circumstances, there is neither time nor opportunity for mindful reflection. By the same token, the novice teachers resort to their knowledge of teaching which they gained after 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling, when the difficulties in the first year or years overshadow the new knowledge they had acquired through their teacher education programs. In other words, in the demanding and challenging situations in their early years, my participants made practical (Clandinin, 1989) their personal knowledge of teaching from their own years of schooling instead of being able to make practical their newly acquired personal practical knowledge of teaching from their teacher education programs. Such is the effect of 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling.

My three participants experienced this effect in their beginning teaching although each of them experienced it differently. Despite Hanna's vision of her students being continuously engaged in something exciting, of her students being alive and active in their learning, of having fun and laughing with them, she in actual fact merely coped, since she was overwhelmed and exhausted by their behavior. It consumed all her time and energy, and therefore her only resource was to fall back on the teaching practices she was so familiar with from her own schooling as a student. Similarly, Jon's teaching was contrary to his expectations. He felt he was just like the alcoholics; only being able to take one day at a time, as planning lessons was overly time consuming. Like Hanna, he was more dependent on textbooks and using fill-in assignments than he wanted to, but he resorted to these methods since this is what he had become so acquainted with through his own schooling. It was too difficult and would take up too much time to attempt something different. In contrast to Hanna's and Jon's experiences, Linda's personal and practical knowledge involved experiences of the innovative and



creative classroom which she expected to implement in her own teaching. As the veteran teacher on her team did not share her vision, having to endure what she found far too traditional and lacking in professionalism, created intense frustration for Linda, and this prevented her from fully utilizing that what she knew so well from her own schooling as a student.

At first glance one is tempted to explain this hazardous beginning in terms of the beginning teachers' lack of skills, i.e. that they did not learn 'anything' in their teacher education. Rather, like Clandinin (1989) suggests, one should look beyond these most common explanations which consist of exploring the transition from a student teacher to a novice teacher to an experienced teacher, by applying the term personal practical knowledge to the situation at hand. This supports Clandinin's (1989) claim that one has to look beyond the most commonplace explanations of the beginning teachers' lack of skills.

As has been brought into view with my findings, the difficulties of my participants, however different for each of them, bear similarities to what Halford (1999) describes, namely, that education is a profession “that eats its young” (p. 14). This view is certainly both bold and challenging, and has an aspect worth considering which implicates that the veteran teachers and the culture of the schools, their traditions and norms, or the reality as referred to above, eats the beginning teachers' visions and beliefs. The critical conditions the participants were faced with made them feel that the ideals that brought them to teaching in the first place, were fast disappearing as Nieto (2009) critically puts it. None of my participants *dropped out* of teaching; what they feared would happen, however, as their stories illustrate, was the *drop out* of their beliefs, the very beliefs they had developed during their teacher education programs; such was the power and the effect of 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling under these challenging circumstances. They felt they were not even close to doing what they had intended to achieve at the outset of their career as teachers. They said that they were in no way close to being the good teachers they desired to be. As discussed, my findings do suggest that the first year or years for beginning teachers in Iceland proved to be as painful a period as findings from other studies under-

line (see e.g. Fullan, 2001; Gordon & Maxey, 2000; Halford, 1999; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Marti & Huberman, 1989; Moir, 1999).

Additionally, beginning teachers in Iceland experience difficulties which may be different from what studies in other countries report, given the fact that the context of Icelandic schools is in some ways different from other countries. Thus, it is very common in Iceland that first year teachers are assigned whichever teaching that is available upon recruitment, which more often than not happens just before school begins in the fall. The participants in this study found themselves in this situation: Jon had to teach Icelandic mother tongue in grade eight even though his subjects were math and social studies; Hanna had to teach all the academic school subjects in grade five and six even though her subjects were social studies and Icelandic; Linda became a grade one class teacher even though she had no preparation for such teaching; Hanna taught extra hours of substitute teaching even though it seriously affected her regular lesson planning because she had the impression that this was expected of her; Jon did not know two days before he met his students whether he was supposed to be a class teacher in grade four or grade seven; Hanna was assigned special education teaching in the remedial room within her school in her third year of teaching without having any such education; Linda and Hanna received neither formal nor informal support until after quite some time in their first year (this will be discussed later in this chapter); and all of them experienced quite early in their first year that their principals and colleagues had somewhat forgotten that they were beginning teachers. This was their reality of teaching and it worked against them in their early years.

#### **8.4.2 Mentoring and Supporting Beginning Teachers**

When beginning teachers arrive at a new work place, it is important, according to Johnson and Kardos (2002), that they are warmly welcomed, introduced to colleagues and given the necessary information about the classes they will teach. Principals are seen to play a vital role in the success of the beginning teachers (Long, et al., 2012). The data of this research reports the same insights, but this framework is obviously not enough in order to 'survive' the first year or years of teaching as the above discussion has shown. The research

literature provides extensive descriptions on the support beginning teachers receive and how it can be improved (see e.g. Johnson, et al., 2001; Keiffer-Barone & Ware, 2001; Olebe, et al., 1999; Rogers & Babinski, 1999), which, as Johnson et al. (2001) point out, might not solely attract new teachers but also keep them. For some years now, nothing in the rules or regulations for schools in Iceland requires principals to allocate beginning teachers a mentor or formal support. Teachers' salary-contract used to stipulate the possibility of payment for one hour per week for mentoring or supporting a beginning teacher, although this ceased to be on offer over a decade ago. In spite of that, many principals ask their teachers to support a beginning teacher even though they might not pay them for taking on that role.

The participants in this study each received some support their first year of teaching, which, at least to some degree, falls under the heading of one of the three types of schools' professional culture which Johnson and Kardos (2002; Kardos & Johnson, 2007) discuss as an important factor in relation to the level of support for beginning teachers; the veteran-oriented professional culture, the novice-oriented professional culture, and the integrated-oriented professional culture. Jon was the only one who was assigned a mentor from day one, and it seems that the professional culture of his school was partly *the integrated-oriented professional culture*, given that he was recognized as a novice, offered extra assistance, and teamwork was common practice. Conversely, Linda had to call for a mentor because her principal, who promised she would have one, delayed it for weeks. Hanna was never even assigned a mentor in the first place. In both of Hanna's and Linda's schools *the veteran-oriented professional culture* appears to have been the predominant one, where the methods and norms of teaching practice were determined by and meant to serve veteran teachers. However, it appears that *the novice-oriented professional culture* was partly the prevalent professional culture in Linda's second school (her third year of teaching), since youth and inexperience existed there, because most of the teachers were beginning teachers in this new school, there was little or no professional guidance, which is also a component of this type of professional culture. Collaborative culture, as Shank (2005) describes it, with common space, common time and common work, where

opportunities of immediate support and assistance from a team of teachers are readily available for novices, was seemingly not the predominant culture in any of the participants' schools. Shank claims that immediate support could have tremendous influence on the beginning teachers' learning as well as on their feelings of wellbeing, but the novice teachers in this study did not receive such support from a team of teachers, therefore it is impossible to discern if it would have had the same beneficial effect.

As the findings reveal, the support for each of the participants varied and all of them received support at their school site which Johnson et al. (2001) and Birkeland and Johnson (2002) claim is the key to retaining new teachers. Goodlad (2004) argues that mentoring should be a part of the same school culture because counseling should be offered by someone who knows the situation. In addition, Hobson (2009) found (in the BaT study) that support which was readily available and easily approachable was highly valued. Hanna called on the substitute principal her first year, who supported her until the new year when the regular principal returned. And since the regular principal did not care for such involvement, Hanna felt she had no one to rely on for the rest of the year. Jon received the guidance he sought after within his school, such as on how things were run on a daily basis and about cyclical events within the school. It is interesting to note that Linda did not want the teacher she team-taught with as her mentor because they were so different and had such different visions, which naturally produced conflicts of interests. Instead she first turned to the student counselor, and then to the mentor she was finally given.

As Johnson et al. (2001) insist, it is at their school sites where beginning teachers must find support, training, success and satisfaction, as it is in these schools and in their classrooms where they will decide whether or not to continue to teach. And in spite of various types and degrees of difficulties in the early years, all three participants taught in schools that supported their work in one way or the other, which Birkeland and Johnson (2002) maintain is the main factor helping new teachers to stay afloat. However, in order for them not to simply 'keep in the swim' but flourish as beginning teachers, it would seem that the integrated professional culture which, according to Johnson and Kardos (2002; Kardos & Johnson, 2007), encourages

teacher collaboration across experience levels, combined with the collaborative culture Shank (2005) describes, should be a model serving the beginning teacher's needs better, which therefore will create the ability for them to better attend to their students' needs.

What is more, participants in this study emphasized the importance of having someone to talk to whom they could trust. They said that they had great need to discuss everything that came up, good as well as bad. It was abundantly clear that all of them craved for opportunities to express their feelings, how things were going and their general wellbeing; they were all in need for effective psychological or emotional support which Hobson (2009) suggests should be available to novices. Hanna was desperate because of what she felt was a constant power struggle between her and the students, as well as within the group of students. She felt she had no methods to deal with this situation. Her students did not listen to her, they were all over the place and just shouting and screaming. The tension between the vision and the reality of teaching was overwhelming for Hanna and she needed someone who would listen to her express this situation. Linda was extremely frustrated because the teacher she was team-teaching with did not speak the same 'pedagogical' language as she did, resulting in unclear lessons and assignments, as well as bewildered students, so that, like Hanna, she, too, needed someone who would listen to her express her frustrations. For Jon it was important to be able to discuss his teaching with colleagues, he felt it was essential to talk about what he had been doing, to receive feedback, so that, he, too, needed someone who would listen to him and was ready to discuss things openly. Both Linda and Hanna mentioned that the door to the principal's office was always open, and it was obviously important to them to be able to call by when they needed a sympathetic ear. They required it in order to remain involved in their job, and my findings echo Kirkpatrick's (2007) that if beginning teachers are to stay involved in teaching it is necessary for schools to recognize their need for discussing their feelings, their interests and their enthusiasm. Here, I want to add how important it is for principals to get to know their newest members on the team through such interactions, as can be derived from the participants' stories.

Qualities of a good mentor also came up in our conversations and the participants found it important that a novice teacher would have a mentor who is willing and ready to assume that role; it must be someone they can turn to, who would be willing to address the problems with them, who would want to help them, and simply enjoy speculating and discussing teaching and learning. Further, there would be a need for support from someone who shares the beginning teachers' ideas and encourages them, given that it can become problematic if the mentor does not share a similar vision, as is clear in Linda's case. It is more than likely that the beginning teacher is unwilling to give vent to feelings which are in fact created by her or his team-teaching because if the mentor is also on the team, she or he might have an invested interest in what is being said. Beginning teachers would expect the mentor to ask them how things are going, they would want the mentor to come by their classroom and familiarize her- or himself with their challenges; to be at home in everything they are dealing with, as Hanna put it, someone who knows the difficulties and dilemmas, the circumstances and happenings (Goodlad, 2004).

It is interesting to match these findings with the three stages Eberhard et al. (2000) postulate that novice teachers go through during their first three years of teaching, i.e. the survival stage in the first year, the maintenance stage in the second year and to the impact or effectiveness stage in the third year. All three participants surely survived the first year, although with different experiences in their sacks as the above discussion illustrate. To some extent, they all continued to receive guidance and support during their second year; Linda and Hanna from their principals and Jon from his colleague who was the special education teacher in his school. This undoubtedly played a part in the way in which they maintained their engagement. Due to this guidance Hanna, Jon and Linda all reached the effectiveness stage, however not all achieved this during their third year, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The young teachers in this research came up with ideas and suggestions on how mentoring and support of novices could be improved. Besides having a designated mentor, they mentioned peer support, similar to Hobson's (2009) suggestions, where beginning

teachers from different schools could meet on a regular basis and express their feelings at their own level, so to speak, and better still with a mentor from the teacher education program. Further, they suggested some sort of a systematic support network to get them started, which would keep an eye on them and motivate them if needed. Hanna felt very strongly about beginning teachers having to take on a whole class alone. She even said that it was not morally right and, very risky indeed to assign a beginning teacher the most difficult class in the school as was done in her case. Instead, they ought to be able to join a team of teachers which would then be responsible for a group of students. This corresponds with Shank's (2005) collaborative culture as discussed above.

My study illustrates distinctly the burden of the difficulties that novice teachers are subject to while learning to get a grasp of their job, as well as how important it is that they receive greater support than was available to them earlier. In the light of my findings, I agree with Lovett and Cameron (2011), when they insist that there is a call for “the teaching profession to look after its own to keep its own” (p. 88), which means that schools must nurture and treasure the professional knowledge and expertise of the beginning teachers. As already discussed, the findings bring to light ideas and suggestions for support beyond the first year of teaching which are intended to improve this situation and will be elaborated on in the last chapter of this thesis. However, even though these beginning teachers experienced their fair share of difficulties during the first year, and even years, in teaching, they also experienced successes and joys, as well as triumphs small and large in their classrooms, which they could build on in order to increase their professional power.

### **8.5 Validating Self as a Teacher**

The goal of this this section is to discuss findings that bring to light the steps the participants took from their challenging beginnings to validating themselves as teachers. As might be expected, however, challenges continued beyond the first year of teaching, as the findings reveal, which corroborate findings of other research (e.g. Eberhard, 2000; Goodlad, 2004; Hobson, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2007; Lovett & Cameron, 2011). All three teachers experienced continued need for

support and guidance which is necessary if the chances of improved practice and sustained inspiration are to be realized (Kirkpatrick, 2007). The behavior of Hanna's students remained challenging in the second year and dissatisfied parents turned against her. Through these ordeals Hanna relied on the principal for support to show the parents that she (the principal) had confidence in her, which the principal in fact did. The principal supported and guided her to tackle these difficulties, which undoubtedly helped her improve her practice and retain her inspiration (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Similarly, Linda could consistently count on her principal's support and guidance during the first two years. Facing the difficulties with the extremely demanding class in her third year of teaching, she could fall back on the guidance and the pleasant teaching experiences from her second year of teaching. As for Jon, he found that the real professional guidance and support he got was from the special education teacher who worked closely with his team during the second and especially the third year of teaching. Goodlad (2004) is right when he says that schools will continue to suffer the consequences if they neglect to look more thoroughly into the first five years of the beginning teachers' careers, and the findings of the present study indeed reflect this insight.

To be sure, the realities facing the participants in this study, in the early years of teaching, were not only characterized by difficulties. There were also experiences of joys and successes. The findings illustrate how one of the young teachers eventually began to get a handle on things in her teaching, and managed it in ways where she could see her students flourish in the classroom. They further unravel how one of the young teachers, who, despite a diffident and calm nature, found a way to address openly and honestly what troubled him, and found a path to take his teaching along through the confusion. And they also depict a young teacher who focused the full power of everything she was, on what she had a burning desire to achieve in order to develop new practices and to help her students learn.

As the stories of the three participants have revealed, their journeys from novices to competent performers, were far from identical (see Berliner, 2001). What was crucial for Hanna in validating herself as a teacher was simply not giving up at a time when she was experiencing the most difficult teaching period, when



she felt the situation to be completely hopeless. Becoming more successful in her third year of teaching brought her the feeling of competence; at last she was able to teach, as opposed to just monitoring behavior all the time. In a word, she was able to create good relationships, she was finally able to plan lessons which were more creative and more fun and this proved revitalizing for her in a way in which made her open to change and innovations again.

What was most significant for Linda was to experience the success during her second year as a result of turning every stick and stone as means of finding solutions and in order to be creative and innovative in her teaching. Her success was indeed a fruit of her own labor as she worked very hard at it, and this gave her the strength and self-confidence she needed when dealing with an extremely difficult class during her third year of teaching. This teaching brought Linda the understanding that to help her students learn she could not take any short-cuts. On the contrary, it was a long and strenuous journey. By recognizing that success in teaching was not a destination but a journey, Linda was validating herself as a teacher. Similar to Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) who compared those who ‘hang in’ teaching with people who work hard on their marriages, Hanna, and especially Linda, as described above, worked diligently on their teaching under very difficult circumstances, and they also reacted to failed expectations by seeking out new sources of satisfaction (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007) which brought about new ways of helping students learn.

What was ultimately of most importance for Jon was finding ways to turn his embarrassing teaching moments into learning experiences for his students. This gradually became his strength in teaching as well as in the relationships with his students. He had the guts to be sincere and open, and he dared to discuss how he could improve his own performance as a teacher, which most teachers might find a very sensitive issue. Equally important for Jon in validating himself as a teacher was the experience that, in light of the fact that his students had greatly improved, he had indeed accomplished something in his Math teaching during his third year. In spite of this he felt that he was in fact not really teaching as his students were working independently according to their own study plans in the new program of differentiated instruction. Jon's traditional image of teaching, his

personal and practical knowledge, was not in accordance with the role of the teacher in this new program. In view of this, it is interesting how distinctly it demonstrates the inner struggle between a more traditional image of the role of the teacher, and acting the new role. The descriptions of his inner struggle are particularly illuminating as such a distinctive example could not be found in the literature I reviewed. This is one example of the new knowledge that such a longitudinal study can provide.

When the findings concerning how these young teachers start to validate themselves are summed up, they fully agree with Clandinin's et al. (2005) ideas, that teachers teach what they know, they teach who they are, and they teach what each situation, each encounter, pulls out of their knowing. Clandinin and her coworkers reach the heart of the matter when they phrase their ideas in this way, and they are, in fact, paraphrasing the term personal practical knowledge. As the findings of this research clearly show, through the process of learning as beginning teachers towards expertise as described by Kelly (2006), and once having passed the survival stage discussed by Eberhard et al. (2000) after their first or even second year of teaching, the personal practical knowledge of these three young teachers began to change. Teaching *what they knew* took on a completely different picture, as their knowledge changed through their learning. Teaching *who they were* also changed as their self-confidence grew. And, lastly, *teaching what each situation, each encounter, pulled out of their knowing* changed simultaneously with their increasing knowledge of teaching, thus they could develop new ways of helping students to learn. Obviously, as the stories of them have shown, they also went through the latter two stages Eberhard et al. (2000) describe: from the maintenance stage in the second year to the impact or effectiveness stage in the third year. Therefore the findings of this study reveal distinctly how the participants began to develop their practices which enabled them to elicit their more or less dormant vision of teaching from the time when they were newly graduated teachers. These findings will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### 8.6 Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences

The findings of this research show that during the fourth and the fifth year, with growing self-confidence, a space was created for the three young teachers to develop their ideas into the practices they aimed at, thus to act on the vision they had carried with them since graduation as teachers. Hanna managed to realize her vision of what she referred to as touching her students' souls by taking action when she had the opportunity to team-teach in a multi-age group of students. Jon's developing sense of confidence made it possible for him to realize his desire to take his teaching further, yet to simultaneously avoid the comfort-zone trap. As for Linda, with her relentlessly positive outlook on issues and situations, she viewed difficulties at hand as tasks to be tackled instead of impossible problems, and managed to realize her vision of working towards making a difference in her students' lives.

Each of the participants evidently improved their teaching every year, and according to Berliner's developmental model (1994, 2001) which outlines how expertise in teaching develops (as described in the literature review on pp. 56–59), these young teachers had moved through the first three stages: from novice, to advanced beginner, and to the stage of competent performer by the end of their third year. Jon's and Hanna's stories depict that Jon had undeniably reached the proficient stage, which is the fourth stage, and Hanna the expert stage, which is the fifth stage, by the end of their fifth year. Berliner maintains that in order to become an expert in teaching, if one ever will, takes five years, or even more. However, judging from the discourse of the participants in the present study, it can take less than five years for some people, like Linda's stories demonstrate. By the end of her third year in teaching she had indisputably become the expert in teaching Berliner (2001) describes using the 13 prototypical features of expertise in teaching (see the literature review, pp. 56–59). Additionally, even though all three teachers doubtlessly improved their teaching each year “as experience [was] gained and reflected on” (Berliner, 2001, p. 478); and as they told and re-told the stories they lived by, Linda's progress proofed faster in comparison to the other two teachers regardless of talent, through extensive deliberate practice, as her stories also show. Even though only a very small

proportion of teachers in general move onto the last two stages according to Berliner (2001), all three teachers reached the fourth stage and one of them the stage of expertise earlier than expected. The teacher in Beattie's (1995a) study constructed and re-constructed her personal practical knowledge through the reflective practices of the inquiry which the three teachers in this study did as well. In addition, they moved faster onto the last two stages which, I suggest, can be attributed, to some extent, to the participation in a longitudinal study such as the present one.

The findings of this study indicate, as is the case in Beattie's (1995a) study, that the participants' understanding of themselves and others grew through their research relationships with the researcher, and as a result they became more responsive and reciprocal. This is why I argue that the more rapid progress of my participants than would be expected according to Berliner's (2001) theoretical account, is mainly due to their participation in a longitudinal study.<sup>17</sup> A long-standing research relationship as in this study created trust, where the participants felt safe to express openly whatever they were grappling with each year, and it made it possible for the researcher to follow up on the process of meaning making, such as their concerns and difficulties, joys and successes. In the ongoing conversations over the five years I was able to assist the participants in putting their thinking and meaning-making in context from one year to the next as these two examples show: "Yes, taking part in this study has made me just more critically aware as a teacher" (see Linda, p. 290–291); and Hanna said that that participating in this research had made her more conscious and reflective as a teacher "because I never talk about my teaching so extensively with people" (see Hanna, p. 163–164). This created field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) both of which were extensive and extremely rich in content. Further, it opened up possibilities to provide

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<sup>17</sup>When Linda had read her final narratives she made e.g. the following remark: "The time with you the first years [of my teaching] gave me a lot and as I have undoubtedly told you before, for me it was like going to graduate school. It was invaluable and so beneficial to reflect on the previous year with you – the professional that you are. This has strengthen me and supported me and the praise from you I cherish" (Linda, see further appendix VII).

deeper insight into the participants' feelings, their development, and their line of thinking each time. Furthermore, it provided insight into the meaning they made of their experiences of issues and incidents in their teaching, the learning of their students and their circumstances, as the stories have indeed depicted clearly, and deeper than if the participants had been interviewed for example at the end of their first year, and then again some years later. All this was the ground on which the comprehensive and detailed stories of the three participants were built, and which made them abundant and rich both in content and meaning. That in itself, can be seen as a distinctive contribution of this study to the area of narrative inquiry and teacher research.

The developmental progress of the three teachers, or their learning as Kelly (2006) has it, was both vertical and horizontal (Newell, et al., 2009), as it was built upon their previous teaching experience and reflections (vertical). But it was also grounded in new sets of relationships which they developed and in their effort to learn how to teach in different settings or simultaneously at different grade levels within the school, which Newell et al. (2009) describe as horizontal development. As Newell et al. maintain, it cannot be assumed that individual teachers can transfer practices from student experience at university to school as teachers, and the present findings largely support this. The participants of the study developed their professional knowledge in the context of their schools as they became experienced teachers as Craig (1995) found in her two year study, but it took more than two years as is illustrated by their comprehensive stories. This present study thus has expanded on Craig's research by further unraveling some of the complexities surrounding how beginning teachers' knowledge is subtly shaped in their professional knowledge contexts.

For the participants in this study, significant learning moments were equally moments of tension they experienced, and similar to Clandinin's et al. (2005) study, these moments created the possibilities of shifts in their stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). These were the moments when they were “most able to awaken to other possibilities” (Clandinin et al., 2005, p. 57). A particularly illustrative example of this is from Linda's third year of teaching, when she found ways to tackle the incredibly difficult class by exerting herself both personally and pedagogically to an extent she

was not aware of being capable of. Here, Linda succeeded in making the connections that Beattie (2007) posits is at the heart of teaching and learning: Her learning was at a level that was transformative both of her knowledge and of herself. An identical learning moment for Jon centered on an understanding of what moving himself, his teaching and his students beyond the comfort zone actually meant in his classroom. As for Hanna, simultaneously going back to graduate school and building a program with a team of teachers that catered to the various needs of her students embraced several such learning moments.

Further, having the opportunity to tell and re-tell classroom stories over a period of five years moved the stories they lived by out of the tacit domain into the open, offering themselves to reflection. Increased understanding of how the term 'personal practical knowledge' helps bring out teachers' tacit knowledge, as I believe this study has clearly shown, may clearly result in improvements in teachers and teaching in general. It changes the professional practice of the teacher in her or his classroom, and it changes the personal practical knowledge of that teacher; hence it changes the professional knowledge landscape (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996) of that classroom. Numerous stories of the three teachers distinctly illustrate this point, and this study, being longitudinal by implication, highlights the importance of creating scope for teachers to collaboratively reflect on their practices.

This longitudinal study, similar to Newells' et al. (2009) research, has provided insights into, and understanding of how early career teachers move in their teaching practice from one year to the next during the first five teaching years. However, because the stories are comprehensive, they have presented in greater detail how the participants managed their challenges, concerns and dilemmas, and how they enjoyed their successes and pleasant moments, than in other research reviewed. The stories in this research further include findings which depict how they developed their embodied knowledge (Johnson, 1989) of creating and managing relationships with students, colleagues and parents alike, as well as building classroom community. Thus, through professional practice and reflection on their meaning making each year, the young teachers in my study gained new learning, both personal and practical, which has reconstructed

their personal practical knowledge of teaching. This will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter.

### **8.7 Re-Creating Story of Self as Teacher**

Each of the stories of the three beginning teachers in this research presents the personal and the professional sides of being and becoming teachers. Each of the participants carried with them identities into their teaching; the professional identities which had been shaped and constructed during their teacher education program. Which, then, were re-shaped and re-constructed during the first five years through the development of their professional practice. These stories tell of creating and re-creating of self as a teacher.

Hanna's stories were mostly stories of resilience and relationships, and of a beginning teacher reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future in order to deal with the requirements of the present situation. Jon's stories depicted a reserved teacher who went about his job in a quiet friendly manner, patiently trying to implement and integrate his ideals into his own teaching. Linda's stories illustrate how determined she was from the day she set foot in her teacher education program, that she would do everything in her power to push for her vision, her ideals in teaching and learning to be realized, so that she could look everybody in the eye and say that she was a good teacher. Their ideals and visions, or their moral horizon (Estola, et al., 2003), gave meaning to their teaching, and their identities were in constant evolution (Kelly, 2006) over the five years of our research relationship.

Beijaard's et al. (2004) review of over 20 studies on professional identities propose a threefold division of identity categories which I found were echoed by my findings although my study makes an additional contribution to the process of identity formation. The first category concerns teachers' professional identity formation that involved knowledge sources like knowledge of teaching, relationships and subject matter. These were also without a doubt influential factors in the identity formation of my participants. Jon's story of teaching grammar and spelling in grade eight Mother Tongue (Icelandic), which was a struggle for him, is a telling story of how his lack of subject matter knowledge adversely affected his identity.

The core point of the third category involved a process of interaction between how teachers value themselves and what is found relevant by others in the profession in order to become a professional. Additionally, in my study there is distinct evidence that interactions, such as what is found relevant by others outside the profession, e.g. the parents and the students, also played an important role in identity formation. This influence can be widely found in the stories of the teachers in my study. These interactions had both positive as well as negative influences on the identity formation or the construction and re-construction of their identity throughout the five years.

An example of negative influence is Hanna's view of herself during her struggling beginning with her extremely difficult class which took her along paths she did not know existed; and travelling along them turned her into a teacher she did not want to be. This was manifested in a dislike towards herself as a teacher and to the extent that she sometimes felt she was incapable of being a teacher. The parents turned against her during her second year, which added to the negative image she had of herself during this period. An example of negative influence in Jon's case was his greatest concern, which he confided to me at the end of his fifth year; i.e. that he was not listened to, especially by students, but possibly also by colleagues. He felt he was not as dynamic a teacher as he wanted to be, he was too hesitant to be spontaneous, he was afraid of doing something incorrectly, and he was preoccupied with all the responsibilities demanded by teaching; of the graveness of it all. He said that this had been his Achilles' heel as a teacher. These experiences seem to have been the most influential factors in shaping his identity to begin with as a teacher and through the entire years of this study. What is more, Linda's disappointment in the beginning of her career when working with the experienced teacher who did not share the same pedagogical ideas, who had extremely traditional ideas of teaching and learning, is still another example of negative influence which shaped Linda's identity in the very beginning of her teaching.

As these three teachers moved through the stages of Berliner's (1994, 2001) model, described in the literature chapter, and, judging from their stories, they increasingly improved at what they were doing, and they began to envisage the possibility of realizing their



passion in teaching. And these were the positive influences and interactions that were relevant for their identity formation. Hanna's main passion in teaching involved the right of all children to receive education in their home school, in the regular classroom with their peers; and further she believed that multi-age teaching was a one means to that end. Returning to graduate school part time in her fourth year helped her find solutions and gain perspective again. It created paths for her initiative, her creativity and desire to build a constructive environment in order to become a better teacher for all students, because she felt that in a class of 25 students some would indeed surprise us in the future.

Jon became very conscious of the necessity of approaching each student as an individual in his third year, whether regarding personal problems or learning needs and his main passion in teaching was the well-being of all his students and developing the capability of being there for all of them. He wanted his students to learn, to work on each task with ambition, to keep their pace and to gain independence. Therefore it was an important positive factor in his identity formation when he came to realize the meaning implied in the fact that not everything is possible, and that he was not doing *everything* wrong, if *one* student was not doing well academically. It was his sincere belief that there must be something in there for all his students, because it will eventually hit home somewhere else in their lives.

In Linda's view, the classroom is a community and feeling good together in the classroom is the starting point of all learning. Her main passion in teaching was to be completely available for her students, where creativity, mutual respect, warm attitudes, feeling of security and simultaneously setting limits were important features. A significant factor in her positive identity formation was her experience during the second year when she became determined to show the parents that she could teach the class of 30 children. This entailed an extreme amount of effort, and she succeeded, which left her with the understanding that you harvest according to what you sow.

The stories demonstrate influences and interactions which shaped the professional identity of the three young teachers during the five years of this research. These findings validate what Cladinin and Connelly (1996) insist upon, i.e. that the professional identity of the

teachers were shaped in practice, in their classrooms with their students, and outside the classrooms in professional communal places with others, as well as interacting with parents. By talking with the participants about what mattered to them and what meaning they made of their experiences, how they understood the knowledge and the context of their teaching, it enabled me, like Connelly and Clandinin (1996) and Clandinin and Huber (2005), to dig deep in an attempt to understand and extract how this is linked, even deeper than the literature reviewed has revealed, as the examples above demonstrate.

Teachers create personal knowledge and a certain kind of practical knowledge of schooling already in school as children (e.g. Beattie, 1995b, 2007; Clandinin, 1985, 1989; Connelly and Clandinin, 1986, 1996; Craig, 1995; Elbaz, 1981, 1983), which they carry with them to their teacher education programs, and finally into practice. How their personal practice knowledge was constituted and lived out on the professional landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) at any particular point in time shaped and re-shaped their identities; it was the story each of them lived by. The findings from this study provide ample evidence showing even more clearly than the literature reviewed how the personal practical knowledge develops and changes from one year to the next, as the comprehensive stories have depicted.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1995), when teachers talk about their practice, they use different language depending on the place on the landscape; whether talking about their classroom events to a colleague or to other professionals in other professional or communal places than the classroom. This effectively means that teachers function on two fundamentally different places in the landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), which creates a potentially confusing and disturbing dilemma.

The teachers in this research all used the in-classroom language, which is the language of story. It is personal, it depends on context, it is moral and it is in line with "the teachers' self-authoring of classroom stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 14). However, I would add, that what teachers see and experience in out-of-classrooms places, what they feel or think about what other teachers are doing, is equally disturbing to them. It disturbs their thinking about teaching and it disturbs what in their minds being a professional entails. Therefore,

these are factors that also affect their identity formation. There are several findings in this research that support this claim. Hanna told a story about teachers' incompetence to tackle individual needs; how strongly she felt about teachers' lack of skills and the schools' incapacity to handle inclusion, which apparently disturbed her thinking about professionalism and schooling. This was Hanna's passion in teaching, and thus affected her identity. Similarly, Linda told a story about a meeting with the teachers in the next grade level in order to plan a unit where their students would work together. The teachers were negative and reluctant to change; they found fault with everything because it was too much work, there were too many groups, too few teachers, too little time. This negativity and, in general, negative teacher talk in the staffroom disturbed Linda's thinking about professionalism and schooling, and consequently affected her identity.

Moreover, what is said in out-of-classroom places *about* individual teachers as well as *to* them can also affect the formation of their identity. A good example of positive influence on identity formation from the out-of-classroom places is what Jon said about the way he was received as a novice teacher, how his principal praised him for his conduct in his first parent meeting, and that the parents admitted that they liked him. This brought home the feeling that he was generally liked, and this certainly weighed against the burden he felt of not being able to capture his students' attention, which he said had been his Achilles' heel from day one as a teacher. Throughout our research relationship, these teachers told me stories about their lives in their classrooms, about what mattered most to them: Their stories of children and classroom events. Of course they moved across the boundaries of the in-and-out-of-classroom places on the landscape, taking their narrative knowledge with them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). This worked both ways as the influences from the out-of-classroom places habitually entered their classrooms.

During our five years of research relationship the young teachers told me a myriad of stories. These were secret stories, as well as cover stories and sacred stories as described by Clandinin and Connelly (1996). Ultimately, they were teacher stories (in-classroom stories) and stories of teachers (out-of-classroom stories). This set of terms is

valuable for understanding the many aspects that frame the formation of teacher identity.

The findings of this present study have shown, that the stories which the participants told me about their in-classroom practices, their secret stories, are both abundant and rich in content. They also shared with me their sacred stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) which spoke of what they felt was right for children, which was their passion in teaching and the learning of their students.<sup>18</sup> These stories will indeed add to the knowledge and deepen our understanding of how identity formation is linked to the conditions, the situations, the knowledge of teachers, and to the context in which teachers find themselves; that is how teacher identity is created and re-created through these factors. And as already mentioned, identity formation is not static, it is an ongoing process, a process of lifelong learning (Beijaard's et al., 2004, Goodson & Cole, 1994).

The findings have also shown, as Cladinin and Connelly (1996) and Beijaard et al. (2004) indicate, that the teachers were more concerned with questions of identity, like *'Who am I in this situation'*, rather than *'What do I know in this situation'*. When a teacher has to make sense of expectations and roles that they have to cope with and adapt to, which are malleable and often feature contrasting perspectives, a tension may rise between the secret story and the cover story. A good example of this was the difficult dilemma Jon had to cope with in his third year, when he experienced conflict between his more traditional image of the role of the teacher (his secret story) and living the new role in the cover story of the school. Apparently, his traditional image of teaching from his childhood and teenage schooling, i.e. the personal practical knowledge of teaching he brought with him to his own teaching, was not at that time in agreement with the role of the teacher in the new program of differentiated instruction which the school was adapting, and which was the cover story of that school. But since his sacret story included his belief that each student should be approached as an individual, whether in regard to personal problems or learning needs, he managed to make sense of these

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<sup>18</sup>See this more fully in their stories: Hanna, pp. 155–157; Jon, pp. 215–217; and Linda, pp. 284–286.

opposing perspectives and then adapt it to his secret story. Or, as Connelly and Clandinin (1999) suggest; his identities blended on the professional knowledge landscape and eventually combined into one.

At the end of the fifth year all the participants expressed the wish not to stagnate in their teaching; they all were well aware of the importance of being receptive to development and change. Linda, for instance, was still exploring herself as a teacher and felt she was only just starting her teaching career. Hanna felt that she must never sit back and think that she was simply there, that she had arrived at her destination; she wanted to continue to develop as a teacher, and therefore constantly reminded herself to be on her toes. Jon experienced that he was starting to relax in his role as a teacher, as the burden of the role of the serious teacher, which was the identity he carried with him from the beginning years, was lifted off his shoulders in the out-of-classroom activities with his students. He wanted to integrate this into his role as a teacher, and he wanted to change and develop as a teacher too. The shaping of their identities was an ongoing process through the five years similar to how Goodson and Cole (1994) describe it. Beijaard et al. (2004) and Beattie et al. (2007) rightly explain that this is a development which will never cease, it is a process of lifelong learning. Or rather, a lifelong quest for an answer to Beijaard's et al. (2004) question: *Who do I want to become?*

In our first meeting, in the days before the three young teachers started teaching, we discussed what kind of teachers they wanted to become and why, as this was one of my fundamental research questions. We returned to this question throughout our research relationship. At the end of their fifth year, I read to them what they had said in our very first conversation and asked for their comments on what they had expressed; whether they felt they had become this teacher. As they re-visited their first image of the teacher they initially wanted to become, they realized how far they had travelled in these five years without having reached their destinations. However, all of them said that they were heading in that direction.

Hanna felt she was on the right track and envisioned that she will become increasingly able to find means and possible solutions for all her future students, the past two years had convinced her of this. And Linda felt that she was close to this goal. She said that she had

proceeded according to her conviction, and that therefore, her journey had been a rewarding one. Jon said that he was not there yet and that he felt that he did not find some of what he wanted at the onset of much importance any more: He still wanted to be the teacher whom the kids will remember because of what they had learnt in his classroom, but humor was also acceptable, and Jon expressed the hope that he will be able to open his students' eyes to the meaning of life and to their own abilities. All three participants had, at the outset of their teaching, hitched their wagons to the star of their images and visions of teaching. All of them acknowledged that they would never reach the destination to which they were heading as newly graduated teachers, nor did they wish to, as creating the paths towards it moved the destination further ahead, and thus also their teaching.

The claim that the teacher is potentially the central change agent in restructuring the professional landscapes of schools (Beijaard, et al., 2004; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin and Huber, 2005; Kelly, 2006), is strongly supported by the findings of this research. One of its aims was to acquire knowledge that would add to the understanding of how teachers' stories to live by can change so that they can realize their full professional potential (Goodson & Cole, 1994). Therefore I wish to express the hope that the relevance of the insights derived from this study will indeed change some school landscapes.

### **8.8 Summary**

In this chapter I have reflected on and discussed the stories of the participants in this present research in relation to my research questions, and in the context of the literature concerned.

This research confirms that learning to teach takes time; to become a mature professional after the initial teacher education program is over. The findings show that there is strong link between the participants' experiences from their homes and upbringing and of their 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling, and their ideas of what constitutes a good teacher, and therefore what kind of teachers they initially wanted to become. This suggests that the development of their personal practical knowledge of teaching already began during their childhood and teenage years in school. This is where their knowledge of schooling originated from, and this is the

knowledge they brought with them to their teacher education program and formed their personal beliefs and visions of teaching and learning. Furthermore, my findings bring to light that during their teacher education they encountered ideas and beliefs; values and dispositions regarding education which they related to and further shaped their ideas of the teachers they wanted to become. Moreover, during their early years in their classrooms these ideas and attitudes were challenged while they struggled with the difficulties through the reality of teaching. The study distinctly illustrates the burden of the difficulties novice teachers carry in order to get a grasp of their profession, as well as how important it is that they receive much greater support than has been available to them and over a longer period of time than just one induction year, which is the most common practice as it seems. As these novices began to validate themselves as teachers they managed to re-construct their identity through the development of professional practice. Thus, the findings from my research show in greater detail than has been described in the teacher research literature, through the well documented individual paths the participants have travelled in the form of their comprehensive stories, the development of their five years of journey from being beginners in teaching to becoming effective professionals.

In the final chapter of this thesis I will bring my journey to a close; where I draw together the contributions of this research to the area of narrative inquiry and teacher research. Further, I will elaborate on some possible implications for future practice and research, and finally offer recommendations for further research.





## **Chapter 9 – Bringing the Journey to a Close: Conclusions**

The questions I departed with on this journey have now been addressed and discussed in the previous chapter. In this last chapter I will give an overview over findings that add to existing knowledge and consider implications in view of their potential applicability within teacher education, with practicing teachers and in relation to policy discourse, both on the local national and the international level, hoping that they will ultimately, have a positive effect on teaching in Iceland in general. Further, I will present pointers concerning underresearched areas where more research is needed.

In view of the findings of my research I shall recapitulate what originally brought me to narrative inquiry. In fact it was the notion of the personal practical knowledge, the term I encountered for the first time when doing my master's degree at OISE in 1994–95. I can still vividly remember when I first came across it. It was a genuine 'aha' experience because it gave me language to express feelings of frustration I felt at the time because of the difficulties which implementing 'new' methods and ideas in teaching and learning had encountered on their way into the classrooms. It helped me understand why teachers were reluctant to change their teaching in spite of wanting to do so. It had something to do with their personal stories; their personal practical knowledge. And it made me understand why teachers may first need to tell their past as well as their current stories in order for them to re-tell them, that is in order for them to create new stories to live by.

When I have asked student teachers, and teachers in my professional development (TPD) workshops, to reflect on their childhood and schooling, on both positive and negative experiences, I have found, similar to my own experience described in chapter 1, that positive memories are very often associated with feelings related to different classrooms they had been in, the atmosphere and the caring, pleasant teacher, and that the opposite is most often the case with memories of a negative nature. Single events often stand out like a

distinct picture. This was also the case for all of my participants, as the childhood stories have illustrated distinctly. Elbaz (1983) has noted that it is both important and useful for teachers themselves as well as for student teachers to become “aware of the knowledge they possess, how they use it, and how they might extend it and use it more effectively to further their purposes” (p. 68). On those very purposes, precisely the ones Elbaz is referring to, rest the possibilities of changing the school landscape as Connelly and Clandinin (1996; Clandinin et al., 2007) call school reform. Contributing to the change in school landscapes is one of the main purposes for doing this research in the first place.

## **9.1 Contributions and Implications of the Research – Key Findings**

The major contribution of this study is that it allowed me to follow closely how the personal practical knowledge of the participants developed, and how it ties in with their personal and practical knowledge from childhood, thus creating a deeper understanding of this very concept. Similarly, this five year longitudinal research has contributed to a deeper meaning of the term three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, because over this period of time I have been able to probe meticulously into the context of any given situation; the participants' feelings, why the situation was as it was, the meaning they made of it as well as what they anticipated would happen. A close and warm personal relationship which was the case in this long-standing study made the participants feel safer in expressing themselves and their feelings more openly and sincerely which, as a result, called for a deeper understanding of situations at hand. This has lent the teachers' stories a unique value, it enabled me to make them more comprehensive and detailed, and that in itself is a distinct contribution to the body of knowledge in narrative inquiry and teacher research. This is the first longitudinal study of beginning teachers in Iceland, and one of a mere handful found in the research literature.

### **9.1.1 The Impact of Personal Practical Knowledge**

The findings from this research confirm and substantiate, how the knowledge which the participants hold from their own childhood and

teenage schooling, both personal and practical knowledge, positive and negative, can affect the daily practice in the classroom. In my visit to their classrooms I indeed saw what kind of teachers they were; for example how they organized their teaching, what kind of assignments their students were working on, and last but not least their interactions with their students.<sup>19</sup> My experience of each of them during these visits was in full accordance with what they told me in our conversations.

Earlier, I compared the effect of personal practical knowledge from 14 years of schooling to the knowledge of someone who has been scrupulously trained in first aid, who knows how to apply it, and will continue to use that knowledge in spite of new knowledge, if not likewise trained.<sup>20</sup> In that case scenario it is highly likely that in the demanding and challenging situations in their first year or years, novices will resort to their personal practical knowledge of teaching from their own schooling, which is knowledge seen through the eyes of the student, or if you will, it is knowledge from the other side; most of which may be a manifestation of the traditional school and the traditional teacher delivering text-based instruction in their classrooms, as was the case with the teachers in this research. For this reason it is very difficult for beginning teachers to make practical all the ideas and instructional methods they were introduced to during their teacher education, which they tried their hands on in their teaching practice and were excited to probe further in their own classrooms. Further, it is more than likely that the consequences of this effect could be that the novice teachers continue to use the classroom practices they grew up with, and resorted to in their challenging early years, if they do not receive support which, for example, makes it possible for them to realize where the impact of this effect is leading them in their teaching.

The findings also add to knowledge of how both the personal and the practical knowledge the participants brought from their homes and their upbringing regarding schooling and learning affected their daily practice in the classroom which the childhood stories illustrate.

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<sup>19</sup>See this more fully in their stories: Hanna, pp. 160–161; Jon, p. 219–220; and Linda, p. 287–288.

<sup>20</sup>This is outlined more fully in the discussion chapter on p. 307–308.

The knowledge drawn from this research will be of value to work with in teacher education as well as with teachers in professional development courses, in order for them to understand why they hold these particular ideas and values regarding teaching and learning, and where they originate from. It is the ground on which a teacher can build further development of her or his teaching. An increased understanding of how the term personal practical knowledge helps extract teachers' tacit knowledge, as this study has explicitly shown, creates the landscape in which an improvement of teaching is more likely to follow as a result. The teacher is potentially the central agent of change in restructuring the professional knowledge landscape of schools. Consequently, this understanding is likely to change the professional practice of the teacher in that classroom, and subsequently change the personal practical knowledge of that teacher, which then changes the professional knowledge landscape. The findings from this research can have significant practical value for these purposes in teacher education as well as in professional development courses and workshops for practicing teachers, for school leaders as well as the educational authorities. If student teachers and practicing teachers can see how the thread, that weaves itself from their own childhood homes and their upbringing and their experiences of schooling, to their knowledge of teaching, and how it shapes their ideas and values, it will become the platform from which they can jump into different or even new landscapes. It is therefore hoped that the stories from the participants in this research will be of practical use for this purpose and thus contribute to teacher education as part of its curriculum.

### **9.1.2 The Three-dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space**

In this longitudinal research the participants have conversed with me regularly over five years; once before they started teaching, two times during their first year, then three times after that, the last conversation taking place at the end of their fifth year. This has allowed me to examine many of the different directions they have travelled, which is inward, outward, backward, forward and situated within place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The stories have depicted the participants' past and present experiences, their feelings regarding their experiences each time, as well as their future intentions;

therefore there are notions of both the personal and the social aspects in them combined with places or situations.

As the participants have been followed yearly for their first five years of teaching it has also been possible to give a temporal picture of them in transition from one year to the next, i.e. to watch closely how they have gone from the hazardous beginning, to validating themselves as young teachers, to recreating their identity in such a way that they felt they were on the path towards becoming the teacher they envisioned when graduating from their teacher education five years earlier. This long time span has thus allowed for a deeper meaning of the term three-dimensional narrative inquiry space than found in most previous research because each participant has told stories about situations and interactions, about their feelings and the meaning they made of their experiences as they lived them in their classrooms during the five years.

### **9.1.3 Learning to Teach Does not Stop once Graduated**

The participants of my research each had their reasons for becoming teachers. They all liked their teacher education program, they were critical of it as well, and their expectations and anticipation of teaching varied. All of them envisioned themselves as enjoying their work, and they were excited to realize their dream, their vision of the good teacher they all longed to become. However, learning to teach takes time, as has been claimed, and beginning teachers learn to teach primarily by teaching and by reflecting on their teaching. This means that the possibility for the beginning teachers to work with the images of the teacher they initially wanted to become is adversely affected by the way in which their beginnings turn out. The findings from this research show in a deeper and more detailed way how the novices grow from being inexperienced teachers to professionals who are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and ready to continue their life long professional journey. The knowledge which came out of my participants' stories can be taken to teacher education because student teachers need to understand why learning to teach does not end on their graduation day; at that point they are far from having completed their education. It can be expected that through such understanding they will appreciate the value of continuous

professional development. This research is intended to contribute to that important understanding. This is still another practical use of the knowledge that the present study has created.

#### **9.1.4 The Struggle to Become**

What dramatically affected my beginning teachers' capability of fulfilling their full potential in the first year or years of their teaching were mainly the difficulties and challenges they were confronted with once they had arrived in the reality of teaching. In the discussion chapter, on p. 309, I drew attention to the view that education is 'the profession that eats its young' (Halford, 1999), which consequently can cause young professionals to either drop the beliefs and visions they had developed during their teacher education programs and brought into their beginning teaching, or drop out of teaching altogether. None of the participants in this study dropped out of teaching, but all of them experienced the dropping out of their beliefs. This caused them to doubt themselves, it made them use instructional methods they did not approve of and sometimes they did not like themselves as teachers. This research has thrown a sharper light on this struggle. It enhances our understanding of why beginning teachers' visions and ideals are often fast eroding during the very first year in their teaching, and as a result the stories with these findings can be used in teacher education to encourage student teachers not to lose sight of their ideals and visions during their difficult beginnings. They should be urged to keep the blackened embers from their original fires alive, so that later, when they have passed through the rough seas, they can poke at the embers and re-build their fires. Further, school leaders as well as practicing teachers, can benefit from this knowledge of how the traditions and norms of the school, i.e. the whole school culture, can either work for or against the early career teachers realizing their full potential.

#### **9.1.5 The Importance of Deliberate Practice**

One of the significant findings that emerged from this study regards the connection between lesson planning and deliberate practice. The young teachers said they were far from being the good teachers they wanted to become, and that there were several factors that worked

against them, one of which was how extremely time consuming it was planning lessons, not to mention interesting lessons. It is fair to say that it took them by surprise. Despite all of them spending a great deal of time preparing their teaching they did not yield similarly. One of them surpassed them as the stories clearly illustrate. Berliner (2001) claims that only a small number of novices become outstanding teachers right away or rather soon. The stories of one of the participants in this study reveal how her personal qualities made her become highly accomplished in teaching already in her second year. These were qualities such as aspiration, positive attitudes, sociability, perseverance, creative thinking, being a problem solver, and the single-minded ambition to do only one's best, to name but some of her qualities, together with *extensive deliberate practice*. Despite obvious talents for teaching, it was the extensive deliberate practice in this participant's lesson planning that made the difference. The stories of lesson planning is yet another area which can contribute to the understanding of the interconnectedness between lesson planning and *deliberate practice* and therefore to the impact that *extensive deliberate practice* can have on the quality of the lessons. Thus these stories can be used for this practical purpose in teacher education as well as in courses and workshops with practicing teachers.

#### **9.1.6 Teachers' Talk**

The findings which viewed experienced teachers as unwilling to discuss pedagogy and teaching this much and in *such detail* reflect attitudes which have all too often been found to be a component of the everyday school culture in Iceland (e.g. Ingvarsdóttir, 2004). Further, for some time now I have been quite concerned about the way teachers talk about and discuss their teaching and their classroom practices. In fact I have been worried about the absence of pedagogical discourse as teachers tend to use general terms instead. I often wondered whether this could somehow be blamed on the teacher education programs in Iceland, as perhaps it was not made explicit enough that a vast part of professionalism is knowing, as well as adopting and using, the relevant terminology; that we, the teacher educators, had not been able to work with this knowledge. However, as Cladinin and Connelly (1995) claim, teachers use different language depending on their audience. I find this view both intriguing

and challenging, and perhaps this can be part of the explanation. I personally know from my 25 years of teaching in the compulsory school system that it is generally accepted within the teaching profession to use plain common language of schooling instead of the professional pedagogical language. Making this connection through the findings of this study made me speculate that if teachers in general avoid or are not comfortable with using their professional pedagogical language when discussing educational matters professionally it could limit their ability to read professional literature and to participate in discussions regarding research findings. An inquiry into how teachers actually talk about their teaching, their classroom practices, about their profession would throw further light on this issue.

#### **9.1.7 The Early Years**

In the introduction to this thesis I mention in passing the term ‘the early years’ when listing terms I found in the research literature used to mean teachers in their first year or years of teaching. This term began to surface when I was writing the final narratives and as I went through that process this term settled in. I decided to use this term when referring to the first three years of teaching, and I have done so throughout the three teachers’ stories and the discussion chapter. This term is supposed to capture the first three years as a continuum. In the research literature to date there has been a myriad of findings that point to the urgency of having an effective induction program for first year teachers. However, in recent years support well beyond the first year is being brought into focus. The findings from this study are in concert with recent studies, and have resulted in recommendations for support during first three years as a coherent period, therefore the term *early years* is offered as a possible term to use when describing this specific period in the lives of teachers.

#### **9.1.8 Support in the Early Years**

As already mentioned, principals in Iceland are not required to offer formal mentoring for beginning teachers. Therefore it depends on each principal whether he or she will assign the novice a mentor, or indeed any formal support at all. It is in fact unjustifiable that the novices are thrown into the deep end and left there to sink or swim (Feiman-



Nemser, 2001) as is customary in Iceland. My research has shown that this is an unacceptable situation. It is more than time for the educational authorities in Iceland to commence induction programs for beginning teachers, and not just leave it there but consider supporting them well beyond their first year. The importance of supporting first year teachers has been reported for a long time in teacher research, but lately a move away from the commonly accepted induction year has been suggested, however without abandoning it, but rather looking into support beyond the first year of teaching. The way the support has been organized, appears not to have worked as well as intended. As noted above, the knowledge created by this longitudinal research has resulted in recommendations for support for teachers in their early years of teaching. As can be seen they both validate earlier research, especially in the first year, and contribute to original recommendations.

### ***Recommendations for Support during the First Year***

As has been frequently accounted for earlier in this thesis, first year teachers have great difficulties coping on a daily basis, trying to find out how to tackle everything that can possibly happen. Each day they are faced with all kinds of stimulus that provokes worries and anxiety which causes them to feel that they cannot handle the job, therefore they are badly in need for an emotional support. The findings from this present research suggest that in all probability the pedagogical advice on e.g. complicated lesson planning and innovative teaching methods, does not seem to ‘reach’ the first year teachers’ ears, so to speak, because they are so absorbed in tackling themselves, and all too often their difficult and challenging situations. In short, it is suggested here that the first year teachers may not ‘hear’ pedagogical advice that is given to them during the induction year. Further, this is the main reason why the support first year teachers need above all is a shoulder to cry on and a sympathetic ear that listens, if I can phrase it like that. What I mean by a shoulder to cry on and a sympathetic ear that listens is this; beginning teachers need the full support of a colleague they can trust, who is willing to discuss back and forth everything that overwhelms them the first months and throughout the first year. The possibility to be matched up with a trusted person must be included in a support program for first year teacher. This trusted person must be a

teacher who does not have an invested interest in what is being said, as my data shows, therefore it should preferably not be a member of the beginning teachers' team or the closest colleague unless the beginning teacher is a member of a collaborative culture. Or as one of my participants suggested that each first year teacher should be a member in a support group of peers lead by a teacher who is a master teacher (e.g. a teacher educator), who could also be a good role model for them. This participant felt that this could probably serve as their best opportunity to talk about their feelings, their interests and enthusiasm. Therefore, the above implications from this research support the claim for the need of support well beyond the first year.

Moreover, as the research findings have suggested, being a member of a collaborative culture, with common space, common time and common work (Shank, 2005), where there is an opportunity for the first year teacher to get immediate support and assistance is without a doubt in my mind, a course of action we should take in Iceland as my data shows. This kind of team work means that they have to discuss ideas and approaches, values and purposes of what to teach, how to teach it and the assessment of student learning; i.e. they have to engage in talking about the pedagogical base of teaching and learning. For that reason, such collaborative learning is a powerful way that might, in the long run, work against the isolation of the teacher in the stand-alone classrooms.

Despite the possibility that the first year teachers might not 'hear', or comprehend the pedagogical advice, as the findings of this research have implied, there are of course matters concerning e.g. daily organizations and routines which can cause unnecessary difficulties for them, and thus they will be in need of some kind of assistance. I have drawn up a table with lists of practical issues, based on my data, for school principals, potential colleagues and those who mentor or support the first year teachers. These lists are neither complete nor are the items arranged according to an order of priority, besides some items might belong on a different list than they are placed now.

**Table 1–A List of practical issues for school principals, potential colleagues and those who mentor or support the first year teachers**

Before the school starts	After the school starts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact the novice as soon as possible</li> <li>• Allow the novice to familiarize her/himself with the school environment before other teachers come in</li> <li>• Make sure that the novice is teaching with an experienced teacher – preferably a part of a collaborative team of good teachers</li> <li>• Explain what kind of support is available</li> <li>• Organize a meeting with other novices and their mentors</li> <li>• Try to find out what worries the novice the most</li> <li>• Explain terms of employment, the policy of the school regarding e.g. attendance, behaviour, recess, lunch break, important dates, assessment, P-T-collaboration, cooperation with others, customs and habits...</li> <li>• Make sure that all the curriculum material and what goes with it is ready and at hand</li> <li>• Assist the novice with organizing the timetable the first week and to plan the lessons</li> <li>• Discuss the physical environment of the classroom, grouping and classroom management</li> <li>• Discuss teaching methods and various ‘routines’, go over the list of students and check for students with special ed. needs</li> <li>• Make sure that the novice gets everything that other teachers get in their classrooms, e.g. various materials and stuff, books, internet access, etc.</li> <li>• Check which teachers are willing in assisting in various ways and how...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come by the novice’s classroom every day</li> <li>• Accompany the novice to meetings and sit with her or him</li> <li>• Repeat things concerning rules, customs and habits within the school</li> <li>• Restate assistance with planning, share material and ideas</li> <li>• Check how the novice manages time</li> <li>• Allow the novice to listen to telephone conversation with a parent and sit in on parent/student conferences</li> <li>• Explain how the curriculum introduction meetings are organized</li> <li>• Explain and discuss assessment policy of the school, the grading system and the relevant ‘book-keeping’ system</li> <li>• Ask the novice to explain how some aspects of her or his teaching are working out</li> <li>• Discuss worries regarding certain students</li> <li>• Ensure that the novice receives assistance because of e.g. students with special ed. needs or behavioural problems</li> <li>• Discuss the problem that might arise if the novice allows ‘papers’ to pile up</li> <li>• Keep an eye on the novice’s well-being as the school year gets on</li> <li>• Remember that the novice is a beginning teacher after the first week of school – as well as after the first month!</li> <li>• Realize how the school culture can work against the beginning teacher’s visions and ideas on what constitutes a good teacher</li> </ul>

***Recommendations for Support during the Second Year***

It is important to bear in mind that the beginning teachers are still beginners in their second year of teaching and they have still a lot to learn. The findings of this research fully support that claim. In their second year there is a continued need for support and guidance, in order for them to improve their practice and retain their inspiration. Many of them will still need a shoulder to cry on and an ear that listens, but now the emphasis should move to a pedagogical guidance regarding skills of various kinds, e.g. on how to design interesting and creative projects, how to arrange the classroom to enhance student

learning, how to create classroom community and manage the classroom in general. It is also important that during the second year the beginning teachers begin to step out of their comfort zone, and take the first steps away from the personal and practical knowledge they brought with them from their own childhood and teenage schooling to the turmoil of the first year.

### ***Recommendations for Support during the Third Year***

In addition to the support the first and second year teachers receive, the main emphasis now should be on extensive pedagogical guidance to avoid the danger of the beginning teachers to get stuck in the personal and practical knowledge they brought with them into teaching as outlined above. This pedagogical guidance could include e.g. various kinds of innovative teaching methods and progressive ideology, understanding and being able to differentiate instruction, how to take advantage of student interests when planning lessons and assignments, designing ambitious and integrated projects, participating in developmental projects, to name but some. Further, what is also of great importance during the third year is to rejuvenate the vision and the ideals from their graduation as teachers, the ones which they carried with them from their teacher education. As can be expected, these were visions and ideals which are more often than not unapproachable for most newly graduated teachers as they are still in their first stages of their teaching. It is crucial for the young teachers to realize that their ideas of the teachers they wanted to become before they got their own classrooms have not perished. It is important for them to foresee that they can climb aboard that wagon they wanted to hitch their star of vision to, and take it again on to the path; the path which will lead them into the direction of their star.

### **9.1.9 Support during the Fourth and Fifth Year**

After the first three years of teaching, the early years, teachers should be offered continuing education, because now they have gained valuable experience which they should get an opportunity to reflect and build on in light of concepts of progressive education and school reform. The findings of my research support that it is only at this point in time that they are somewhat ready and equipped to connect in earnest progressive and innovative ideas with the pedagogy from their

teacher education programs, that is to connect deep practice to pure theory. This is of vital importance in order to improve teaching and learning. Moreover, the support I have mapped out should create space for beginning teachers to develop their ideas into practices they aimed at, thus acting on the vision that they in all likelihood have carried with them since graduation as teachers. Subsequently, a realistic hope might emerge that we can move education into what we think is educationally effective in the 21st century.

#### **9.1.10 Participating in a Longitudinal Research – Becoming more Effective Earlier**

The results of this study, which add to earlier claims regarding the need for emotional support, indicate that the main advantages of participating in longitudinal research was the trust that was created which enabled the participants to talk openly and freely about their feelings and needs, about their students and the parents, as well as possible conflicts with their team workers, to someone they could trust; to the researcher.

The findings confirm that taking part in a longitudinal study supported the beginning teachers well beyond the first year of teaching. Their pedagogical knowledge, their pedagogical thinking and hence assumingly their practices developed, at least partly, out of their involvement in this longitudinal research. Both Linda and Hanna regarded this longstanding research relationship as an important source of support during the first five years of their teaching and Jon finally brought up the issue of not being listened to at the end of the fifth year. A research relationship for five years builds up trust over time and allows for more in-depth studying of experiences; what they really mean to the participant, as well as the meaning they make of it.

The present study provides additional evidence to Berliner's (2001) earlier claim that generally it takes five or more years to become an expert in teaching, and that only a very small proportion of teachers move to the last two stages of effectiveness. Through the reflective practices of this inquiry, the participants' understanding of themselves and others grew, and the ongoing conversations with the researcher made them more able to put their thinking and meaning-making in context from one year to the next, making them more

responsive and reciprocal. All the three teachers in this research reached the fourth stage and one of them the stage of expertise much earlier than expected as the findings from Linda's stories clearly demonstrate, which is a significant contribution of this research. Therefore, judging from the stories, it is suggested that it *can* take less than five years for some people to become an expert in teaching if they have the opportunity to participate in active reflective practices during their early years of teaching, like these young teachers had.

The findings from this study show how the early career teachers developed their professional knowledge in the context of their schools as they became more and more experienced. It was in their classrooms where they decided that they would continue to teach in spite of difficult beginnings. All of them raised the issue of the importance of having someone they could talk to intensely and at length about pedagogy; about their feelings; about their teaching and ways to improve it; in short to someone who cared enough to bother. Therefore the participants felt that taking part in a longitudinal study had made up for this lack of pedagogical discussions in their schools. Through the opportunity of telling and re-telling classroom stories over a period of five years, the stories that the participants lived by were dramatically moved out of the tacit domain into the open, and became the object of reflection. Taken together, these results suggest that participating in a longitudinal study encouraged the teachers to become more effective earlier than could be expected.

## **9.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research**

This study has explored the experiences of beginning teachers in their first five years of teaching. It is a longitudinal study and there lies its major strength, both nationally and internationally. Early on, when beginning to write the final narratives, I realized that the extensive and extremely rich data or field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) created in this research made it possible to write more comprehensive and detailed stories than I had come across in the research literature. I also realized that they would enable me to provide deeper insights into the participants' development, their line of thinking each time and the meaning they made of their experiences. This has meant that the stories have cast further light on the terms 'personal practical

knowledge' and 'three-dimensional narrative inquiry space'. They, additionally, introduce the possibilities of utilizing them as curriculum materials in teacher education. Further, at the end of the writing process when I realized how different these three young teachers were, I saw that they, each in their own way, were archetypes of a familiar teacher.

In the interest of generalizability, including only three participants might be considered a weakness by some researchers, although, it is not the intention of this study to provide assumptions that can be imposed on or transferred to large numbers of teachers; rather the intention is to understand the meaning of the experience of what happened to, or in connection with, the teachers involved. In this study I am first and foremost concerned with the feelings, hopes, desires, and moral dispositions of the teachers, and with their existential and circumstantial conditions, such as the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and anything else that forms the individual's external context (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). When writing the final narratives, I offered the participants drafts for them to read and to provide their feedbacks (see Appendix VI), which can be taken to be a strength of the study. At the very end of that process the participants read their stories and responded with their comments. Their feedback can also be viewed as an additional strength, it adds to the authenticity of the research as can be seen in Appendix VII – Comments from a participant after having read the stories.

My own biases and background could be viewed both as a strength and a weakness. Most likely, it affected how I saw and listened to the teachers, because different observers see different things: "Since we have to accept that what we see is a function of our stance, this poses a self-reflective ... constraint on our understanding" (van Manen, 1999, p. 18). I was a teacher in the basic school for 25 years, I have been a teacher educator for 23 years<sup>21</sup> and I have given innumerable workshops for practicing teachers. This may account for my wakefulness (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) "as well as for [my] blindness" (van Manen, 1999, p. 18). From the outset I made a point

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<sup>21</sup>For 11 consecutive years I held a position simultaneously as a basic school teacher and as a teacher educator within the IUE.

of bearing this in mind, simultaneously aware that while learning to become a narrative inquirer I had to acquire a particular view of experience as a phenomena under study. It also furnishes the ability to be able to connect dots, to discern what is of value and relevance, and what is not, etc.

What might be considered a weakness of this research is the brief time I spent in the participants' classrooms, which was one day in each. The main reason for this was because I intended to do a telling inquiry, not a living one (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). I wanted the participants to tell me aspects of their lives as teachers, how they felt, what they found interesting, challenging, difficult, successful, promising, etc. What they would tell me was their decision, rather than I asking them to explain what I saw in their classrooms, what I found of interest there for whatever reason. For the same reason I did not interview the principals of the schools. At the beginning of this study I decided that I would collect data only from the teachers because I was preoccupied with why it seemed so difficult to become the teacher one wants to become at the outset of teaching. However, when I visited their classrooms, I did see what kind of teachers they were, and as mentioned earlier, my experience of each of them during these visits was in full accordance with what they told me in our conversations and discussions through our five years of research relationship.

Moreover I began data gathering before I had decided to enter the doctoral program, which meant that I began it without having a formal research design ready at hand. 'Creative people find creative ways to do things', Beattie said when I was explaining to her that I began this study in the "middle", as it were. The real reason was, that when I decided to engage with this study I was already assistant professor, and research was part of my duties. When my first opportunity to take a research leave as an assistant professor collided with the first opportunity to enter a doctoral program in education in Iceland I took that opportunity. I was accepted and so was the work I had already done. In retrospect I can see how a formal research design from the outset would have made many of the steps I took on this long journey sounder, more on-target and therefore easier and a lot less time consuming. Having discussed the strenghts and weaknesses of this



study it is time to point to the future with recommendations for further research. That will be addressed in the following section.

### **9.3 Looking ahead – Recommendations for further Research**

The findings of the present study have shown how the early childhood experiences of the participants, the knowledge they hold from their homes and upbringing and their own schooling, both personal and practical knowledge, can affect daily practice in the classroom. It has further brought to light the effect of 14 years of compulsory and high school schooling on the professional practice of beginning teachers, the effect that has been compared with first aid training. This research has contributed to the understanding of the term 'personal practical knowledge' and added greater depth and extension to it. There is, however, a need to cast a further light on this specific effect, because it appears to be one of the main hindrances of school improvement, therefore additional research, possibly with more participants, may provide new insights.

Even though lesson planning has been heavily researched, the present study has identified an issue where more research is clearly needed; this is the interconnectedness between lesson planning and *extensive deliberate* practice. Teachers in general spend a lot of time preparing their lessons, which should result in lessons being interesting, motivating and of good quality. However, the quality of teaching is not necessarily in proportion with the time allocated to it. Many teachers claim that they cannot change the way they teach because it takes too much time to prepare new things, and that they are already spending a lot of time preparing their lessons. If teachers do indeed spend the alleged time preparing lessons, it is reasonable to ask why then (too) many of them continue to prepare the same traditional teaching they have perhaps done for years, instead of preparing something different than last time. These deliberations make it interesting to study further, whether many teachers may not understand fully the difference between quality lessons and poor lessons.

This research has made connections regarding teachers' talk which raises a question regarding the possibility that teachers in general avoid, or are not comfortable with, using professional pedagogical

language when discussing educational matters professionally. It also raises the question whether that could limit their ability to read professional literature and to participate in discussions about research findings. It also raises a question concerning how teacher talk (Guðjónsson, 2004) may influence their teaching. This inevitably raises concerns regarding if and how that might possibly work against professionalism in schools and school improvement, and thus become a serious impediment for changing school landscapes. Therefore it may be interesting to research that issue in more depth.

#### **9.4 Standing on the Summit**

I would like to close the thesis with a story of yet another journey I took up a mountain as the work on the thesis neared completion.

On my way up the mountain, in the fall of 2011, I caught sight of the sheep's paths; they ran alongside the hill parallel to one another. Icelandic sheep have treaded these paths throughout the summers for centuries. All of a sudden they lay before me as *the* paths that I have been walking since I began my doctoral thesis journey, – yes, and indeed ever since I became a teacher 33 years ago. Climbing upwards, just at the threshold of the peak, my path merged with a wider trail, and it dawned on me that all the other paths that I had travelled brought me to this one; and I realized that this was the way to the peak. This was on a wet Saturday nearing the end of October, and *this* mountain climb was to be a welcome rest from grappling with the final chapter of my thesis, one of which I had been contending with for some days, or ever since I handed in the discussion chapter. I took my time ascending the steepest slopes, step by step, and in a split second I understood that it was precisely this mountain climb that was the metaphor for my doctoral thesis journey. At that precise moment I walked onto the last path where all the other paths crossed. Far beneath me I could see the small mountain lake by which my cottage rests. Above me loomed the peak and it appeared surmountable. I thought that this was exactly the spot where I found myself on my doctoral thesis journey; at the verge of the mountain peak. But woe betide the one who assumes a clear route ahead, because just below the peak was a steep boulder with a narrow strip. On each side were precipitous hills, and one had to take great care not to slip while

crossing. Similar to the last part of the thesis I thought. I edged myself carefully over the strip and reached the peak. Standing proud on top of the tallest boulder I could only hope that my doctoral thesis journey would have a similar ending – on the summit!

This micro-story does not only symbolize my doctoral thesis journey. I have always viewed my journey as a teacher through the analogy of steadfast climbing of mountains, from the very beginning of my teaching career, as described in the introduction of this thesis. But this single mountain has been by far the highest and the steepest one up until now. The participants in my research also sketched their own metaphors in relation to their role and development as teachers, which we discussed at the end of their fifth year of teaching; Hanna's metaphor was a garden in growth, Jon's metaphor was a journey into uncertainties, and Linda's metaphor was like a bright, colorful abstract painting.<sup>22</sup> I felt they were particularly illustrative of the narratives from their five years of teaching. The journeys into their own landscapes took them along a myriad of paths, as the preceding stories have truly shown. The stories spanned a period of time which stretched from their days of childhood schooling, and until they became teachers; they were stories of their earliest ideas of what kind of teachers they wanted to become, until the re-creation of their identity as teachers at the end of their fifth year of teaching.

The research presented here, on the experiences of beginning teachers in their first five years in teaching, explicitly brings to light how challenging and exhausting teaching is, and this fact does not solely characterize the first year, but indeed the first three to five years. It can only be viewed as irresponsible to leave the young teachers to struggle with this more or less on their own. Providing novice teachers with more extensive, rigorous and attentive support during the first three years and beyond, as has been recommended, will facilitate professional development and increase their potential as teachers, and ultimately create the optimum conditions under which they as well as their students, can flourish.

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<sup>22</sup>See this more fully in their stories: Hanna, pp.117–118; Jon, pp. 169–170; and Linda, pp. 229–230.

I have demonstrated elsewhere in the thesis, and that should at this point be clear by virtue of the particular theme addressed here, that human beings are storytelling animals who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. We gain understanding by listening to, by reading and by telling stories. The knowledge that stories express is loaded with the values of our upbringing, our culture, our opinions and our assumptions, much of which is unconscious, and our actions are to a large extent driven by them. If we want to change the school landscapes, we must gain awareness from where our values, opinions and assumptions on teaching and learning originate in order for us to create a new story to live by. It is my belief that extensive stories like the ones found in this thesis can be used in teacher education, as case studies through which student teachers can reflect on their own experiences in order to bring about such understanding, and likewise for practicing teachers. Moreover, the intention of presenting the findings of my research in the form of such comprehensive stories is also to gain influence, and to simultaneously push the boundaries and to wake up the audience addressed. It is my hope that in so doing the findings of this research will find their way into classrooms and hopefully make a contribution toward generating school improvement.

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## **Appendices**

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## **APPENDIX I – A LIST OF CONSIDERATIONS TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN DOING NARRATIVE RESEARCH**

### **1. Why this study is important?**

The narrative inquirers need to attend to three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social. The personal means situating oneself in the study. The practical means wondering how the study might change one's and others' practices. The social means pointing toward the study's end point, that is to be able to answer the "So what?" and "Who cares?" questions.

### **2. What is the chosen topic?**

The narrative inquirers need to name the phenomenon that is under study. They must imagine the chosen topic, the phenomena, along with possible participants and puzzles, as existing or taking place in this multi-dimensioned and an ever shifting space. A narrative view extends over time, is shaped by personal and social conditions, and situated in a multiplicity of places.

### **3. What are the particular methods used to study the phenomenon?**

The narrative inquirers need to think about, figure out and describe the kind of field texts (data) that need to be collected and composed. Living and telling are starting points for collecting field texts. The difference between telling and living is often a difference between life as lived in the past (telling) and life as it unfolds (living). These two starting points can often complement one another. When collecting field texts care has to be taken as to how the field texts are attentive to all three commonplaces.

### **4. How will the field texts be analyzed and interpreted?**

The narrative inquirers need to know about the many ways there are to move from field texts to research texts and that all forms of narrative inquiry emphasize the importance of considering the contextual and relational while analyzing field texts into researchable components. This means that they need to examine, describe, and specify the common-place features built into the study. Six considerations have been detailed as useful pointers when thinking about narrative inquiry research text writing.

5. What is the investment of self in the inquiry?

The narrative inquirers need to be self-conscious of their potentially intimate connection with the living, the field texts collected and their research texts. They need to deliberately imagine themselves as part of the inquiry and carefully plan their participation and for methods of reporting of self in the study.

6. What is the researcher – participant relationship in the study?

The narrative inquirers need to consider the intense, intimate relations that may develop in a long-term study or if the researcher shares similar experiences with the participants. The more focused on living the study the more likely it is that intense relations will develop rather than in a telling study. The time available for a study also interacts with considerations of researcher-participant relationship. The more time spent in the field or in classrooms more often hidden elements of the living is likely to be captured.

7. How is this study positioned in relation to other research?

The narrative inquirers need to position their study in relation to other research as is similar to what all researchers do in their literature reviews. The study can also be positioned in relation to other programs of research, as there are multiple programs of research within each area or to other forms of inquiry, meaning that exploring e.g. the conceptual roots of narrative inquiry is important even if they do not want to explore the philosophical assumptions in great detail.

8. What is the relational ethics of narrative inquiry?

The narrative inquirers need to be aware of that considerations of ethics are central to narrative inquiry. The researcher must deepen the sense of what it means to undertake a life study and to live in relation in an ethical way. At the outset ethical issues are imagined, as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts. This means that each story the researcher chooses to tell, or chooses not to tell, each word which is selected for the retelling, or rejected for the retelling, is done in the participants' imagined presence or possibly negotiated with them. The most serious ethical problems tend to arise between texts and readers. The negotiation of research texts with participants serve to avoid that they are not resonant with them.

## **APPENDIX II – A LETTER OF PERMISSION TO VISIT SCHOOLS**

Permission requested for a visit to the school

Reykjavik, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2005

Dear

...

My name is Lilja M. Jonsdottir and I am a lector within the department of education at the University of Iceland. I am currently conducting a research on the experiences and views of beginning teacher in their first years of teaching. In the research I seek to gather data that allows me to answer questions regarding the kind of knowledge, skills and values a beginning teacher should be equipped with, how this knowledge can be utilized within teacher education, and not least, how this knowledge can help to provide better ways for us to support beginning teachers. I have already conducted a number of interviews with the participants in the research and forthcoming is a visit in their classrooms where I will observe them in their teaching.

...(name of teacher) in ...school is a participant in my research. With this letter I ask for your permission to visit her/them in class. Full discretion is guaranteed, all names will be altered and no information will be traceable.

Best regards,

Lilja.

## **APPENDIX III – INTERVIEW GUIDES**

### **Interviews With Newly Graduated Teachers - First Interview - Before School Starts**

#### **1. Background**

- Where and when are you born
- Where did you grow up
- What kind of upbringing were you exposed to
- Was there anything in particular (specific impressions) in your upbringing, which is of importance in regards to your choice of education and profession (your interest in working with people)

#### **2. School**

- When you look back to the time you went to grade school, what is the first thing that comes to mind
- Do you remember your grade school teachers
- Can you list some positive memories
- Can you list some negative memories
- Can you talk of something important that you learned (what remains with you to this day)
- Did you have any ideas concerning teaching during those days

#### **3. Becoming a Teacher**

- Do you remember when you first considered becoming a teacher
- Why did you want to become a teacher
- Why did you decide to enter teacher education
- What do you think a normal school day is like

#### **4. Teacher Education**

- In what way was teaching introduced to you within teacher education
- How was the concept of the “classroom” delivered
- Were there any organized presentations and/or discussions in regards to the way in which school is or should be – what do you think
- Was there any discussion on the ethics or values of the teaching profession

## Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

- Can you tell me about some important learning experiences in the teacher education – in what way do you think that will manifest itself in your work
- Do you feel at this moment that a specific type of schooling has been prioritized above others – which
- Do you feel at this moment that a specific type of teacher was preferred above others – which
- Do you believe that the reality in the field is different – why
- Do you feel at this moment that teacher education is an adequate preparation for teaching
- What significance does becoming a teacher have in your mind at this moment?

### 5. Current anticipations toward what is to come

- What kind of teacher do you want to become
- What do you believe will be the easy/easiest
- What do you believe will be the difficult/most difficult
- To what are you most looking forward to
- What are you most anxious for
- Do you believe teaching will be much work
- In what area do you think you are the strongest
- In what area do you think you are the weakest
- What kind of teacher do you think you will become

### 6. Related issues

- Where are you going to teach?
- How do you think you are prepared to deal with that kind of teaching

### 7. How do you want to arrange the continuation of our cooperation

- Keep a guide-book
- Conduct Monthly Interviews
- Observe your teaching
- Interview a few of your students in autumn and spring
- Interview a few of your students' parents in autumn and spring

### Beginning Teachers - Second Interview 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2002

- Now a month has passed of the first school year, how do you feel?
- How has everything worked out?



- What has worked out well?
  - What has worked out badly?
  - (What has gone wrong?)
  - What is of most importance now, at this moment?
  - How has building a relationship with the students gone?
  - How have they received you?
  - How has organizing the teaching gone?
  - How is overseeing the students going?
  - How has managing the students gone?
  - Do you feel that you are doing what you set out to do?
  - Is the teaching the way you thought it would be?
  - Is the preparation more/less?
  - How is the cooperation with the parents structured?
  - How was the introductory evening with the parents?
  - What has been the most challenging about the first month?
  - What has been the easiest?
  - Do you remember what the first days/week was like?
  - What kind of teacher do you think you are now?
  - What do you feel about yourself as a teacher now?
  - Are you today the teacher you wanted to become?
  - Why/why not?
- 
- Do you feel like you were prepared for this in teacher education?
  - How would you have structured that preparation?
- 
- How do you foresee what is to come?
  - How are you going to prepare for what is to come?
- 
- Beginning Teachers - 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview in April/May 2003 - End of First Year
  - Now that April is upon us, and the school year close to being over, how do you feel?
  - How has everything worked out after new years?–Why?
  - What has worked out well? – Why?
  - What has gone wrong? – Why?
  - What is of most importance now, at this moment?–Why?
- 
- How is organizing the teaching now going? –Why?
  - Has the preparation time changed?
  - Are you content with the subjects?
  - Have the methods changed?
  - Is the teaching now the way you prefer it the most?
  - Is there anything you would have differently?

## Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

- How is managing the students now going?
- How is your relationship with the students now?
- Have you managed overseeing the students?
- Have your methods changed? How?
- How has your cooperation with the parents gone in the spring term?
- Do you remember what the first weeks were like?  
What do you think is different now?  
(what is difficult/easy now?)
- How do you feel about yourself as a teacher now?  
Are you now the teacher you wanted to become?  
Why/why not?
- How is communication with the school administration?  
Has something changed? What?
- How do you foresee what is to come?  
Toward spring?  
Next winter?

## Interview After 2<sup>nd</sup> Year of Teaching – 2004

- Your second year is now coming to an end, how did you feel this spring – when it finished?
- What do you think went well this school year? Why?
- What do you think did work out as well? Why?
- What is of most importance now, at this moment? Why?
- How did organizing the teaching go last winter? Why?  
Are you content with the subjects?  
Have your methods of teaching changed?  
Cooperation with other teachers?  
Has the preparation time changed?  
Was the teaching last winter the way you wanted it to be?  
Is there something that you would have wanted differently?
- How is student management going, classroom management?  
Have your methods changed? How?  
Was classroom management easier? Why?
- How is overseeing the students going?  
Observing each and everyone?  
Registering their development?  
Judging their performances?
- How is your relationship with the students now?

- Do you remember what your first year was like?  
What do you think was different last winter?  
(What was still difficult/easier?)
- Do you remember What kind of teacher you wanted to become?  
Are you still the teacher you wanted to become?  
Why/why not?
- What do you feel about yourself as a teacher now?
- In what way would your students describe you as a teacher?
- How is your relationship with the school administration now?  
Has it changed? What?
- How was the cooperation with the parents gone?  
Has anything changed from last year, what?
- What do you feel like you have learned as a teacher in your second year of teaching?
- What do you think you can learn from these first two years of your teaching?
  
- Do you know feel, in your second year of teaching, that you are closer to becoming the teacher you wanted to become when you graduated?  
If yes, had it contributed to that?  
If no, why not?
- What do you currently think about the teacher education?  
Was it good general preparation for teaching?  
Has it proven useful? Why not?  
What has not been of good use? Why not?
- What kind of preparation do you believe would have been more appropriate?
- What about field work?
- What do you think about the lengthening of the teacher education program?
- How do you foresee what is to come – next winter?

#### Interviews Conducted Towards the End of the Third Year of Teaching

- Now that your third year of teaching is coming to an end, how do you feel?
- What do you feel went well this school year? Why?
- What do you feel has not gone as well? Why?
- In what way would you describe yourself as a teacher?
- What is of most importance to you when it comes to teaching? Why?

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- How do you think your teaching has changed in these three years? Why?
- How have your attitudes changed? In what way? Why?
- How do you want to develop as a teacher? What do you want to place more emphasis on? Why?
- How would you rate the support you have received over these three years? What has been of most importance?
- What do you feel about teaching now? What has been rewarding? What do you now feel was missing? What advice do you have for those who organize teacher education?

Do you remember what kind of teacher you wanted to become before you began teaching?

- Are you becoming that teacher?
- What has supported you in this direction?
- What has hindered you?
- What has been the most important learning experience these first three years of teaching?
- If you think back to the first year of teaching, what comes first to mind?
- What went well then?
- What was most difficult then?
- What would you have differently?

The beginning

Guidance/support

Teaching

Cooperation with other teachers

Other

## Interviews Conducted Towards the End of the Fifth Year of Teaching

- When you look back over these five years, what is the first thing that comes to mind?  
What stands out after the five years?  
What do you remember most vividly?  
What is now of most importance?
- How do you feel like your teaching is going?
- What is best about your teaching? Give an example  
What is worst about your teaching? Give an example
- What do you still find difficult about your teaching? Give an example

- Do you feel like your teaching (and your methods of teaching) has changed these five years? How has it changed?
- What is your classroom like? Describe it – why is it that way?
- Would you want to have it differently? How?
- What are you considering now – at the end of the fifth year?  
What is your feeling about these first five years?  
What is the biggest learning experience?  
How do you now feel as a teacher?  
Have your attitudes changes? How? Why? Give examples  
Have you changed as a teacher?  
Are you a good teacher? What is there to suggest that?
- Do you remember a difficult case you had to deal with?  
Was there a particular incidence in your teaching (can be whatever) that you were not content with in regards to how it was dealt with, and still remains a burden?  
What happened – why?  
What did you do – why?  
How did you resolve the incident? Why?
- How do you view the teacher education now?  
What has been of good use?  
What do you now think was missing?
- What advice do you have for those who organize teacher education?
- If you would receive a training teacher into your classroom, in what way do you think he/she should be prepared?
- Do you remember now what kind of a teacher you wanted to become when you began teaching?  
What kind of teacher was that?
- Reminder of what was told during the first year (can I read for you what you said then?):
- When you said you wanted to be a ... (fair) teacher, what did you mean?
- What is a ... (fair) teacher like?
- Are you a ... (fair) teacher now?
- In what way, could you give an example?
- How has is been/going (how have you faired), in becoming that teacher?
- What has supported you in this direction? Is there anything in particular that has helped you become that teacher? Describe it
- What has been a hindrance? Is there anything in particular that has hindered you in becoming this teacher? Describe it
- Do you now feel that you are closer to becoming that teacher?  
How?

## Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

- When you think back to the first year – what is the first thing that comes to mind?
- Do you feel that you then received the support you required in becoming the teacher you wanted to become?
- What was of assistance – made it difficult?

What went well then?

What did you find most difficult then?

What would you have had differently?

The beginning/first weeks of teaching?

Guidance/support?

Teaching?

Cooperation with other teachers?

Other?

- Do you know what the term culture of a school means? (attitudes/customs/habits)?
- How would you describe the culture of the school you began or are still teaching at?
- Do you feel that his culture was of support for you as a beginning teacher?
- If yes, give some examples of that
- If no, give some examples of why that was not the case
- How would you now describe yourself as a teacher?
- How would your students describe you as a teacher?
- If you were to describe these five years in a visual way, - if you were asked to provide a metaphor – what would it be like? – to what can you compare yourself and your teaching up to this point (I would compare it to...)
- If we would talk about these five years as travels, what kind of travel would it be?
- In what kind of landscape are you travelling?
- In what way do you think your experiences up to this point have aided you in developing your teaching?
- Do you feel like your participation in this research has influenced your attitudes towards teaching, school, students? How? Give examples

### Thoughts / Notes for researcher:

Delve into answers they gave from the first year – before they began teaching

Inquire into each point on its own (in the first year you said you wanted to become a ... teacher? Do you feel like you are that teacher

today? What is ... teacher? In what way? Give example of that from teaching and through communications with students

- Remember to ask about individual issues from each year  
What has helped?  
What has hindered?  
Why/Why not?  
See relation to the culture of the school
- Do they realize what they brought from teacher education and if and how the culture of the school changed that
- Inquire into methods and connect it to the first year and the teacher education  
Why/why not doing what they intended to do?

## **APPENDIX IV – A LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS REGARDING THE INTERIM NARRATIVES**

Reykjavik, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2009

Dear...

Your stories, which will follow, are neither exhaustive nor complete, they are work in progress – they are so called ‘interim narratives’. An integral element of the research methodology that I make use of, which is entitled ‘narrative inquiry’, is to encourage the participants to carefully read their own stories. It is though acceptable to change, add or correct at later stages of the research process, all the way to the end. I will then work on your comments with your cooperation.

The University of Iceland makes the requirement that doctoral dissertations be written in English – this is why your stories are in English. I sincerely hope that it will not cause much inconvenience. You can of course make your own comments in Icelandic.

Three main themes appeared in your interviews and below them are your stories. The three main themes are the following:

- A) Creating a Teacher Identity
- B) Creating Relationships
- C) Creating Classroom Community

I refer to your interviews by marking a digit to each year; 1 (a, b and c), 2, 3 and 5. Please note that I have not had an English-speaker review this text.

In these interim narratives I have to the best of my abilities attempted to provide a realistic portrayal of you. I have meticulously scrutinized each interview with particular attention in mind to how you have told your tale, how you understand your teaching, how you understand the **experiences** these first five years of teaching and what meaning you make of them. These concepts; *experience* and *meaning* are two of the key terms within narrative inquiry. The first two stories have the



purpose of connecting your experience as a student with the teacher you are, which is intimately related to another concept in this methodology, namely, *personal, practical knowledge*. In those stories I have sometimes rearranged and retold points from the interviews, which I have allowed myself some poetic licence so your presence will be more strongly felt.

It is very important that you review the interim narratives with the following points in mind:

Do you feel that I understand what you tell me

Do you feel that these stories portray you realistically – are they your stories

Do you want to add something to the stories

Do you want to explain something in more detail (it is very important to explicate what you intend)

Is there anything you want to change (it is alright to change)

Is there something you want to leave out

Do you disagree with anything in the stories

Other things you want to mention

All your comments, thoughts and ideas, whatever they may be, are extremely important. And I would really appreciate if you are willing to note your emotional reactions to the stories. Remember – Using Icelandic is allowed!

Thank you in advance and with kind regards,

Lilja.

## APPENDIX V – THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE FINDING CHAPTERS – THE STORIES

### 1. Introduction

### 2. Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual

Hanna	Jon	Linda
Fear A girl from a farm	The broken window A boy from a farm	A Pleasant Surprise A girl from a small town

### 3. Becoming a Teacher: (the latter half of the titles of the theme-story for each of the participant is something which is descriptive of each of them)

Hanna: Being Full of the Joys of Spring

Jon: Being Careful before Every Step

Linda: Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

Hanna	Jon	Linda
* Deciding to Become a Teacher * The vision of the teacher Hanna wants to become	* Deciding to Become a Teacher * The vision of the teacher Jon wants to become	* Deciding to Become a Teacher * The Vision of the Teacher Linda Wants to Become

### 4. Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years – Dealing with Challenges in the Realities

(the titles of the sub-stories is something which is descriptive of the content of each story)

Hanna	Jon	Linda
* Making Way through Rugged Paths and not Being Shoed for the Road * It is Difficult Planning Interesting Lessons * Dealing with Difficult Parents * Not Having a Mentor	* Shackled by one's limitations * It is a time-consuming task planning lessons * Dealing with difficult incidents * Having a good mentor	* Working with an Experienced Teacher * It's a Challenge Planning Lessons with a Traditional Teacher * Dealing with Difficult Students * Everybody needs a mentor

### 5. Validating Self as a Teacher

(the titles of the sub-stories is something which is descriptive of how each of them succeeded)

Hanna	Jon	Linda
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Getting a grasp on things</li> <li>* Enabling Everyone to Flourish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Having the guts to be sincere</li> <li>* Finding one's way through the maze</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* When Success is Fruit of One's Labor</li> <li>* Success is Doing Ordinary Things Extraordinarily Well</li> <li>* Success is not a Destination, it's a Journey</li> </ul>

### 6. Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences

(the titles of the sub-stories is something which is descriptive of how each of them is as person, or how they dealt with things, or their personality traits)

Hanna	Jon	Linda
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Seizing the Opportunity to Act on One's Vision</li> <li>* When Acting on One's Vision Means Going Against the Grain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Wanting to go there but holding back</li> <li>* Letting go when working with people</li> <li>* Intending to go for the team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* When Difficulties at Hand are Tasks to Tackle Instead of Impossible Problems to Solve</li> <li>* Going from Strength to Strength with the Parents</li> </ul>

### 7. Re-Creating Story of Self as Teacher –

(the latter half of the titles of the theme-story for each of the participant is something which is descriptive of each of the participants' classrooms)

Hanna: Creating Rich Learning Community

Jon: Creating a Respectful Classroom

Linda: Creating a World of Adventure

(and the titles of the sub-stories are quotes from each of their stories)

## Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

<b>Hanna</b>	<b>Jon</b>	<b>Linda</b>
<p>* In a class of 25 some will surprise us later – Hanna's Passion in Teaching</p> <p>* Being Constantly on One's Toes – Hanna is creating and recreating her identity as a teacher</p> <p>* Capturing the togetherness – Hanna and her classroom</p>	<p>* There must be something in there for them – Jon's passion in teaching</p> <p>* Starting to relax in the role – Jon is creating and re-creating his identity as a teacher</p> <p>* Capturing the respectfulness – Jon and his classroom</p>	<p>* Being Totally There for Them – Linda's passion in teaching</p> <p>* Still in the Making – Linda is creating and recreating her identity as a teacher</p> <p>* Capturing the Visual and the Metaphorical – Linda and Her Classroom</p>
Bringing Hanna's Stories to a Close – Summary of Hann's Stories	Bringing Jon's Stories to a Close – Summary of Jon's Stories	Bringing Linda's Stories to a Close – Summary of Linda's Stories

## **APPENDIX VI– A LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS REGARDING THE FINAL NARRATIVES**

Reykjavik, 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2011

Dear ...

These stories that I now send you are your final stories as they appear in the first draft of my dissertation. As I mentioned to you, according to the research methodology that I rely on it is extremely important that participants have the opportunity to read their stories carefully, where it is fully appropriate to alter, change or edit at the final stages of the research procedure. I will then re-examine your comments in cooperation with you. As I also mentioned last time, the dissertation and your stories are written in English in accordance with regulations of the University of Iceland. I hope that will not be of inconvenience. It is of course fully acceptable that your comments be made in Icelandic. In the final stories there are to be found six major themes, or chapters under which are subchapters.

The six major themes are the following:

- 1) Early Childhood Experiences: The Origins of the Individual
- 2) Becoming a Teacher
- 3) Experiencing the Vision in the Early Years - Dealing with Challenges in the Realities
- 4) Validating Self as a Teacher
- 5) Developing Practices – Positive and Negative Experiences
- 6) Re-Creating Story of Self as a Teacher

Where applicable I have collected stories of events or incidents from those five years that form a whole and this is done to illustrate your development as a teacher. At the bottom of each story one can see to which interview I refer each time. In the final stories I have taken the liberty of retelling and rearranging certain events from the stories and interim narratives, which I have allowed myself so your presence will be more strongly felt. I begin the chapter on you on a poem since this methodology is open toward creative writing :-). The poem serves the purpose of providing an image of you as I perceived you through our

## Hitching One's Wagon to a Star

long research cooperation. Please note that I have not had an English-speaker review this text.

In these interim narratives I have to the best of my abilities attempted to provide a realistic portrayal of you. Of most importance to keep in mind is to pay attention to how you have told your tale, how you understand your teaching, how you understand the **experiences** these first five years of teaching and what meaning you make of them. To remind you, these concepts; *experience* and *meaning* are two of the key terms within narrative inquiry

It is very important that you review the interim narratives with the following points in mind:

Do you feel that I understand what you tell me

Do you feel that these stories portray you realistically – are they your stories

Do you want to add something to the stories

Do you want to explain something in more detail (it is very important to explicate what you intend)

Is there anything you want to change (it **is** alright to change)

Is there something you want to leave out

Do you disagree with anything in the stories

Other things you want to mention

All your comments, thoughts and ideas, whatever they may be, are extremely important. And I would really appreciate if you are willing to note your emotional reactions to the stories. Remember – Using Icelandic is allowed!

Thank you in advance and warm regards,

Lilja.

## **APPENDIX VII – COMMENTS FROM A PARTICIPANT AFTER HAVING READ THE STORIES**

Two E-mail letters from Linda with her comments on her final narratives:

**Sent:** Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2012, 11:15

Hi Lilja,

I have already glanced over the text on our Linda ... and I'm going to have a better look at the text! I really appreciate this dear Lilja. I just want to begin by saying THANKS! I'm really honored of getting to be Linda in your project. To have your first years in teaching in such a well written and professional text is immeasurable. The poem in the beginning completely caught me off guard ... I felt a tiny lump in my throat already in the beginning and while I read tears trickled down my cheeks ;) Then I simply fell to the floor when you tied the text together in the end with regard to the poem. Yes! I'm sincerely grateful for everything. The moments spent with you the first years gave me a lot and as I have doubtlessly told you before, they were for me like graduate studies. It was immeasurable and so healthy and so good to explore times passed with you – such a professional as you are. You have given me strength and I keep your compliments in a good place :)

Reading the first chapter was a little bit difficult, i.e. about my childhood now that my father has died. This year has been difficult without him and I also lost my grandmother just before Christmas. But that's how life is and there are many things to be grateful for. You handled my words well in the text and for that I'm grateful.

Lots of love,  
“Linda”

**Sent:** Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> of March.2012, 13:39

Hi Lilja,

I'm sitting here by the screen. I have been through the text back to front, backwards and forwards. I'm thinking about leaving it at that. I have changed or added very little, almost nothing. As I told you last time I'm content with this. This is how it was – this was my experience and I told my story as honestly as I could. Reading this is actually amazing – I enjoy it but at the same time I get butterflies in my stomach. Sometimes I feel like I'm too honest, sometimes slightly narrow-minded, like e.g. concerning Brynja – the first teacher I

worked with. I criticize her quite strongly – of course there were many positive things about her. Yes! Every word is true and I don't want to withdraw any of them. But I could have allowed good words to float alongside them. I was such a puppy during my first years of teaching – with eyes and ears perked every day ... wagging my tail and up for almost anything ;) Yes! I still am as a matter of fact :) But I have to admit that the past three years of teaching have been difficult – and educational! The puppy is exhausted! :-)

This reading now about Linda has actually helped me a whole lot and arrives at the perfect time. What I mean is that lately I have lost the “kling”-atmosphere in my work. I am confused. Where am I headed? What am I going to do? Where is the Icelandic school headed? Do I want to be a part of it? Can I change anything – should I quit teaching and turn to something else? These thoughts have drained me of energy – the energy that inhabited Linda ... although ... not quite :) I thought it was wonderful reading her stories – they reminded me of the teacher that I was – yeah! And still am and what kind of teacher I want to be. But I am still confused! I'm now teaching grade 1 one in B... School, and I intend to follow these students for the next two years. What do I do after that? Hopefully graduate studies ;) Now I have to set myself a goal – but holy moly, what they will be I don't know ;) What should I do?

Once again I want thank you my dear Lilja for your kind words in my regard and the poem. I still get a lump in my throat when I read it ... hihhihi I often can't resist taking a look at it! OK ... I know it by heart ;)

This time with you gave me more than all those years in Kennó [The IUE]... it was a form of graduate studies – private tutoring ;) I always looked forward seeing you and meeting with your challenging and educational questions. You are so professional and strong and at the same time so sweet with such an endearing presence. You provided me with healthy and fruitful provisions for life. You had faith in me and encouraged me. You also complimented me. Thank you for that.

But what is the situation? Is our “communication” over now? Or can I expect hearing from you again? When do you put the final finishing touch on the project?

Best regards,  
“Linda”



## **APPENDIX VIII – A LIST OF PRESENTATIONS ON RESEARCH FINDINGS GIVEN AT CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS – PAPERS AND ARTICLES**

### **Doctoral Seminars at the Iceland University of Education and the University of Iceland:**

- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2005). *Byrjendur í grunnskólakennslu* (áhersla á rannsóknarspurningar) [Beginning teachers in the basic school (with emphasis on the research questions)].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2006). *Byrjendur í grunnskólakennslu* (áhersla á aðferðafræðina) [Beginning teachers in the basic school (with emphasis on the research methodology)].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2007). *Narratífan - frásagnaraðferðin* [On the narrative inquiry].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2009). *Narratíf rannsókn á fyrstu árum kennara í starfi* [Narrative inquiry into the first years of teaching].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2009). *Narratíf rannsókn á reynslu kennara fyrstu fimm árin í grunnskólakennslu* [Narrative inquiry into the first five years of teaching in the basic school].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2011). *Sögur verða til* (Narratíf rannsókn á reynslu kennara fyrstu fimm árin í grunnskólakennslu) [The making of stories (narrative inquiry into the first five years of teaching in the basic school)].

### **Presentations of this Research in Iceland and Other Countries:**

- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2005a). *Hvað finnst byrjendum í grunnskólakennslu um kennaramenntun sína – ári síðar?* [What do beginning basic school teachers think about their teacher education programs - one year later?]. Erindi á málþingi um framtíðarskipan náms við Kennaraháskóla Íslands [paper presented at a conference on the future of teacher education at the Iceland University of Education].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2005b). *Þarfir nýliðans í kennslu* [Beginning teachers' needs]. Fyrirlestur fyrir Menntasvið Reykjavíkurborgar [a lecture for the Reykjavik department of education and youth].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2005c). *Hvað finnst byrjendum í grunnskólakennslu um kennaramenntun sína?* [What do beginning basic school teachers think about their teacher education programs?]. Erindi á 9. málþingi Rannsóknarstofnunar Kennaraháskóla Íslands [paper presented at the Iceland University of Education, the 9th research conference].

- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2005d). “Ég er bara eins og alkahólistarnir sko, lifi bara fyrir einn dag í einu nánast ...” – Rannsókn á gengi og líðan grunnskólakennara – fyrsta starfsárið [“I'm just like the alcoholics you know, I take one day at a time”]. Erindi á ráðstefna Félags um menntarannsóknir [paper presented at the conference of the Icelandic educational research association].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2007a). *Stories of Beginning Teachers' Journey to Become the Teachers They Initially Intended to Become*. Paper presented at the conference of the International Study Association of Teachers and Teaching, ISATT, in Brock University, Kanada.
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2007b). *Raddir nýrra kennara [Voices of the beginning teachers]*. Erindi á Bolholtsmálstofu um kennaramenntun, Kennaraháskóli Íslands [paper presented at a seminar on teacher education in Iceland].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2007c). Narratífan sem rannsóknaraðferð í menntarannsóknnum [Narrative inquiry as a research method in educational research]. Erindi flutt á vísindaráðstefnu Félagsvísindadeildar Háskóla Íslands, Þjóðarspeglinum [paper presented at the VIII conference on research in the social sciences, University of Iceland].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2008). *Why didn't I Learn this in Kennó [at the University]?* Paper presented at the 10th Nordic conference on teacher education, Iceland University of Education.
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2009). “Ég vil vera góður kennari sem leggur áherslu á þætti sem maður lærir svo mikið í Kennó...” [I want to be a good teacher who places emphasis on those elements that we have learned so much about in the IUE]. Aðalfyrirlestur á ráðstefnu sem haldin var í tengslum við landssambandsþing samtakanna Delta Kappa Gamma, á Hallormsstað [a keynote speaker at the DeltaKappaGamma annual conference in Iceland].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2009a). Using Narrative Inquiry in a Research on the Experiences of Beginning Teachers during Their First Five Years of Teaching in Iceland. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research in Vienna.
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2009b). Ánægðir foreldrar eru bestu bandamenn kennara (foreldrasögur í langtímarannsókn á fyrstu árum grunnskólakennara í starfi) [Happy parents are teachers' best allies (parent stories in a longitudinal research on the first five years of teaching)]. Erindi á Málþingi Menntavísindasviðs [paper presented at the conference on research in education, University of Iceland].
- Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2009c). “Ég vil vera góður kennari sem leggur áherslu á þætti sem maður lærir svo mikið í Kennó” [“I want to be a good teacher who places emphasis on those elements that we have learned so much

about in the IUE”]. Veggspjald á ráðstefnu Félagsvísindasviðs; Þjóðarspegli [poster session at the X conference on research in the social sciences, University of Iceland].

Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2010a). “Ég vil verða farsæll kennari”. Að nota narratífu í kennararannsókn [“I want to be a successful teacher”. Using narrative inquiry in teacher research]. Erindi á Menntakviku, ráðstefnu Menntavísindasviðs [paper presented at the conference on research in education, University of Iceland].

Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2010b). *Foreldrasögur í narratífri rannsókn [Parent stories in a narrative inquiry]*. Veggspjald á ráðstefnu Félagsvísindasviðs; Þjóðarspegli [poster session at the XI conference on research in the social sciences, University of Iceland].

Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2011). “Maður hefur lært svo rosalega mikið um sjálfa sig”. Þróun fagvitundar fyrstu fimm árin í kennslu [“One has learned so much about oneself” The professional development the first five years in teaching]. Erindi á Menntakviku, ráðstefnu Menntavísindasviðs [paper presented at the conference on research in education, University of Iceland].

### Book Chapter, Paper and Article

Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2005). “Það vantar einn áfanga sem ég hef kallað Bland í poka 107”. Viðhorf byrjenda í grunnskólakennslu til kennaranáms síns – ári síðar. [“There is one course missing which I've called Mixed issues 107”. Attitudes of beginning teachers towards their teacher education program – a year later.]. In G. L. Marinósson, Þ. Blöndal & Þ. Jóhannsdóttir (Eds.), *Nám í nýju samhengi*. (pp. 151–165). Reykjavík: Rannsóknarstofnun Kennaraháskóla Íslands [The Research Centre of The Iceland University of Education].

Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2007). *Narratífa sem rannsóknaraðferð í menntarannsóknum*. [Narrative Inquiry as a research method in educational research.] In G. Þ. Jóhannesson and H. Björnsdóttir (Eds.), *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum VIII* (pp. 737–747). Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Jónsdóttir, L. M. (2012). “Það er náttúrulega ekki hægt að kenna manni allt”. Viðhorf byrjenda í grunnskólakennslu til kennaranáms síns. [“Not everything can be taught”. Attitudes of beginning teachers towards their teacher education.



