SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS IN SCHOOL DIVISIONS (RE)COMPOSING
STORIES TO LIVE BY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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By
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Gloria Lynn Antifaiff, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, has presented a thesis titled, *Senior Administrators in School Divisions (Re)Composing Stories to Live By: A Narrative Inquiry*, in an oral examination held on December 9, 2016. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

My research puzzle for this narrative inquiry is about senior administrators in school divisions (re)composing stories to live by during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement. As this study unfolds, Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) understanding of a narrative inquiry approach is used to explore research puzzles, wonders, and new learning. This study begins with my experiences as a senior administrator on the educational landscape and explores my puzzles about improving student achievement in school divisions. My wonders centre on questions such as: How do we demonstrate improved student achievement for all students? Do we all agree on what improved student achievement is? How do I find balance with what I believe about learning, and achieve what is expected of me in the role of a senior administrator in a school division? How have my experiences shaped my professional identity, and who I am as a senior administrator? Do senior administrators in school divisions (re)compose stories to live by as their professional identity evolves and leadership skills develop?

The participants in this study are three senior administrators from school divisions: Barbara, Alice, and me. Field texts were collected throughout the study in the form of artefacts, audio recordings, documentation notes, personal field notes, and chronicles. Eventually I moved from field texts to interim texts, and I integrated literature about narrative inquiry, educational leadership, professional identity, colonization, and teacher education. Narrative accounts were created for each of the participants. As the narrative accounts, literature, and relevant field texts were
interwoven from interim to research texts, six story threads resonated: being a member of the colonizing dominant group, shifting professional identity, re(composing) stories to live by, becoming awakening to the lives of children and youth, school reform, and the shaping presence of dominant institutional narratives. This dissertation shares the narrative understanding of the author and two participants about their experience of being senior administrators through the narratives they create to understand those experiences. It creates hope for additional research in educational leadership and senior administration using a narrative inquiry methodology.
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**Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my family. I could not have completed my doctorate degree without their constant support and encouragement. My husband, Ben, is my solid foundation, and he gives me courage and reassurance to keep moving forward to explore new opportunities. I am very fortunate to have found a life partner who loves, encourages, and understands me so well.

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Prologue

Outdoor adventures with my father are some of my treasured childhood memories. Whether it was fishing, hiking through the bush of northern Saskatchewan, or camping, there was never a dull moment. Reminiscing about outdoor adventures with my father have provided my family with many hours of storytelling. As I think about outdoor memories from my childhood, I am drawn to a memory of hiking with my father in a northern forest:

My father and I were standing at the edge of a marsh that seemed to be as large as a wheat field. As I looked across the marsh, I saw an endless sea of cattails waving gently in the wind. The tops of the tall pine trees surrounding the marsh moved in time to the rhythm of the wind. Suddenly, the silence was broken by the sound of two geese honking as they rose from the marsh and took flight. One goose, slightly in front of the other, took the lead, and together they ascended towards the tops of the surrounding trees. It was a beautiful sight, and for some inexplicable reason, I shivered. I looked up at my father standing beside me. It was 1970; we were in the North, deep in the bush. My father looked at me and said, “Take a picture with your eyes, Gloria. You will want to remember this moment.” (Personal Field Texts, June, 2012)

This memory is still vivid for me, and now, more than 40 years later, I have taken the time to consider the landscape in which this event occurred, and the learning it provided for me during the course of my life. If my father were alive, I wondered if he would remember the moment as I do. As individuals, we all have collections of
memories about experiences, and memories of these experiences might be triggered at the oddest times:

Almost every day, for several years, I drove the same route to my work at a rural school division central office. I drove down a busy road onto a bridge, over a double highway, and into an industrial area on the outskirts of a city. The industrial area consisted of several businesses ranging from a large steel mill to large farm implement dealerships, and a junkyard filled with discarded rusted and twisted vehicles. The traffic was mostly local, and consisted of large semi-trucks and heavy vehicles that rumbled along roads filled with potholes.

Every spring, without fail, a small flock of geese chose this area for their nesting site. There was a ditch alongside the road that usually contained murky water, which may have been run-off from the latest rain, or contaminated water from a nearby sandblasting company. The grass grew long in the ditch, and a few small patches of cattails stretched to peek over the weeds. In the ditch or a nearby farmer’s field, the geese built their nests.

To me, it seemed to be an undesirable place for a nesting site. The heavy trucks tossed up gravel and rocks as they rumbled along. The cleanliness of the available water source was questionable. Each year when the farmer seeded his field, the nests were destroyed. If the geese had flown a few kilometres north, they would have discovered a nature sanctuary that is green, peaceful, and serene with plenty of fresh, clean water. I perceived the nature sanctuary to be similar to the marsh in northern Saskatchewan I saw many years ago. It was a place which
These two personal field texts about geese demonstrate how one event can trigger the memory of another event that happened several years before. As I reflected on both events, I recognized how my outdoor adventures with my father influenced me and created stories I live by. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) used the phrase “stories to live by” to understand “the interconnectedness of knowledge, context, and identity” (p. 4). They explained that the phrase “stories to live by . . . is given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context” (p. 4).

As an adult, I stood on the shores of a northern lake with my children and encouraged them to “take a picture with their eyes.” I became an amateur photographer, and taught others how to take photographs. My words of advice for students were to frame the objects or subjects in the picture to tell a story, just like “taking a picture with your eyes.” When my father passed away, I lost interest in photography, and I could not take photographs. I wondered why I lost this interest when he passed away, and as I thought about it, I think it was because the memory of taking photographs was so closely associated with memories of him. Eventually, as time passed, and with the encouragement of my family, I was able to pick up my camera again, and I slowly began to rekindle my interest in photography.

My two previous stories provided an example of how revisiting and reflecting on personal stories can lead to new puzzles, wonders, and learning. “We retell our stories, remake the past. This is inevitable. Moreover, it is good. To do so is the essence of...
growth . . . Enhancing personal and social growth is one of the purposes of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 85). Clandinin and Connelly explained that the study of experiences may lead to tensions as questions begin to surface about fact and fiction. They explained, “. . . the distinction between fact and fiction is muddled” (p. 179). As I reminisced about my childhood experiences I was aware that my memories were my memories of experiences. “As researchers, we may take a photograph as a field text, but that photograph is one telling, one shot, one image” (p. 84). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reminded narrative inquirers that “. . . there is no one true version of events. . .” (p. 85) and rather than reduce experiences to questions about truth, the purpose is to “construct a narrative understanding” (p. 85) so new puzzles, wonders, and learning emerged.

As this narrative inquiry unfolded, I was wakeful to my stories to live by and the tensions I experienced as a senior administrator in school divisions during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement. As I reflected on my schooling and teaching experiences, I was attentive to moments that called to me that I sensed influenced my professional identity and, therefore, who I am and who I am becoming as a senior administrator on the educational landscape.¹ I had puzzles and wonders about the tensions I experienced throughout my career. This narrative inquiry will explore the puzzles and wonders I have about senior administrators (re)composing

¹ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that the term landscape “attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 51).
stories to live by in school divisions during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement.
CHAPTER ONE: Narrative Beginnings

Each year senior administrators in most Saskatchewan school divisions develop or revise their strategic plan to focus the direction of the school division. Budget dollars and resources are streamlined to align with the strategic plan to ensure that the school division advances toward the achievement of specific targets or outcomes identified in the plan. The Ministry of Education mandated the framework of the strategic plan. The framework used to be called the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF), but in 2012, the Ministry introduced a new word: accountability. The new framework became the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework (CIAF). A planning meeting I attended in early 2012 as a senior administrator involved considerable discussion about literacy achievement scores:

During the meeting, the Higher Literacy and Achievement section of the strategic plan led to considerable discussion. The school division had introduced a new assessment tool during the previous year. The final assessment results were not favourable. In fact, the results were quite dismal. The assessment indicated that fewer than half of the Grade 8 students were reading at grade level. The achievement results of the students in other grades were not much better.

2 A key action for 2012-2013, identified by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2012), was the expansion of “the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) to become the Continuous Improvement and Accountability Framework (CIAF) by clarifying strategic direction for the education system, and determining expectations for all Ministry sectors, beginning with the K-12 education sector” (p. 4).
The original target was that by 2013, 90% of students would be reading at grade level. The assessment results we were looking at indicated that there was a long way to go to reach that target. Considerable heated discussion ensued. Why were the results so low? Was there an issue with the assessment tool? Did teachers have adequate professional development on how to use the tool? Were the results accurate? What steps had been taken to ensure accuracy? Would the results improve next year? What should the target be? Who should be held accountable for the low scores? (Personal Field Texts, January, 2012)

Measuring student achievement is a process that is far from perfect, but it is a topic debated in schools, school divisions and, even sometimes, the community and the media. Over the course of my career, I have engaged in discussions about how to measure student achievement, and I have attended conferences focused on how to improve it. When I reflected on students and teachers, each with their own unique views, knowledge, and experiences, I wondered whether it was possible, with precision, to narrow student achievement to a single target, single percentage, or letter grade. If the target in the strategic plan was anything less than 100%, I felt we were giving up on some students. If the target was 90%, I wondered which students would be left behind in the bottom 10%. If the target was 60%, I knew that the school division would probably achieve this target, but we could not reasonably exclude 40% of the students. A dilemma school divisions face is how to demonstrate improved student achievement for all students. I wondered, do we all agree on what student achievement is, and how to measure achievement accurately? Can it be accurately measured? How do I navigate
the student achievement debate and balance this with what I believe about teaching and
learning, and what is expected of me in the role of a senior administrator in a school
division?

This chapter started with me describing an experience I had with a senior
leadership team as we discussed literacy achievement scores in the school division. I
chose this experience to begin to shape the puzzles and wonders I had about being a
senior administrator tasked to improve student achievement. I will continue this chapter
by explaining how a narrative inquiry begins, and use a three-dimensional inquiry space
to study experience. I will then reach back to my childhood memories and share
experiences I had about being schooled, and I will consider the influence that my
childhood schooling experiences have had on me. I will then share experiences that have
created moments of tension for me as I navigated the educational landscape as a senior
administrator. I will describe awakenings I experienced as I became attentive to
colonization and issues of dominance and inequality, particularly when I reflected on
high school graduation rates, curriculum, and assessments. Finally, I will transition to
Chapter Two as I begin to inquire into my experiences as a teacher to further explore
emerging research puzzles and awakenings.

1.1 Beginning and Shaping a Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) understanding of a narrative inquiry approach
was used to explore emerging research puzzles. My story about attending a senior
administrator planning meeting to discuss literacy achievement scores, set within a
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specific time and context, was an experience that filled me with tensions. Staying attentive to those tensions shaped new wonders and questions.

One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narrative of experience, the researcher’s autobiography. This task of composing our own narratives of experience is central to narrative inquiry. We refer to this as composing narrative beginnings as a researcher begins his or her inquiries. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70)

As my narrative beginning continued, I found myself engaged in an ongoing inquiry into my experiences across time, place, and situations. My sense of wonder extended to searching for ways in which my professional identity developed alongside my present-day knowledge about student achievement. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described working within a three-dimensional space as we began to compose “stories of our past that frame our present standpoints, moving back and forth from the personal to the social, and situating it all in place” (p. 70). In other words, in narrative inquiry, the narrative inquirer begins the study by sharing an autobiographical account of experiences beginning at a point in time that seems to make sense for the study. As the study unfolds, the narrative inquirer journeys back and forth on a continuum of time being attentive to experiences that call to the narrative inquirer engaged in the study. The experiences shared in this study will not be in chronological order, but instead unfold as puzzles and wonders emerged. As the experiences unfolded, I was attentive to the three-dimensional inquiry space in narrative inquiry by attending to the personal situation, the societal circumstances, and the place experiences occurred. The experiences shared in
this narrative inquiry will have an inward movement as feelings, questions, and wonders surface within me, and they will have an outward movement as the environment in which the situation occurred is considered. Just as experience is not linear or one-dimensional, neither is this research study.

1.2 My Schooling

In September 1967, I proudly entered a kindergarten classroom with my mother and a yellow satin-edged blanket for naptime. I remember lying on my mat rubbing and twisting the satin edge of the blanket between my fingers. I did not feel ready to sleep, and I tossed restlessly from side to side. The tactile experience of having the cool satin edge of the blanket rubbing on my fingers provided a feeling of comfort, and it helped to distract me so the time would pass quickly. In June 1968, the kindergarten teacher wrote in my report card that I was “a very fine student and show[ed] much promise.” (Personal Field Texts, EC&I³ 804, June, 2009)

As I reread this handwritten report card several years later, I wondered what the written comment meant. “Promise” in what? I could only speculate, but I suspected at the age of 5 that I demonstrated the desirable qualities of a successful student. I could not recall specific details about my academic achievement in kindergarten, and many years later I relied on the artefact of my report card as a way to try to travel back to that time and place. I have one prominent memory about kindergarten, and it is a tactile one:

³ EC&I is an acronym for Education Curriculum and Instruction. EC&I 804 is a curriculum development course in the University of Regina Education Graduate Studies program.
the feeling of the satin edging of my blanket rubbing on my fingers. At that time, I did not think about my ability to do well academically in school, but I am sure my parents expected me to be well-behaved, and the comment written on my kindergarten report card likely indicated to them that I achieved this expectation.

As I continued to think about this experience in kindergarten, I thought about children entering the school system. They do not question whether or not they are ready to begin school. Simpson (2001) considered Dewey’s teachings, and identified the child as “a natural and multi-talented learner who does not need to be drawn out or have educators pour anything into her or him” (p. 193). However, children are unaware that they have entered into a place shaped by traditions, accountability expectations, and standards of expectation for academics and behaviour. Memories about school experiences can have a lifelong impact. “The stories we live by, and the stories we live in, over time are indelibly marked for all of us by stories of school” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 22). Some students will have fond memories of their schooling experiences; other students will have very different memories. Questions filled my mind about improving student achievement, such as: Which students will be successful? Which students will not be successful? Who chooses which students will be successful or not successful? How is success measured? What is success? Do students have a voice in this process?

As I thought about all of this alongside my earlier shared experience in the school division strategic planning meeting, I realized that there was little thought given in that meeting to the complex lives of children in kindergarten or other children and youth in
the school division. My wonderings about my schooling experiences made me think about other report cards I had received during my years of schooling:

On my Grade 1 handwritten report card, my teacher wrote that my work habits were above average for “obeying rules,” “listening attentively,” “following directions,” “finishing my work on time,” “being neat and careful while doing my work,” and my ability to “work independently.” The teacher wrote, “Gloria is a very pleasant, co-operative little girl,” and “Gloria is an asset to her class.” I think, from her perspective, I would have been a low-maintenance student.

The remainder of my elementary school report cards contained the same themes. I was a student who did well in all the subject areas, and I was pleasant and cooperative in class. In Grade 6, the teacher indicated he knew a bit more about me as a person; he demonstrated this in his comment, “Gloria has a beautiful sense of humour which I appreciate.” In Grades 7 and 8, I had the same homeroom teacher. In two years, the only written comment on my report card from this teacher was at the end of Grade 8 when the teacher wrote, “Congratulations, Gloria.” This trend continued into high school with my marks ensuring I was on the honour roll for each year. The written comments were few and far between, with the most common word being “good.” (Personal Field Texts, EC&I 804, June, 2009)
The inquiry into my report cards confirmed for me that my experiences as a student in the school system were summarized by many teachers into one word—good. As I reflected on my schooling experiences, I remembered my “Dick and Jane” reader, my phonics and arithmetic workbooks, sitting in a traditional desk as part of a row of other desks, raising my hand to speak or, more often, not raising my hand to avoid the spotlight of the teacher’s attention. I was the good student, as was written many times on my report cards. I had figured out how to do school. I needed to do exactly as the teacher expected, conform to the institutional rules, and abide by the expectations established by each teacher. In these ways, I was able to be a successful student, and I was labelled as good, in part, because my behaviour kept me under the radar and my academics were acceptable.

Perhaps I should be pleased that I was successful in school. However, the memories left me feeling unsettled. It was disturbing to me that the experiences I remembered most clearly about school were often associated with memories outside of the classroom, such as field trips, play days, and a picnic in the park with my class. By thinking about these stories, I came to realize that I have been schooled and shaped by the institution of school. Delpit (1988) explained that:

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4 On April 24, 2015, a simple, one word search for “good” in Google yielded over 6 billion sites containing this word. Dictionary.com (2015) defined the word “good” as: (1) morally excellent; virtuous; righteous; pious: a good man; (2) satisfactory in quality, quantity, or degree: a good teacher; good health. (3) of high quality; excellent; (4) right; proper; fit: It is good that you are here. His credentials are good; (5) well-behaved: a good child.
The success of institutions . . . is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power. Children from middle-class homes tend to do better than those from non-middle class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes—of those in power. The upper and middle classes send their children to school with all the accoutrements of the culture of power. (p. 283)

My middle class background seemed to have made my journey predictable; these aspects also appeared to have conferred upon me the label of good. Delpit (1988) explained “that members of any culture transmit information implicitly to co-members” (p. 283). As I thought about Delpit’s words, I realized that the experiences I had with my family outside of school shaped me to be successful within the traditional culture of schooling. Furthermore, as Hollins (2008) wrote:

Cultural knowledge includes those understandings, values, and behaviours acquired in the socialization or enculturation process within the home-culture. Based on their experiences in the home and with caregivers, children have acquired a great deal of knowledge about the world. . . . Meaningful school learning is directly linked to learning that is already in progress in ways that extend and build on the knowledge that has already been acquired as well as that being processed. (p. 86)

As I read Hollins, I realized the expectations of the education system matched the expectations of my family. I did not enter a completely unknown world when I entered kindergarten and continued to Grade 12.
I was raised in a middle class family of Ukrainian heritage. My mother was a stay at home mom and devoted her time to running a household and raising her children, while my father ran his own business as a mechanic. My two siblings are eight and twelve years older than me. Several of my memories about my early childhood are related to sensory experiences, such as the feel of the satin edging of my yellow blanket rubbing on my fingers, the smell of fresh bread baking in the oven, the taste of fresh homemade cookies, the feel of scratchy homemade wool clothing on my skin, or the feel of prickly curlers poking into my scalp as I tried to sleep with them in my hair. We lived in a comfortable home that my father built with his hands and assistance from his circle of friends. I have memories of playing with Barbie dolls, colouring books, and cut out dolls. I remembered when my mother transformed our basement into a series of blanket tents and organized tea parties. These are some of my memories about my childhood.

I sensed this enculturation into the education system began at my home and has impacted me throughout my life, and it may be continuing to influence my beliefs and values about school and learning. As I, for example, read hooks’ (2000) description of her experiences attending post-secondary institutions into which she was not encultured, I felt many differences between her experiences and my own. She wrote:

Slowly, I began to understand fully that there was no place in academe for folks from working-class backgrounds who did not wish to leave the past behind. That was the price of the ticket. Poor students would be welcome at the best institutions of higher learning only if they were willing to surrender memory, to
forget the past and claim the assimilated present as the only worthwhile and meaningful reality. (p. B16)

When I reminisced about my schooling experiences I became aware of growing tensions within me as I began to reflect critically about privilege and domination in culture. hooks (1999) stated: “Because all people within a culture of domination are socialized to embody its values and attitudes, all individuals are agents of domination, helping to perpetuate and maintain its systems” (p. 77). hooks explained those within the dominant culture “have the capacity to act in ways that oppress, dominate, wound” (p. 77). Colonization, as defined by hooks, “is the conquering of ‘the minds and habits’ of oppressed people so that they themselves internalize and accept their ‘inherent inferiority’” (p. 84). In contrast, hooks explained that decolonization is:

. . . the breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of that reality of our own experience.

The process of decolonization is a ‘disruption of the colonized/colonizer mindset,’ a letting go of white supremacist capitalist patriarchal assumptions and values. (p. 84)

My middle class background positioned me as a member of the colonizing dominant group and provided me with privileges I was not aware I had. “Privilege is granted even without a subject’s cognition that life is made a bit easier for her” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 75). Crenshaw (1991) helped me to understand this further:

Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically
negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different. According to this understanding, our liberatory objective should be to empty such categories of any social significance. Yet implicit in certain strands of feminist and racial liberation movements, for example is the view that the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction. (p. 1242)

Crenshaw (1991) explained the concept of “intersectionality” and helped me to further my understanding. Crenshaw wrote that there are multiple “intersectional identities” (p. 1243) to consider, and it was not simply my middle class background that privileged me. I assumed that the way I was raised, and my apparent success in school, were the result of me being ‘good,’ but in fact, it was beyond a monolithic existence. I am a member of the colonizing dominant group, and I have privileges that enable me to be successful. As I proceeded through my career to eventually the role of a senior administrator, I was coming to realize I was unconsciously trying to ensure students experienced the same success I had experienced in school as member of the colonizing dominant group.

McIntosh (1989) helped me to understand this further:

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual will. (para. 6)
Specifically, she explained, “whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (para. 6). When I thought about this in the context of the senior administration meeting I described at the beginning of this chapter, new awakenings about the meeting began to emerge. I realized every person in attendance at the meeting had a graduate degree from a post-secondary institution, and each person had expectations that every child and youth in the school division should be achieving the “success” they had experienced in school. There were many layers of complexity in the meeting, but one unspoken question was: Why were students not being successful, like we were in school? In the midst of the meeting, not one person mentioned that a culture of dominance and inequality was a contributing factor that was inhibiting success for some students.

As I learned more, hooks (1995) helped me to understand that this lack of recognition by members of the dominant group was actually a strategy to marginalize students for not fitting into the status quo. hooks explained this concept further when she described an experience about one of her sisters seeking therapeutic help: “All the strategies for change they offered her were based on the assumption that she was the problem and that by simply conforming more to the status quo and changing her behavior she could resolve her dilemmas” (p. 267). The strategies discussed at the senior administration meeting did not focus on a broader context or deep self-reflection, but rather on a problem with processes and that people needed to be blamed for the lack of favourable results.
Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that all researchers enter their inquiry space with “views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry” (p. 46). It is important to acknowledge the tensions and understand “that narrative inquirers need to reconstruct their own narrative of inquiry histories and to be alert to possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research they undertake” (p. 46). This made me wonder if my schooling experiences had been different, that is, if my schooling experiences had positioned me to be the “Other,” similar to what hooks described about her experience of not being encultured into the post-secondary institution, would I, in this present time, feel the same tensions? Would I have chosen to pursue a career in Education? Who would I have become if my experiences had been different? In asking myself these questions, I was drawn toward memories of other experiences I had on the educational landscape that filled me with tension.

1.3 High School Graduations and Graduation Rates

In the traditional school calendar year, June is typically high school graduation season. Each year, within the large rural school division where I worked, I attended several high school graduation ceremonies. My role was solely tokenism. I represented the central office, and I attended to demonstrate that we recognized the significance of the graduation ceremony. Each graduation ceremony drew several hundred town folk along with family and friends. The ceremony was usually hosted by the school staff at the town rink or school gymnasium to accommodate the large crowd. It was not unusual for a graduating class of 14 students to draw a crowd of 600 people.
All of the graduation ceremonies seemed to have a ritualistic similarity to them. The facility space was set up with a stage and long aisle for the graduates to walk down, with chairs arranged on either side, similar to a church. The young women looked beautiful dressed in their long, flowing strapless gowns with their hair styled in a variety of fashions. The young men looked handsome in suits and tuxedos with colourful vests. Their parents and other family members usually stood by looking proud, and often they had a tissue clutched in hand to dab at tears.

A standard PowerPoint presentation chronicled a visual life history for each graduate from their early years to their current age. Picture after picture was shown to depict the lives of children growing up in rural Saskatchewan. This montage contained quick flashes of images of carefree children riding horses, playing hockey, figure skating, leaning on tractors, riding ATVs,\(^5\) and comfortably petting cows and hugging kittens. In the background, a variety of music genres blasted through the crackly sound system.

The award presentations were often lengthy, and the awards typically focused on leadership, citizenship, sports, and academics. At some of the smaller high school graduation ceremonies, the same students were repeatedly called to the podium to accept awards. Typically, the principal’s address and the valedictorian’s speech painstakingly outlined humorous events and memories of the graduating class. Most of the graduating students had attended the school

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\(^5\) ATV is an acronym for all-terrain vehicle.
together since kindergarten, but for those students who arrived after kindergarten, the speaker seemed to always make sure to identify the students who had arrived after kindergarten. The graduates’ post-high-school plans were announced as they walked across the stage to receive their high school diploma.

As I observed the graduation ceremony as a guest in the audience, I reflected on a number of silences. I wondered about the images not shown on the big screen. What was not being said? I wondered about the graduates who sat and watched the same students repeatedly rise to accept awards. I reminisced about a conversation I had with a parent who told me that in some rural schools, if a child enters after kindergarten, the child is always considered an outsider. I told the parent that I did not understand, and the parent said, “It was the rural way.” I watched this reality unfold as students were identified as not starting at the school in kindergarten, but the audience was reassured the students were accepted as friends. It felt to me that through the naming process, some students were being positioned as outsiders. I wondered about the students who did not walk across the stage. (Personal Field Texts, June, 2011)

While high school graduation is a time for celebration and a benchmark of achievement for many Grade 12 students, there is another group of students who are not present. These are students who did not complete the courses or achieve the marks required to earn a high school diploma. In order to earn a diploma in Saskatchewan, students need to earn 24 credits or successfully complete 24 courses, typically during a three-year period. If a Grade 12 student does not earn the 24 credits, the student is
excluded from the graduation ceremony. Saskatchewan high school graduation statistics reveal harsh realities. For example, the “Saskatchewan Indicators Report” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010) identified that:

Almost three-quarters of Saskatchewan students graduate from Grade 12 within three years of starting Grade 10. However, some students need more time to complete all the courses necessary to graduate and continue in school longer than the typical three years after beginning Grade 10. (p. 84)

The report identified that for self-declared Aboriginal⁶ students, the path to graduation is particularly challenging:

. . . of all self-declared aboriginal⁷ students who entered Grade 10 in 2002–03, 52.5% had completed Grade 12 by 2009–10, and 4.1% were still working towards secondary level completion . . . while persistence rates fluctuate year to year, the proportion of aboriginal students who complete within the typical three year period has increased from 27% to 32% since 1996–97. (p. 84)

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⁶ “When students enrol at any school in the province, they may self-declare aboriginal ancestry. An aboriginal student may be Mètis, Treaty/registered (status) Indian, non-status Indian or Inuit” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 84).

⁷ The reader may note inconsistency in this study with the capitalization of the word “Aboriginal.” For the purpose of this study, the word Aboriginal is capitalized, unless it is lower case in a direct quote.
In other words, what this report revealed is that in 2009–10, 68% of Aboriginal students had not completed their high school education within the typical three-year period. The report also stated that “generally, self-declared aboriginal students had lower marks than non-aboriginal students in all locations” (p. 40), and that “youth who do not achieve Grade 12 standing are more likely to be disadvantaged in their personal and career prospects” (p. 90).

On June 2, 2012, the “Saskatchewan Provincial Auditor 2012 Report” was released to the public. A key point of interest for me was that the Provincial Auditor dedicated a chapter of the report to Grade 12 graduation rates in Saskatchewan. In the report, Lysyk (2012) outlined her conclusion about Grade 12 graduation rates:

The Ministry of Education (Ministry) is responsible for setting objectives and giving direction for early learning, elementary, and high school education. Our audit found that during 2011, the Ministry did not have effective processes to increase the Grade 12 graduation rate above the 2004–05 baseline rate. For students entering Grade 10 between 2004–05 and 2008–09, the overall provincial Grade 12 graduation rate decreased 3.3% (from 75.6% to 72.3%). The Ministry had not sufficiently identified and analyzed the reason for the decrease. As well, it had not analyzed the most effective education strategies to use at critical

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8 For the purpose of this study, the researcher acknowledged it is not only Aboriginal students that may not complete their high school program. Students that receive instruction through alternate means such as home-based or home-school education are not mentioned. This acknowledgement creates silences for the reader to consider.
learning points and did not give clear direction to the education sector as to how to improve Grade 12 graduation rates across Saskatchewan. (p. 31)

The remainder of the chapter outlined 10 detailed recommendations for the Ministry of Education to implement which would provide direction to school divisions on how to improve student achievement and improve Grade 12 graduation rates, such as: “the Ministry of Education use its legislated authority to direct school divisions toward improved Grade 12 graduation rates” (p. 36), and “the Ministry of Education direct school divisions to use key effective strategies (once identified by the Ministry) that have proven practical for overcoming the most significant risks of school divisions affecting student achievement and for increasing Grade 12 graduation rates” (p. 40).

The auditor’s report and 10 recommendations seemed far removed from classrooms and the lives of the children, youth, and teachers who spent approximately 190 days each year in schools. However, as a senior administrator, I sensed the impact would resonate to the core of schools because the auditor’s report implied that schools were not capable of improving student achievement without direction from the Ministry of Education. There was clear direction to raise the accountability levels in school divisions to increase achievement scores. Smith and Fey (2000) explained:

Although there are many varieties of accountability in education (moral, professional, fiscal, market, bureaucratic, and legal), the term has come to mean the responsibility of a school (district, teacher, or student) to parents, taxpayers, or government (federal, state, city, or district) to produce high achievement test scores. (p. 335)
On October 17, 2012, the Government of Saskatchewan released the “Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond.” The purpose of the plan was to outline the strategies for economic growth in Saskatchewan over the next eight years. The plan identified two key Education goals along with actions: to “reduce the difference in graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 50 per cent by 2020” (p. 4), and to “lead the country in Grade 12 graduation rates by 2020” (p. 5).

The Government’s focus on Grade 12 graduation rates clearly set the tone and direction for the next several years in the Education sector. The Grade 12 graduation statistics for Saskatchewan indicated that a large number of students were not successfully completing their high school education or were taking longer than the typical three years. As I reflected on the Ministry reports and my experiences attending high school graduations, several questions surfaced. Why are a large number of students not achieving the desired outcomes to earn a high school diploma? Are the students who do not complete Grade 12 the casualties of an education system that is not working? Or are there other factors that need to be examined beyond the education system? Would the high school graduation results be different in a contemporary education system focused on meeting the needs of today’s learners? How do we change an education system that is deeply rooted in tradition and resistant to change? I read Apple (2004), and new awakenings began to surface within me:

Educational institutions provide one of the major mechanisms through which power is maintained and challenged. These institutions and the manner in which they are organized and controlled are integrally related to the ways in which
specific people get access to economic and cultural resources and power. Yet, because education is usually part of the public sphere and is regulated by the state, it is also a site of conflict, since in many nations there are serious questions about whether the state is organized in ways that benefit the majority of its citizens. (p. vii)

Apple stressed that the crucial point to understand is “how hegemony acts to ‘saturate’ our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic, and social world we see and interact with, and the common sense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world tout court, the only world” (p. 4). As I thought about Apple’s words, I realized I had been schooled to reinforce hegemony. My colleagues had similar schooling experiences, and while I cannot speak for them, my observations were that, they too, had been schooled to reinforce hegemony. “Like a fish who cannot understand that it is in water, people see the world through their systems of language without realizing it” (Apple, 2010, p. 98). The graduation ceremonies I attended had been normalized by people. Those ceremonies have become an expectation upon the completion of Grade 12. They are a celebration, in part, for students who have successfully navigated the normalized view of being schooled. “Hegemony refers to the ideal representation of the interests of the privileged groups as universal interests, which are accepted by the masses as the natural order” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 42). When students do not graduate, as indicated previously in the graduate rate reports, there seemed to be an assumption that something is wrong with the students, the school system, and both need to be fixed. Referring to school reform, Apple (2008) suggested that, “it consistently paints a picture
that what is going on in schools now needs fixing, is outmoded, inefficient or simply ‘bad.’ Reforms will fix it” (p. 244). The reality is that the reforms generally worsen situations of inequality and serve to strengthen hegemonies (Apple, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2008). As I continued to reflect upon the Grade 12 graduation rates and the reform efforts that I have been involved in, as a participant and leader, I was awakened to the results orientation of most reform efforts and, as Craig (2012) observed, the lack of sensitivity towards teachers and the professional knowledge they have gained from working with students on a daily basis. The focus on a higher level of accountability and centralized control is creating an audit culture that focuses on measuring results.

Taubman (2010) explained the concept of “audit culture” is used to refer to: “...the practices and discourses of standards and accountability and to the consequences of that adoption. ...” as well as, “... the preferred way to hold schools accountable and to determine whether federal, state, and local spending on education produces benefits” (p. 59). Teachers and administrators needed to be particularly concerned as this could potentially deskill the profession of teaching, as non-educators attempt to manage and control the process of education in the pretence of efficiency and standardization (Apple, 1993, 2004). Giroux (2012) explained:

Although teachers and administrators have to take responsibility for the lackluster academic performance of their students, there are often many other factors that should also be taken into consideration, such as parental involvement, the socioeconomic status of the students, the existence of support services for
students, the funding structure of the school, and the challenges that emerge when students do not speak English as a first language. (p. 74)

Apple (1998) described the scrutiny of conservative modernization and identified a movement of non-educators’ involvement in educational policy and direction:

This is a fraction of the professional new middle class that gains its own mobility within that state and within the economy based on the use of technical expertise. These are people with backgrounds in management and efficiency techniques to provide the technical and “professional” support for accountability, measurement, “product control,” and assessment that is required by the proponent of neo-liberal policies of marketization and neo-conservative policies of tighter central control in education. (p. 197)

When I reflected on my earlier shared stories of my memories of kindergarten and my schooling years, I wondered about the experiences of students who did not have, as did I and other students, the opportunity to walk across the stage to receive their high school diploma. I was filled with questions. Why were students failing? Was the entire education system, designed to encourage the failure of students who do not comply, or do not intrinsically understand institutional narratives? Why was the Government scrutinizing Education?

1.4 Student Achievement for Some or Student Achievement for All?

As I thought about the government focus on improving graduation rates, I recalled an experience I had as a senior administrator when I attended a provincial education committee meeting to discuss student achievement:
In 2012, the Ministry of Education restructured to build a more cohesive department focused on improving achievement for all students. The new Student Achievement and Supports department had a mandate to integrate all of the services associated with the curriculum, instruction, and assessment of the K-12 education system. A working committee, of which I was a member, guided the liaison meetings between the Ministry of Education and the senior administrators of the school divisions.

The overall mandate of the working committee was student achievement for all students. The mandate focused the committee members to engage in rich discussions about the successes and challenges of providing relevant and meaningful education to students in today’s world. One discussion of this committee focused on the provincial Assessment for Learning (AFL) results. The results clearly indicated Aboriginal students were not achieving as well on the assessments as non-Aboriginal students. Some committee members felt the AFL clearly identified the achievement gap while also showing areas schools needed to focus on in order for Aboriginal children to experience improved achievement.

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9 The Assessment for Learning (AFL) program began in 2008 with the introduction of a large-scale provincial assessment in writing for Grades 5 and 8. Subsequent years included the introduction of reading and mathematics assessments at various grade levels. The goal of the AFL program was to “improve learning and achievement for all Saskatchewan students” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013, para. 1). In 2012, the AFL program ended and Ministry resources for this program were reallocated to other priorities.
success. Others on the committee felt the assessments were culturally biased and did not measure achievement on an equitable basis. One Aboriginal committee member questioned whether there was truly an achievement gap at all.

This point about the possibility of there not being an achievement gap caught my attention. The perspective of this one committee member was that the AFL did not measure student achievement, and from an Aboriginal perspective, Aboriginal students were doing quite well in student achievement. (Personal Field Texts, January, 2012)

I participated in this unfolding conversation and was especially interested in what this one committee member had to say about trying to understand achievement from an Aboriginal perspective. His concerns resonated with my own. Like him, I had asked myself, “How should we measure student achievement?” Loseke (2007) identified a concern about social policy:

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10 Readers will note the terms “Aboriginal” and “First Nations” are used throughout this study. The researcher acknowledged the tensions that may be created by naming. Donald (2009) identified tension with using the term “Indian” in his study. “I use Indian in this article to acknowledge these ongoing tensions salient at places like forts that have been recreated as museums” (Donald, 2009, p. 20). For the purpose of this study, the researcher has aligned with Tupper’s (2014) use of the terms “Aboriginal” and “First Nations.” “Throughout this discussion, I use Aboriginal as an encompassing term to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. When I use the term First Nations, it is in the context of specific communities/groups of Aboriginal peoples, many of whom signed treaties with the federal government, and are neither Inuit nor Métis” (Tupper, 2014, p. 485).
Social policy “sorts” unique people into identity categories. Real people enjoy the benefits, and suffer the burdens, of policy targeted to types of people. For better or for worse, narratives of institutional identity shape the social world and its inhabitants’ life chances. (p. 667)

Loseke (2007) believed that “the narratives embedded in social policy are rather deterministic in that they define possible client classifications. Schools receiving money from Title 1 legislation, for example, must classify their individual students in terms of their deficiencies” (p. 670). Provincial achievement results were disaggregated into male, female, and Aboriginal data sets. I had been puzzled about how student achievement results were disaggregated by students’ ancestry, specifically self-declared Aboriginal students. I shared my puzzling with colleagues about the disaggregation of student achievement results by Aboriginal students, and the response I received from various individuals was that Aboriginal people wanted the data to be disaggregated. My puzzling deepened further as I wondered how focusing on deficiencies in student achievement results would raise achievement results for Aboriginal children and youth. I wondered who spoke on behalf of the Aboriginal students to request this type of data.

1.5 Becoming Wakeful to How Curriculum Reinforces Hegemony

The auditor’s report, discussed earlier in this chapter, clearly identified a concern about low graduation rates in the province, but it did not identify reasons for this trend. My focus on this complicated issue gradually turned to the curriculum. Tupper (2009) wrote:
While teaching is an ongoing process of curricular negotiation, if teachers are not engaging in a critique of the curriculum they are mandated to teach, by simply making choices about how to deliver content, realize objectives, and evaluate students, the reproduction of particular knowledge traditions continues. (p. 81)

Tupper and Cappello (2008) cautioned that it is important “to pay attention to the story officially sanctioned through mandated curriculum in this province and ask questions about what is missing, what students are not being told about the history of the place they inhabit” (p. 560). For example, when examining the teaching of Treaties in the province, Tupper and Cappello observed that “the narrative of this province is imagined and produced primarily through the foundational story of the pioneer” (p. 561). As I considered this point, I could not recall, as a young student, learning about the history of Aboriginal peoples, but I did remember learning about early explorers and the settlement of the land by pioneers. Battiste (1998) helped me to understand this further:

Public schooling has not wholly ignored Aboriginal content in the schools, as many, if not most, have taken on the task of seeking to find the means to make their curricula inclusive. But mainstream knowledge has not been questioned or reconsidered; rather, the Other is acknowledged as a knowledge, not the knowledge . . .” (p. 21).

“Curriculum development is connected to the ways in which dominant groups think about and value knowledge and what knowledge these groups value” (Tupper & Cappello, 2008, p. 567). As I reflected upon curriculum development in the province, I recalled attending curriculum implementation workshops, but did not remember anyone
encouraging teachers to think critically about the story being told in the curriculum. We accepted the content was what we were expected to teach to our students.

As I thought about Tupper and Cappello’s observations, and the initiatives unfolding in the province to improve student achievement, I became more wakeful to how the mandated curriculum being taught within schools reinforces hegemony, and I wondered about the stories that were not being told. Gallego, Hollingsworth, and Whitenack (2001) described the inequality in the school curriculum in this way:

Therefore, to be successful at schooling one must not only have the dominant “school grammar,” but also the dominant values, beliefs, and attitudes, or risk alienation and school failure. For teachers and teacher educators to be able to reform the inherent biases in school culture requires not only a deep knowledge of curriculum and a knowledge of self and other in relationship, but a critical understanding of the role of race, class, and gender in schooling, and a commitment to action for equity on behalf of children. (p. 244)

Similarly, Montgomery (2005) conducted a study of racism in Canadian history textbooks and noted:

In the state-sanctioned textbooks analyzed here multiple formations of containment effectively deny, manage, and order racism in such a way as to provide a minimum amount of disruption to the grand redemptive narrative of Canadian nationalism. That is to say, the representation of racism in Canadian history books configures Canada as a good and tolerant space (or one becoming
progressively good and tolerant) in which racism is imagined to be the exception and fighting against racism the norm. (p. 438)

As I continued to think about curriculum and my schooling experiences, I realized the curriculum I learned as a student was designed to ensure that I understood the facts from the perspective of the colonizing dominant group. I did not recall learning about Aboriginal cultures or different perspectives. Donald (2009) explained: “Attempts at the so-called inclusion of Indigenous perspectives have usually meant that an anachronistic study of Aboriginal peoples is offered as a possibility in classrooms if there is time and only if people are interested” (p. 5). He felt that decolonization could only occur when, “Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together” (p. 5).

As I recalled my experiences and I read literature for this study, I continued to be awakened to colonization in the school system. I became aware of tensions it created within me as I thought about issues of dominance and inequity. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that as a narrative inquiry unfolds, the narrative inquirer will continue to struggle with personal tensions as boundaries are crossed and other narrative histories become visible. This tension is expected and becomes an important part of the inquiry. As I continued to think about how curriculum reinforces hegemony, I was drawn to concerns about assessment and the measuring of student achievement.
1.6 Becoming Wakeful to How Assessment Reinforces Hegemony

In my thinking about assessment I recalled an experience when I made a startling realization about the inequality that existed in provincial assessments. I had been closely examining the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2009) “Challenge Booklet” for Grade 8 students, which was a provincial mathematics assessment. Throughout the assessment, students were expected to demonstrate their problem-solving and computational skills by completing a series of questions. Some of the questions implied an assumed background knowledge, which I now realize that not all students would have. One question asked students to calculate the time it would take to mow a soccer field. Another asked them to estimate the number of perogies needed to feed a group of people. The questions were:

It takes Mr. Brady 2/3 of an hour to mow all the grass on the school’s soccer field. If he divides the field into four equal sections and mows at a constant rate, what fraction of an hour is needed to cut each section? . . . For a family gathering, Chef Marty made perogies for his family. He used the pattern shown in the chart below to determine the number of perogies he would need to feed everyone. (pp. 4-5)

Both questions assumed students would have the background knowledge to visualize a soccer field and a perogy. Belisle (2012) reviewed provincial assessments in Saskatchewan and observed:

The linguistic and cultural assumptions made in the creation of the assessments, in their administration, scoring and ultimately in the reporting of the results serve
to preserve the hegemony of the dominant white middle class in Saskatchewan while marginalizing all other groups. (p. 61)

Kohn (1999) explained:

When specialists sit down to design a norm-referenced test, they’re not interested in making sure the questions cover what is most important for students to know. Rather, their goal is to include questions that some test-takers—not all of them, and not none of them—will get right. They don’t want everyone to do well. (p. 78)

Apple (2004) helped me to understand this further when he wrote about the hidden curriculum that is deeply rooted in schools:

The hidden curriculum in schools serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy. . . The fact is that these assumptions are obligatory for the students, since at no time are the assumptions articulated or questioned. (p. 81)

Some students were severely disadvantaged by being expected to complete an assessment that was designed with assumptions that all students had the same standardized knowledge.

As I continued to think about how curriculum and assessment reinforced hegemony in the school system, I realized the tensions I was experiencing were an awakening to colonization and a feeling of frustration as I realized how unaware and unprepared I felt to address the tensions, even though I was positioned as a senior
administrator and felt capable of establishing direction to improve student achievement. The more I learned, the more I realized that I was the colonizer and positioned with tools like curriculum and assessment to reinforce hegemony in the school system. I was the person that created a mechanism in the school system to administer the provincial assessments, and it was me that reported the achievement results to the school division, Ministry, and the public. The more I learned about colonization, I realized there were complexities that reached far beyond my understandings, experiences, and capabilities as a senior administrator.

1.7 Colonialism and Schooling

During my research, I read literature about the history of formalized Western schooling for First Nations people, and this drew me to a deeper understanding about the colonial perspective found in the curricula that is taught in Canada. Chambers (2006) reminded me that “. . . education has always served empire. . .” (p. 27), and that my curriculum studies, many years ago as an undergraduate education student, were taught and learned from a colonial perspective. Veracini (2001) explained colonialism “has two fundamental and necessary components: an original displacement and unequal relations. Colonisers move to a new setting and establish their ascendancy” (p. 1). JanMohamed (1985) explained colonialism has two distinct phases; dominant and hegemonic.

Throughout the dominant phase, which spans the period from the earliest European conquest to the moment at which a colony is granted “independence,” European colonizers exercise direct and continuous bureaucratic control and military coercion of the natives; during this phase the “consent” of the natives is
primarily passive and indirect . . . By contrast, the hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism) the natives accept a version of the colonizers’ entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production. (pp. 61-62)

Littlejohn (2006) described similar phases when writing about the history of schooling First Nations and Métis children in Saskatchewan schools from the early 1800s to the 1960s. Littlejohn (2006) explained:

The Europeans came to this land with their own intellectual tradition and chose to replace the traditional education of the First Nations and Métis peoples with schooling. Schooling is the intentional, packaged instruction delivered in a particular place for the purpose of teaching information, and values. (p. 63)

In other words, the historical purpose of schooling First Nations children in Saskatchewan was to assimilate them into the ways of the white, European culture.

With the signing of the Treaties in the late 1800s, “the schooling of the First Nations children became the responsibility of Canada’s federal government” (Littlejohn, 2006, p. 65). Eventually, the federal government began to investigate cost-effective ways in which to school First Nations children. Government representatives began to

11 The editors of the book, Noonan, Hallman, and Scharf (2006), clarify that while the book title includes the words history of education . . . “it focuses primarily only on one aspect of education – schooling. Schooling as a public enterprise is a major part of the social and cultural development of a society. From the beginning of White settler communities in Saskatchewan, the establishment and maintenance of schools was an important task of the government” (p. vii).
look towards the United States and the industrial school model that offered a standardized approach to schooling. The industrial school model was a way to “. . . eliminate ‘Indianism’ in Indian children. This resulted in such policies as forbidding Indian children to speak their mother tongues in school” (Littlejohn, 2006, p. 68). The concept of residential schools was soon developed, and children had to leave their homes to live in a dormitory and attend school. It was thought that this would be a rapid way of assimilating First Nations children into the white culture. The model failed miserably. Moving First Nations children to residential schools uprooted the children and placed them in an alien world, one that had nothing to do with the lives they were accustomed to living on reserves with their families. This created an even worse situation because graduates could not find employment, and they lost their language while acquiring skills that were useless in their real world. Littlejohn (2006) concluded:

Generation after generation of non-Aboriginal teachers sought to change the values, attitudes, religious beliefs, behaviours and ways of knowing of First Nations children. Generation after generation of non-Aboriginal teachers tried to eradicate the North American intellectual tradition from First Nations and Métis people and replace it with their Western intellectual tradition. . . . However, for the most part these schooling efforts failed because, regardless of the approach or type of school that they utilized, they operated on the same premise—that the child’s culture was a detriment to the child. (p. 80)

There is a failed history in Canada to recognize the significance of the Treaties that were negotiated many generations ago. Miller (2009) stated, “Although they
[Treaties] have been an important feature of the country since the earliest days of contact between Natives and newcomers, relatively few Canadians understand what they are or the role they have played in the country’s past” (p. 3). Specifically in Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan (2007) announced “the government's commitment to mandatory Treaty education, ‘There must be an appreciation in the minds of the general public that Treaties are living, breathing documents that continue to bind us to promises made generations ago’” (para. 18). As a result, mandatory Treaty education was introduced in all Saskatchewan K-12 schools and subject areas. The Ministry and school divisions worked with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner to develop resources to support the mandate, and a Treaty Essential Learnings assessment (Government of Saskatchewan, 2007, para. 20) was developed to measure Grade 7 students’ understanding about Treaties.

In March 2013, the Joint Task Force on “Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis People” released its final report. The Joint Task Force was funded by the Government of Saskatchewan. The work of the Joint Task Force was intended to inform the improvement of graduation rates by 2020 as mandated by the Government. As I read the final report and the 25 recommendations, my thoughts wandered back to the graduation ceremonies I attended, the students who did not walk across the stage, the provincial auditor’s report, my awakening to how curriculum and assessment reinforced hegemony, and the historical account about schooling First Nations children. Would the Joint Task Force Report (2013) have an impact on school divisions and improve student achievement for First Nations and Métis students? “The
Joint Task Force believes that actions and investments generated from the recommendations in this report reinforce critical aspects of a comprehensive plan to address poverty” (Joint Task Force, 2013, p. 28). The Joint Task Force wondered, as did I, if the report would become just another report:

The nagging issue – will this report gather dust on a shelf? – lingers as the Joint Task Force concludes its mandate. The Joint Task Force hopes that the willingness of so many voices sharing their successes, the supports needed and the visions of a hopeful future in this province will have resonance with the leadership of the government of Saskatchewan, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, education and business, and the Federal government. (p. 70)

Would the Government of Saskatchewan’s focus to improve the achievement rates of First Nations students become an example history repeating itself? The tensions that existed in Education about student achievement were deeply rooted in history. It was the expectation of the Ministry of Education that school divisions would be accountable to improve student achievement. How could senior administrators in school divisions negotiate the tensions that existed on the education landscape, avoid the mistakes of the past and, in the future, improve student achievement? Where were the voices of children, youth, their families, and teachers in these new mandates?

1.8 Shaping Spaces for Awakening

In this chapter, I began shaping this narrative inquiry by describing an experience I had with a senior leadership team as we discussed literacy achievement results in the
school division. I began to shape the puzzles and wonders I had about being a senior administrator positioned on the educational landscape to improve student achievement. I explained how a narrative inquiry begins, and how it is shaped using the three-dimensional inquiry space to understand experience. I continued the chapter by sharing my childhood experiences being schooled and my awakenings to the influence my childhood schooling experiences had on me.

As my awakenings unfolded, I continued to share experiences I had as a senior administrator, and I became attentive to the experiences that created tensions within me, particularly when I reflected upon high school graduation ceremonies, provincial high school graduation rates, conflicting views about student achievement, and how provincial curriculum and assessments reinforced hegemony. As I read literature for this study and reflected upon my experiences and the awakenings that were emerging, I shared questions that were formulating. In Chapter Two, I will continue to shape spaces for awakening as I inquire into my experiences as a teacher and reflect upon how my experiences have shaped my professional identity.
CHAPTER TWO: Navigating a Professional Landscape Shaped By Dominant Institutional Narratives

In this chapter I will recount my experiences teaching children. I will explore how those experiences have shaped new spaces for awakening, and shaped my professional identity. As I thought about my experiences teaching children I became attentive to tensions that I felt. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr (2010) described this tension in terms of “in-classroom” and “out-of-classroom” places on professional knowledge landscapes:

In-classroom places are described as safe places where teachers live out their personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), that is, their stories of who they are and who they are becoming as they interact with children. Out-of-classroom places are described as prescriptive professional places shared with other teachers where teachers are expected to hold certain, expert knowledge shaped by policies, theories, and research, and given to them through dominant stories of school. (p. 82)

In narrative inquiry, being attentive to tension is necessary because it creates awareness of the space in which further opportunities can be found to inquire into experience. “Tensions also helped us identify, inquire into, and represent the relational tensions between individuals’ storied lives and their expressions as they were enacted in in-and out-of classroom places on the professional knowledge landscapes in which they lived” (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 83). As I explore my teaching experiences, within the three-
dimensional inquiry space, and I am attentive to the tensions or bumps I experienced with institutional narratives.

2.1 Stepping onto the Educational Landscape as a Teacher

I began my teaching career in 1985 when I was hired to teach in a Grade 2 classroom. My first day was memorable:

My first day of teaching was October 31, 1985. I remember the day well because it was Halloween. I had been hired six weeks prior to begin on this day, so I had plenty of time to plan. I can say with confidence that the Halloween party I hosted that first day was the best I have ever planned. November 1 arrived with a harsh reality and a bit of panic along the lines of “what do I do next?” I was quickly immersed in my teaching career. The Grade 2 students were energetic and eager to please their new, young teacher. I was energetic and eager to please the young students. We were definitely a match. I often arrived at the school early in the morning ahead of all the staff. I carefully reviewed my plans for the day, made sure my lessons and materials were in order, and greeted the students at the door as they walked into the classroom. My focus on my new career was unwavering, and I was determined to be the best teacher I could be.

The beginning of my teaching career was not, however, without conflict. Starting my teaching career meant my husband and I needed to move away from my family to a different city. Five months after we moved, my mother passed away. This was devastating to me, but ironically, it was the Grade 2 students who helped me get through this difficult time. Once the bell rang in the morning
and the sound of chatter from the young children reached my ears, I was immersed in the experiences of the day. The children’s laughter was contagious, and who could not be swept away by the stories they shared about their lives, or the wonderings they had about their learning as we worked through the lessons I had planned?

The week after my mother passed away, the school-based administrator purposefully walked into my classroom, did not acknowledge that my mother had passed away, and arranged a time to observe my teaching so she could complete my summative evaluation. I was hurt that the school-based administrator was focused on evaluating me so soon after I returned from my mother’s funeral. It made me feel like she was watching me for weakness to see if the passing of my mother might somehow impact my ability to do my job. I put on my professional face, and I successfully worked through the evaluation process. I cannot remember the content of my summative evaluation report, but the feelings I had about being supervised soon after my mother’s funeral resonate within me to this day. (Personal Field Texts, October, 2011)

As I reflected on my first year of teaching, I realized there were many untold stories as I stumbled my way through the days, trying to create lessons that would engage my lively classroom of young children, while at the same time learning how to become a teacher. I was also mourning the loss of my mother. I had no idea how to handle this traumatic loss and be a teacher. I was in deep emotional pain. When I think about this now, I realize I went to school and tried to portray a happy and confident
teacher, but at home I was distraught and not sleeping. At times, I wondered how I
would make it to school and do my job effectively. Maybe the school-based
administrator saw my struggle, and she was prepared to deal with it if she saw I was not
doing my job.

As I continued to think about my first year of teaching, I realized that my
expectations about teaching and the expectations shaped by institutional narratives were,
already then, beginning to bump against each other. I now realize, in my first year of
teaching, my knowledge of the prescribed curriculum and my personal expectations
about school were influenced by my past experiences, and this was the beginning of the
development of my professional identity. Clandinin (2013) described a narrative way of
thinking about identity as “the nexus of a person’s personal practical knowledge, and the
landscapes, past and present, on which a person lives and works” (p. 53). Clandinin
explained:

A concept of stories to live by allows us to speak of the stories that each of us
lives out and tells of who we are, and are becoming. This highlights the
multiplicity of each of our lives – lives composed, lived out and told around
multiple plotlines, over time, in different relationships and on different
landscapes. (p. 53)

Institutional narratives also have a critical influence on a teacher’s identity. Connelly
and Clandinin (1999) explained:

It is also evident that each person responds in her own way to that institutional
setting with dramatically different consequences for the place each occupies on
the landscape and for how she views that relationship of the out-of-classroom place to the in-classroom place. Each person creates a special place and orientation that is given by her story to live by and that may be said to constitute her professional identity. (p. 93)

In other words, when a person shares a story it is shaped by other narratives such as cultural, social, familial, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Clandinin (2013) explained, “The institutional narrative of schooling is also visible through the mandated curriculum and through the stories of school. . .” (p. 208). Over time, some institutional narratives become dominant and are accepted by the majority of people in the institution. This can include: assessment practices, instructional practices, familiar rhythms of the school calendar and organizational structures, and policies and procedures that might be referred to as, the way it has always been.

The experience I shared about the school-based administrator represents the first bump or tension of which I remember becoming aware. She had responsibility and expectations placed upon her to complete the summative evaluation report. As I reflected upon this experience, I understood that she had a job to do and deadlines she needed to meet; she too, was shaped by institutional narratives. Kohn (2004) described the climate of a classroom as “guided by a certain set of values, a vision of what school ought to be like” (p. 161). In my early years of teaching, I believe I had a vision in my mind to create an in-classroom place that was a kind and caring learning environment for children. As a beginning teacher, I was becoming aware that the out-of-classroom
environment was different. The out-of-classroom environment had a hierarchal structure, an expected planned curriculum to teach, summative evaluation reports, and sometimes, uncompromising deadlines. The concept of caring seemed far removed. Noddings (1986) described an ethic of caring that seems to be lacking in formal education that may lead teachers to find themselves “serving the new rules rather than the persons we teach, because our duty is to be faithful to laws and promises” (p. 503). She advocated for teachers to model an ethic of caring through teaching and interactions with colleagues. Noddings (1986) explained:

When we act as models of caring, for example, we may also model a host of other desirable qualities: meticulous preparation, lively presentations, critical thinking, appreciative listening, constructive evaluation, genuine curiosity. An ethic of caring gives us an anchor to throw out when we are in danger of drifting away from persons and relations. (p. 503)

As I thought about Noddings’ words, I sensed that she was encouraging teachers to reach out to colleagues because eventually teachers may experience a sense of being overwhelmed. Teachers working together may create a community of caring and provide potential for a safe out-of-classroom place.

Upon deeper reflection about my first year of teaching, I was drawn to wonders about why I would feel school was not a caring place or a place that I could not openly mourn the loss of my mother. Why would the place of school be a place that teachers might become overwhelmed? If the adults in the school had these feelings, how must the children feel? In Chapter One, I wrote about colonization and the shaping presence of
the colonial perspective in curriculum and assessment. Schick and St. Denis (2005) deepened my understanding about this when they explained: “The normative cultural practices of whiteness are pervasive throughout levels of schooling from administration to textbooks to all manner of interpersonal actions” (p. 300). They wrote:

. . . dominant cultural practices are always ‘on,’ always the standard or fallback position for ‘the way things are done.’ This gives enormous privilege to those whose histories, ethnic backgrounds, social class, family assumptions, and personal knowledge are in line with these dominant practices. (p. 300)

As a member of the colonizing dominant group, I unconsciously learned I was expected to always be “on.” I was taught from a young age to behave myself and to not show signs of weakness. If I showed signs of weakness, it meant I was not in control, and therefore, not capable. “The way whiteness operates as an unspoken norm obscures the way it is considered not only normative but also superior” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 308). From my observation of my colleagues around me, including the school-based administrator that supervised me, they too, had similar teachings.

During my second year of teaching, I experienced more tensions. The result of one experience impacted the schooling of five children:

In September 1986, I was confident and ready to handle the challenges that students and the school administration presented to me. In particular, I remember a group of five boys in my Grade 2 classroom. Each of the boys was a delight to teach. They were a bundle of energy and always had big smiles on their faces. As the year progressed, it became evident the boys were struggling with the math
in their Grade 2 workbook. The boys often visited the learning assistance teacher for help with math. In the spring, after consulting with the learning assistance teacher, the principal, and the boys’ parents, we decided to retain the boys in Grade 2. The decision bothered me considerably. I will never forget the look on the boys’ faces when they realized they had failed a grade. I felt I had let them down. I felt I had failed.

In the summer that followed, I spent several days analyzing the Grade 2 math curriculum guide, and I developed an individualized math program. I was surprised to learn that the math workbook I was expected to use in the classroom contained concepts that did not align with the provincial Grade 2 curriculum. I developed an individualized math program to align to the Grade 2 curriculum, and collected several manipulatives to use with the program to make math a concrete, hands-on learning experience for young children. I was determined to make sure I never had to retain a student again. (Personal Field Texts, October, 2011)

As I reflected upon this experience I was particularly drawn to considering the institutional narratives that shaped it. Greene (1978) helped me see myself, and teachers in general, from another standpoint:

. . . [teachers] have seldom looked at the question of whether their actions were intrinsically right. Facts have been easily separated off from values; decisions have been made on grounds independent of moral propriety (for all the ostensible moralism in the schools). Because public schools have dealt with the mass of
children, the collective, what has been true about sociological positivism has
tended to be true about educational thought; consideration has been focused on
what has promoted social stability and material progress rather than on what has
promoted or might promote individual happiness and self-determination. (p. 60)
The specific details about retaining the five Grade 2 boys are not clear in my memory,
but I am confident that a contributing factor to the decision was that the boys could not
comprehend the written text in the math workbook. As I remembered this experience, I
sensed ways in which the severity of this decision was pivotal in the development of my
beliefs about learning. To this day, I have neither retained or supported retaining another
student. I believe it is my responsibility as a teacher to determine where students are in
their learning journey, and I must adjust my teaching to meet their needs. Noddings
(1986) described conflicts of fidelity that teachers may experience:

When our fidelity is a way of life, unshakable in its caring for the people under
our gaze, we can look at each of these other admirable goals and ask what they
mean, how they serve the purposes of community and personal growth, and how
best we can achieve them without betraying the persons to whom we will remain
faithful. (p. 503)

Reflecting upon the retention of the Grade 2 boys, I wished that as a young,
inexperienced teacher I had received Nodding’s guidance and words of wisdom. If I had
a stronger awareness of the ethic of caring that Noddings described, perhaps the decision
to retain the boys would have been different.
As I continued to think about the stories I shared in Chapter One and the heightened accountability expectations to improve student achievement, I came to an important realization: I did not recall, in my beginning years as a teacher, the same pressure to improve student achievement. Perhaps the tensions were there, but they were not openly discussed. It was accepted that the boys were not responding to the instruction from the learning assistance teacher and me; therefore, they needed to fail Grade 2. There was no discussion about my needing to change my teaching and assessment practices to meet the individual learning needs of the boys.

As I inquired into my experiences as a beginning teacher, I could see that I learned my colonization lessons well. The boys did not learn what I had taught; therefore it was a problem with the boys. Kohn (1999) reinforced what I know and understand now, but as a young teacher we did not talk about children developing at different rates in the school in which I worked:

It’s one thing to say that everyone should be able to do such-and-such by the time he or she graduates from high school; it’s something else to dictate that every student must be able to do such-and-such by the end of second grade. The latter requirement fails to understand that kids develop at different rates—and that this is perfectly acceptable. (p. 47)

In this present stage of my career, I know and believe what Kohn said, but why in the beginning stages of my career, did this belief not apply to the boys? While I did not remember a specific emphasis to improve student achievement, I now realize that I was immersed in a model of schooling, similar to what I experienced as a child, which was, if
students did not succeed, they failed. In a colonized mindset, our actions unconsciously preserved colonial paradigms. Battiste (1998) explained: “. . . Eurocentrism resists change while it continues to retain a persuasive intellectual power in academic and political realms” (p. 23). At that point in time, the solution was to eliminate the problem by failing the boys and forcing them to redo their grade. As I reflected on this experience, it was disheartening to me to realize I was the colonizer, and my actions served to strengthen the colonizing dominant group.

In my first two years of teaching, I sensed institutional narratives were silently at work and connecting to my own experiences with schooling. I was a good student trying to be a good teacher. I was immersed in the experience, and I did not realize the silent narratives that were unfolding. Clandinin et al. (2010) explained how teachers have traditionally negotiated this tension:

Teachers also try to live out narratively coherent stories of who they each are as good teachers. Many teachers try both to live within the plotlines of the story of school as well as to continue to live out their own personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Tensions occur when they cannot manage to continue to compose coherent stories in the midst of this complexity. (p. 87) At first, I thought the tensions I was experiencing resulted from my trying to reconcile in my mind how to be a good teacher. I knew in my personal practical knowledge whom I wanted to be as a teacher, but I was experiencing tension with what was expected from me in that role. I also, now know that the tension I was experiencing was a result being a
member of the colonizing dominate group, and trying to live up to a certain unspoken standard of expectation.

Schick and St. Denis (2005) explained how whiteness allowed the construction of innocence and goodness. They discussed how this construction could influence how undergraduate education students think. “The equating of good with white permits education students to think that they are going to learn of the other, to learn how they can be helpers, to discover how to incorporate practices of the dominant society” (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p. 308). They explained this leads to the assumption: “what we have and who we are is what the world needs, whether it wants it or not” (p. 308). When I reflect upon my first years of teaching experience, I can see this in my actions and behaviours. The Grade 2 boys that failed their grade were not learning their math; therefore they needed to stay in Grade 2 until they did learn. The boys needed to align with what was expected from them. There was no space for individual growth and pace.

Moon (1999) examined how the concept of whiteness is perpetuated across generations. “If ‘whiteness’ is socially constructed, as critical scholars claim, then ‘white’ people must be made. This ‘making’ of ‘whiteness,’ like other identities, is accomplished via a complex enculturation process that begins in the family/home” (p. 178). Home is a critical place where we develop our beliefs, values and identity. “Materially and ideologically, home may be constructed as an antihegemonic space (i.e. families who actively teach and enact antiracism or antisexism), or it may reproduce dominant hegemony” (Moon, 1999, p. 180). Moon explained that producing “good” white girls is a patriarchal construct that is tightly connected with issues of racial loyalty.
In other words, a “good” white girl is a white female that passively, sometimes unknowingly, supports white hegemony which perpetuates the promotion of whiteness, and this in turn, creates a type of harmony in the home. It would be expected that dominant ideologies would not be challenged, and if they were, it would be in private.

In my first year of teaching, I wanted compassion from my administrator because I was a new teacher and my mother had passed away, but there was little room for my story to permeate the expectations placed upon her to complete my summative evaluation report. In my second year of teaching, the decision to retain five students was upsetting for me. The students did not fall within the parameters of the expected achievement levels for Grade 2, and it was determined that they needed to repeat the grade. There seemed to be no space for children to learn at an individual pace. I have also come to realize that the lessons I learned as a member of the colonizing dominant group were unconsciously being perpetuated forward in the classroom.

2.2 Becoming Encultured in the Teaching Profession

As I reflected on my first two years of teaching, I was cognizant of the understanding and collegiality I experienced with my colleagues. I was fortunate to work with nurturing individuals who welcomed me to the teaching profession. They guided me as I navigated a controversy that I had not experienced in university. When I began my teaching career, a controversy was raging about how to teach young children to read. The debate centred on whether to use phonics as the primary method of instruction or the whole language method. Goodman (1989) explained whole-language:
This research base is unified with the strong humanistic traditions of holistic movements in education that go back at least as far as Comenius. Whole-language teachers have a philosophy of education with this strong base in theory and research that they use to make practical decisions and to plan innovation. They take responsibility for knowing the research. In many cases they become researchers and co-researchers in their own classroom. (p. 207)

I was firmly rooted, along with many of my colleagues, on the whole language side of the debate. My colleagues and I met after school hours, in our homes, to discuss teaching practice and plan how we would integrate whole language strategies into our classrooms. The meetings provided an opportunity for me to learn from experienced teachers and develop my personal practical knowledge. Energized from the previous evening’s discussions, we would eagerly go back to our classrooms to try new teaching methods.

Many years later, as I now reflect on my meetings with these teachers, I understand I was being mentored by them. We used our personal time to discuss new teaching methods to engage students in learning. In our own way, we were disrupting institutional narratives and were enthusiastic to try new and innovative teaching methods. During my beginning years of teaching, I do not remember a government focus to raise student achievement scores. I seemed to be able to focus on developing my skills as a teacher without the pressure of demonstrating improved student

12 “Whole language takes seriously Dewey’s statement about starting where the learner is. It views learners as strong, capable, and eager to learn” (Goodman, 1989, p. 209).
achievement scores. I developed my teaching skills in a supportive manner with colleagues as we examined our practice together. During that time, the Ministry of Education seemed far away from the reality of the classroom I experienced on a daily basis.

Thinking back to the stories I shared in Chapter One, I saw that my experiences as a senior administrator contrasted sharply with my experiences as a beginning teacher. As a senior administrator, I was expected to demonstrate improved student achievement for all the students in the school division. The Government placed greater accountability on school divisions to improve graduation rates, and it created tremendous pressure on everyone working in provincial school divisions. As I continued to think about improving graduation rates and student achievement, I was drawn to memories about students I taught.

2.3 Negotiating a Landscape Shaped by Dominant Institutional Narratives

As I became a more experienced teacher, I gradually transformed my classroom into what I believed was a student-centred environment. My classroom began to look different. I replaced desks with tables and chairs because I wanted a space that was comfortable and provided flexible work spaces for the students. Throughout the day, students worked in alternate spaces in flexible groupings. I was often seated on the floor working alongside children or seated at a table with a small group of children. I seldom lectured at the front of the class. The students spent a significant portion of their time in learning centres working on activities carefully designed to complement the grade level curriculum, encourage choice, and hopefully provide meaningful and relevant
engagement. In thinking about these gradual changes, I was reminded of another change that I made in my classroom:

Early in my career an intriguing tool was being introduced to schools that was transforming my own teaching and assisting me with meeting the needs of individual students. This tool was a computer. At that time I did not have experience with technology. A computer lab was set up in the school, but it was used very little by the teachers. At home, my husband introduced a computer to our family. He eagerly carried the box downstairs to set it up in our basement. He got everything all set up, and when he turned it on, nothing happened. We did not realize we needed to load software onto the computer in order to make it work. The mouse was awkward to use at first, and it took time for us to learn to use it efficiently.

The first program we mastered was PrintShop.\textsuperscript{13} We eagerly demonstrated to visitors to our home how we could print a picture of a coffee cup on our dot matrix printer. We patiently watched the printer head of the dot matrix printer slide slowly back and forth across the paper to print the picture in black and white and, eventually, like magic, a picture appeared on the paper. At school, I became braver, taking my class to the lab and teaching the children to use the Commodore 64 machines. My interest in computers continued to grow as I saw how motivated students were about using them. Eventually, I asked for my

\textsuperscript{13} PrintShop is a desktop publishing software program distributed by Broderbund. The version referred to in this document is one of the first versions of the software program.
own computer in the classroom so I could integrate computers into the learning centres. (Personal Field Texts, October, 2011)

As I reflected on my early experiences with technology, I realized that my desire to create a student-centred environment for students was not without challenges. Creating an environment focused on children required me to balance the tensions between what was expected of me as a teacher, the experiences that shaped the lives of the children, and my practical professional knowledge. Aoki (2005) described a space between planned curriculum and lived curriculum as a space for creativity and potential for newness. “It is a site wherein the interplay is the creative production of newness, where newness can come into being. It is an inspired site of being and becoming” (Aoki, 2005, p. 420). As I thought about what Aoki was saying, I was awakened to the tension I felt as a teacher striving to create spaces in the classroom for children to be and become. As a teacher I understood that I was expected to deliver a mandated curriculum, but I also wanted to ensure that the learning experiences in the classroom were relevant and meaningful to the children. My efforts to transform the physical environment of the classroom to be focused on children resulted in the classroom looking different from other classrooms. My colleagues sometimes questioned me about how to manage the children: How did I make sure the children were not copying from one another? How did the children know where to sit? How could I be sure the correct number of instructional minutes for each subject was being taught?

Through my more present inquiry into these experiences, I was coming to realize that my desire to create a student-centred environment in the classroom did not mean that
I was able to break free from the restrictions of institutional narratives and a traditional classroom. As I read hooks (2010), I was reminded that I was a member of the colonizing dominant group, and I had learned how to maintain the status quo. She explained that traditionally, school systems have been places of colonization, that is, places where information has been taught to students based on the teachings expected by the dominant culture. She explained that, “it has only been in the last twenty years that there has been radical questioning of what we teach and how we teach it” (p. 29).

I was trying to be a different type of teacher to break away from traditional teaching methods, but even though my classroom looked different, and I taught in a different manner, being a member of the colonizing dominant group meant my lessons were conventional to me. I was taught to maintain the status quo. I was naïve to think the adjustments I was making in the classroom structure or in my teaching practices were disrupting dominant narratives in school for children. Giroux (1981) described cultural hegemony which refers to “...material practices embedded in the roles and routines through which students give expression and meaning to their classroom experiences” (p. 74). Despite my efforts to try to create a different classroom environment, “...conformity, powerlessness, and impersonalization are the governing characteristics of the student’s experience.” (Giroux, 1981, pp. 74-75). Greene (1973) helped me to understand this further when she identified school as traditionally being “understood to be the place where knowledge is transmitted, where children are exposed to world pictures accepted by their culture, where beliefs and truths are taught” (p. 99). She wrote:
Every time he presents himself to his students, he speaks to them from a continuum that differs from and often collides with the one in which they exist. The routines he is obligated to maintain are governed by schedules and lesson plans frequently alien to his students’ temporality, their “inner time.” It is too much to expect that he will ever become fully cognizant of their diverse personal lives or wholly willing to permit them freely to choose themselves by means of what he provides. No matter how stimulating the environment he creates, he will necessarily have in mind dispositions that seem to him more desirable than others; and this constraint, in itself, is a limitation. Communicating what it is to know, to judge, to believe, he will necessarily be working to move his students toward states of mind he considers valuable, more valuable certainly than the states in which they began. (p. 175)

My teaching experiences up to that point focused on what I believed was appropriate for each individual child to learn, but as I thought about this, I realized I was introducing my story and my beliefs based on my experiences as a member of the colonizing dominant group. I felt the sad truth is that I was just maintaining the status quo in a different way. Miller (1998) helped me to continue to think about this and explained:

To “tell our or my story” as singular, unified, chronological, and coherent, is to maintain the status quo, to reinscribe already known situations and identities as fixed, immutable, locked into normalized conceptions of what and who are possible. Instead, addressing “self” as a “site of permanent openness and
resignifiablility” opens up possibilities for speaking and writing into existence ways of being that are obscured or simply unthinkable when one centered, self-knowing story is substituted for another. (p. 152)

As I continued to think about this, I realized my professional identity as a teacher was developed as a member of the colonizing dominant group. At the time, I was unaware, despite my efforts to create a different kind of classroom environment, I probably did not do it at all.

2.4 Awakening to the Storied Lives of Children

I continued to think about student achievement and the development of my professional identity as a teacher, shaped and refined by my experiences and the institutional narratives in which I was immersed. Memories about the children I taught are the stories I recalled most vividly. During one particular time period in my career, I spent seven years teaching in urban community schools. The Government of Saskatchewan (2013) described community schools as “. . . the right way to ‘do’ school. . . In short, community schools represent an excellent investment for society to make” (para. 1). At the time, community schools received additional funding from the government, and they typically had a high Aboriginal student population. In the beginning of this experience, I found myself in a multi-age Grade 1 and 2 classroom, a classroom in which I was the sixth teacher the students had seen in the past three weeks. Their assigned teacher did not show up to work one day, and it was the teacher across the hall who noticed the class was more “out of control” than usual. I was hired on the
weekend to start immediately on Monday, so I did not have time to set up the classroom in my usual manner:

On the first day with the students, I distinctly remember looking up at the round clock on the wall. The time was 9:02 a.m., and I wondered what had I gotten myself into. David came running into the classroom, yelled at me that he did not have to listen to me, ripped the glasses off a child’s face, and tried to stomp on the glasses. Another child picked up a chair and threw it across the classroom. The other children entered the classroom loudly, pushing each other, and hurling rude comments at each other. An educational assistant was in the classroom to work with David, and I asked her if this was how the students normally behaved. She calmly replied, “Yes.” I went home that evening and cried.

It took me a few weeks, but eventually I was able to bring somewhat of a sense of calmness to the class. Even though the school year was well underway, I began as if it was September, and worked with the students to establish expectations for our classroom. I quickly discovered that if I was ever going to get to the learning objectives for each subject area, I needed to learn about the experiences of the children in order to make their learning at school meaningful and relevant. I found my most successful classroom management tool was reading. The children loved stories. We spent many hours together on the floor as I read stories to the whole class, to small groups, or to individuals. The stories

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14 As a way to protect the identities of all people and places that become visible in my stories, I have chosen to use pseudonyms and, at times, a different gender when referring to individuals.
I read swept us away to unknown landscapes and offered starting points for discussions with the children who eagerly questioned things that did not make sense. I was intrigued with the children’s abilities to make sense of the stories from their own perspectives.

There were, however, moments when I felt guilty. I knew our classroom timetable was not being followed. I knew the subject matter that I was expected to teach was being set aside. Or was it? I talked to the principal about this concern, and the response I received was one that showed me that she supported my efforts. Privately, I think the principal was thankful the class seemed to be “in control.”

I sensed the stories that I read out loud interested the children and engaged them in rich and lively discussions. The stories I read seemed to encourage the children to respond, often with their own stories and interpretations about what they heard. Together, we puzzled over the decisions of the characters and the plots that were unfolding in the books we read. Mutual respect was gradually established in the classroom, and the children seemed to grow in their eagerness to share their ideas and opinions. (Personal Field Texts, October, 2011)

The time I spent reading and talking with the children was an opportunity for me to gain a deeper understanding of their lives; doing so helped me to find ways to attempt to connect the curriculum, in what I hoped was a meaningful manner, to their lives. As I thought about this story I was reminded of what hooks (2010) wrote about the relationship between a student and teacher:
Engaged pedagogy begins with the assumption that we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between student and teacher. As leaders and facilitators, teachers must discover what the students know and what they need to know. This discovery happens only if teachers are willing to engage students beyond a surface level. (p. 19)

The students’ childhood experiences were very different from mine. If I was going to connect with them in any meaningful way in the classroom, I had to take the time to engage in deeper conversations with them. One memorable experience demonstrated to me the complexity of the experiences the children had in their community:

One cold winter morning the noise in the class had settled down to a comfortable hum while the children worked on their math. As I moved from child to child providing assistance, I noted that Stephanie had not arrived. Stephanie had been excited the day before because her mother was getting out of jail. Just as I was about to call the office to say that Stephanie had not arrived at school, she appeared breathlessly in the doorway. Stephanie was obviously flushed from running to school, and she seemed uncertain about how I would react to her being late. I immediately asked if she was okay. She burst into tears and announced that there had been a knife fight at her house.

I asked her if she wanted to talk. She nodded, and proceeded to recount the events from the previous evening. Her mother had indeed been released from jail the day before, and many people had come to their house to celebrate her homecoming. From Stephanie’s description I inferred that in the early hours of
the morning the adults were inebriated, and Stephanie’s mother and sister got into a physical fight using knives. Stephanie told me there was blood everywhere, including on her. The police arrived to break up the fight. As I listened to Stephanie’s story I tried to maintain a calm exterior, but inside I felt turmoil. The only thing I could think to ask Stephanie was who took care of her during this upheaval. Stephanie replied, “Nobody.” When the police came she was curled up in a ball on the couch, and after they left, she went to bathe herself to wash off the blood. (Personal Field Texts, February, 2012)

I felt that taking the time to listen to the stories of the young children I taught helped me to somewhat gain insight into the lives they led when they left the classroom. I realized that I could not fully understand Stephanie’s experiences, but I knew that I wanted to support her. She chose to come to school after she experienced a traumatic event, and her presence indicated to me that she felt school was a safe place where she wanted to be in that moment. As I reflected on this experience with Stephanie, I was reminded of what Lugones (1987) wrote about shifting from mainstream life experiences to life experiences that are not comfortable. Her term for shifting from mainstream life constructions to other life constructions is “world travelling,” a concept that provides a way to understand another person’s perspective. Lugones (1987) explained:

The reason why I think that travelling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them is because by travelling to their “world” we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. (p. 17)
As I thought about Stephanie and her home life, I realized I never fully “travelled” to Stephanie’s world, but during the school year, Stephanie travelled to the school “world” on a daily basis. She was a brave child to travel between two “worlds” that were very different. The school world that Stephanie travelled to was shaped by institutional narratives created by members of the colonizing dominant group. People may have judged her because of her home life, or may have tried to fix her home life. The stories the children told me helped me to gain a sense of understanding about their complex lives, but in turn, I needed to create a respectful learning environment that would captivate their interest. I now understand the gift that teachers receive when children choose, at school, to share stories of their experiences. Okri (1997) described the importance of storytelling:

> Even when it is tragic, storytelling is always beautiful. It tells us that all fates can be ours. It wraps up our lives with the magic which we only see long afterwards. Storytelling reconnects us to the great sea of human destiny, human suffering, and human transcendence. (p. 47)

Stephanie’s story impacted me because she gave me a small insight into her life at home. I hoped that by taking the time to listen, I demonstrated that I cared about and valued the children. I have now come to realize that the stories children told me in the classroom were their way to encourage me to travel with them to their “world” so I could better understand what it was to be them.

As I thought about Stephanie, I wondered if she continued to share her stories about her home life when she went to school, and whether she graduated from high
school. She had a turbulent home life. Was she judged because of it? Were her experiences marginalized to a point where she felt she did not belong? The experience with Stephanie brought me to recall other unexpected moments when I had the opportunity to travel to the “worlds” children lived in:

In order to promote a home reading program in the classroom, I set up a contest. Prizes were awarded for the number of books children read, and the grand prize for winning the contest was lunch at McDonald’s with me. As the contest reached the final stages, two Grade 2 girls were reading furiously to win the competition. Each morning they would run into the classroom to tell me about what they read the night before. The end result was that I declared both had won, and we set a date to go to McDonald’s for lunch.

I had not anticipated the excitement from the two girls. Abby was very well versed in going to McDonald’s. On the drive to the restaurant she easily recited what she planned to order. Kerry was quiet and reserved, but she did share that she had never been to McDonald’s before. Abby was shocked and spoke up right away. I was driving and kept my thoughts to myself. I had assumed all children had been to McDonald’s.

At the restaurant, Abby showed Kerry how to order her food, and what she should do with it when we got to the table. As we settled in to eat lunch, Kerry began to share stories about her life at home. I knew from meeting her young parents that there were four girls in the family. The love and caring in the family was obvious, and I suspected the parents struggled to make ends meet.
Kerry told us they lived in a house with two bedrooms. She shared a bedroom with her three sisters. The three sisters slept on foam mats on the floor, and the baby slept in the closet with the doors off the hinges. Abby asked why the baby slept in the closet, and Kerry replied that was so the baby would not hurt herself when she rolled around. With the absence of a crib, it made perfect sense.

I felt a sense of deep respect for Kerry’s young parents. It was obvious that the couple had the best interests of their four girls well in hand within their means. They may not have been able to afford a crib, but they created a safe space for the baby to sleep. It was a life lesson for me to remember that the children in the classroom had lives that were very different from my life as a child and the subject matter that I was expected to teach in the classroom. It was my role to figure out a way to make relevant, meaningful connections to the curriculum content. I wondered how I would do this when the more I learned, the more I realized that I knew so little about their experiences. (Personal Field Texts, February, 2012)

I had organized the competition to emphasize the importance of reading at home. Although Abby and Kerry had eagerly participated, other students did not, and I began to wonder about them. Similar to my earlier described experience in Chapter One, about attending high school graduations and my wonders about the same students receiving awards and students that did not graduate, I wondered how the students within the classroom felt about watching the two girls compete for the top prize? As I reflect upon this experience, I realized I created a space in the classroom where some the children did
not feel a sense of belonging. It would have been impossible for some of the children to participate when they left school to go home. The narrative I created in the classroom was based on my assumption that all children should be able to read at home. I also wondered about the complex lives of Abby and Kerry. As did Abby, I had assumed all children had eaten at McDonald’s. Thinking about this, I realized Kerry was competing for a prize that she had no frame of reference for the experience of visiting a McDonald’s restaurant. I had normalized going to McDonald’s as part of the culture for all the children in my classroom. As Kerry ate her lunch and shared stories about her home life, I felt a deep sense of respect for her family. I realized that Kerry had given me the opportunity to travel to her “world” for a brief moment.

I believe the time I spent working in the community schools helped me to become a teacher who was becoming more sensitive and awakened to the lives of her students. Each day seemed to bring a new story that provided a new insight into the lives of the children. Each time I heard a story, I was reminded that I should not make assumptions when trying to understand the lived experience of another. In a way, I was travelling to the worlds the children lived in to help me gain a better sense of who they were when they returned to their homes. Lugones (1987) recommended “world” travelling and affirmed “this practice as a skillful, creative, rich, enriching and, given certain circumstances, as a loving way of being and living” (p. 3).

As I continued to think about my experiences as a teacher, and the tensions that were present, I recalled an experience with a public service volunteer organization in one of the schools:
The community school I worked in was engaged in a partnership with a public service volunteer organization. One year the organization decided to give each child in the school a Christmas present. Teachers were to help the students sort out what they might like for Christmas and ensure the requested gift cost around $20. Each child filled out a little card with his or her name, grade, and Christmas wish. The volunteers went back to their place of work, and they promoted the project, encouraging their staff members to sponsor a child’s Christmas present.

A few days before the Christmas break, the volunteers returned with Santa and boxes and boxes of brightly wrapped Christmas presents. The children were called to a common area, one classroom at a time, so each child in the school could spend time with Santa and receive his or her present. Most of the children quickly opened their presents and were quite excited to see what was inside.

One child caught my attention. Seven-year-old Susan sat quietly in a corner with her Christmas present on her lap, watching the excited children around her. She carried her unopened present back to the classroom. Eventually she began to tenderly pick at the folded edges of the wrapping paper, and she came to my desk to get the tape and scissors. I was curious to know what she planned to do so I discreetly watched her out of the corner of my eye. With infinite care and patience, she carefully ran the scissors along the taped edges of the present and neatly opened it. She peeked into the box, smiled, and then began the painstaking process of rewrapping the present. Once she had the present
rewrapped, she came to me to return the scissors and tape. I talked to her about
the present and expressed curiosity as to why she had rewrapped it. Susan
explained to me that her family did not have a Christmas tree or Christmas
presents at home. On Christmas morning, this would be the only present that she
would have, and she wanted to save it so she would have a present to open.

(Personal Field Texts, March, 2012)

As I reflected on this story, I was struck by the tensions that were present, but
which I had not realized at the time. Christmas can be a stressful time for some families,
but the goodwill intentions of the volunteer organization and the participation of the
school staff must have added to the stress for some parents and children. The volunteers
intended to be giving and supportive to children in need, but their actions may actually
have increased the children’s stress and anxiety. For example, Susan knew there would
be no presents at her house on Christmas morning, but I wondered if the emphasis on
gifts made her anxious. I wondered if her parents and preschool siblings watched her
open the one present on Christmas morning. Or did Susan unwrap the present in private,
as she had in class? Retelling this experience exposed contradictions and internal
conflict within me. Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (in progress) described how retelling
can have an impact on a narrative inquirer:

Reverberations can, at times, create profound feelings of internal contradiction.
They are not pre-planned. In our becoming awake to the reverberations we
experience through our retelling and reliving of what it means for children and
families to engage in curriculum making, we were also awakened to the tensions that were present as we lived out our retold stories. (p. 5)

While living through this experience, I did not realize the colonizing forces that were being reinforced by myself and the other adults around me. We were members of the colonizing dominant group teaching lessons based on our beliefs about how Christmas should be celebrated. We thought it was a positive volunteer effort, but upon reflection, I am able to understand how the event served to reinforce inequality and marginalize some people.

As I continued to reflect upon this time period, the question of improved student achievement still existed. Were the children demonstrating improved achievement? When I thought about the graduation rates reported by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2010) referenced in Chapter One, I wondered which of my students did not walk across the stage to receive their Grade 12 diploma. I thought about this ongoing legacy of dominance and inequality in schools, I was reminded of hooks’ (2010) words:

> Without a decolonizing mentality, smart students from disenfranchised backgrounds often find it difficult to succeed in the educational institutions of dominator culture. This holds true even for those students who have embraced the values of the dominant culture. In fact, those students may be the least prepared for the barriers they face because they have so convinced themselves that they are different from other members of their group. (p. 26)

As I reflected on what hooks was saying, I realized that my efforts to create a non-traditional classroom and break free from traditional teaching methods did not free me
from the lessons I learned during my schooling as a member of the colonizing dominant
group. I continued to be surrounded by the beliefs and values of the dominant group,
and I was enculturated from a very young age to be a member. The lessons I learned as a
child continue to be with me today.

As I continued to think about my teaching experiences in the community school,
I believed it was there I began to unconsciously deconstruct my experiences alongside
the children. Their home experiences were very different from mine but I began to
question myself about my perception of “normal.” As I think about this more, I can see
I was still being influenced by my colonial teachings because I was positioning those that
were different from my perception of normal, as Other. Schick and St. Denis (2005)
helped me to understand this and explained:

One privilege of whiteness—to pass invisibly for the norm—depends on
marginalized identities against which the norm can be compared. A dominant
group is positioned to define itself as a blank, unmarked space vs. a marked
outside “other.” The unmarked norm is a space of privilege, an identification
gets to define standards according to itself. (p. 200)

They explained further, “Although whiteness is not a singular or fixed identity,
whiteness is produced through the construction of an “other” — one that is outside one’s
own experience” (p. 301). As a member of the colonizing dominant group, I have been
taught to think in binary terms; me and other. As I was learning about the lives of the
children I taught, I began to question my beliefs about normal.
In this chapter, I shared memorable teaching experiences that have influenced the stories by which I live by, and ultimately, who I am as a senior administrator on the educational landscape. My experiences along my journey were temporal moments, which many years later as I reflected upon them, filled me with tensions and questions. I came to realize that as a member of the colonizing dominant group I have reinforced dominance and inequality. While I was immersed in the experiences, I did not realize the impact of my actions and behaviours. In my efforts to create a classroom focused on learning for all students, I realized I continued to reinforce colonization.

In Chapter Three, I will describe narrative inquiry as a relational methodology and explain the ontological position of this study. I will describe the 12 touchstones of a narrative inquiry to guide the reader to a deeper understanding about this study, and explain how this methodology was used to inquire into the experiences of senior administrators (re)composing stories to live by.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

In this chapter, I will describe narrative inquiry as a relational methodology and explain challenges with using this method. I will explain the ontological commitments and touchstones to which a narrative inquirer must be attentive. I will explain my justifications for choosing my topic of study for this narrative inquiry, and I will explain
in detail how I designed this inquiry and engaged in research with my participants. I will conclude by explaining how the remainder of this thesis will unfold.

As I imagined this study, I reflected upon my experiences as a student, teacher, and administrator. My stories of experience span a continuum well beyond 40 years. Clandinin (2013) described “stories of school . . . [as] powerful shapers of these stories we live in and by” (p. 22). A significant number of my experiences at school were of a positive nature, and often included memories about students, colleagues, and community members with whom I have been honoured to work. I understand that not all individuals have the same positive memories about school. When I tried to imagine an educational landscape free of dominant institutional narratives, I struggled. I know that at times I have contributed to the continuation of dominant institutional narratives in the school divisions where I worked, and I needed to continue to strive to identify those that encircled me because, at times, I may not realize I am reinforcing them. Apple (1999) explained, “Education is a site of struggle and compromise. It also serves as a proxy for larger battles about what our institutions should do, who they should serve, and who should make these decisions” (p. 202). I understood that I needed to be aware of existing tensions, and to be particularly aware of silences, because it is within this space that there was potential for new learning opportunities to exist. As I continued to reflect on my experiences in schools I began to imagine this narrative inquiry.

3.1 Choosing a Methodology: Borderland Challenges

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) identified four turns that narrative inquirers take as they begin to consider narrative inquiry as a methodology for a study: “. . . attention to
relationships among participants, the move to words as data, the focus on the particular, and the recognition of blurred genres of knowing” (p. 3). I chose narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study because of the attention to the relationship between the researcher and participants in the study, and the three-dimensional inquiry method that is used to inquire into stories to live by, as they unfold over time. “Narrative inquiry is marked by its emphasis on relational engagement, whereby the understanding and social significance of experience grows out of a relational commitment to the research puzzle” (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 577). Furthermore, narrative inquirers are “not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum—people’s lives, institutional lives, lives of things” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explained that “the study of narrative . . . is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry as:

. . . a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration 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. (p. 20)

I was interested in the experiences of senior administrators in school divisions (re)composing stories to live by during a period of heightened accountability to improve
I was eager to engage in conversation with other senior administrators in school divisions to learn more.

When I began to learn about narrative inquiry, I was quickly immersed in a myriad of confusion as I tried to understand what seemed to be or not to be narrative inquiry. When I read Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I began to understand that the root of my confusion was that I was being influenced by formalistic and reductionistic thinking. Clandinin and Connelly explained that a central point of tension for narrative inquirers is that “formalists begin inquiry in theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (p. 40). When I first became interested in narrative inquiry, I questioned the value of my stories and wondered if I had stories to share. It took time for me to feel comfortable to share stories about my experiences. I worried that my experiences would not be viewed as academic or worthy for study.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledged that “beginning narrative inquirers are easily shaken when formalists raise questions about the place of theory in their work” (p. 41). They explained that narrative inquirers write dissertations without a specific literature review chapter and weave the literature throughout the dissertation in conversation with experiences. This created another source of tension when those with a formalistic approach questioned the interweaving of literature in a narrative inquiry.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) clarified the philosophical assumptions for narrative inquiry by contrasting the conceptual roots of narrative inquiry with post-positivism, Marxism, and post-structuralism. They explained that there is not a clear border that
surrounds narrative inquiry, but rather borderlands. They explained borderlands to be “those spaces that exist around borders where one lives within the possibility of multiple plotlines” (p. 59). The concept of borderlands creates “spaces around the philosophical borders” (p. 59) that are blurred and overlapped. At times, the narrative inquirer might find herself travelling into borderlands, and must be attentive to ensure that the narrative inquiry remains true to the philosophical assumptions. For example, in post-positivist research, the researcher begins “. . . with a theory of knowledge and, from there, ventures into claims about the nature of reality…. positivism rejected any claims about reality that could not be grounded in empirical observations of the facts and experience” (p. 43). The post-positivist researcher seeks to identify generalizable patterns. In narrative inquiry, the researcher works “. . . with an attitude of knowing that other possibilities, interpretations, and ways of explaining things are possible” (p. 46). Clandinin and Rosiek explained:

In other words, narrative inquiry does not merely describe this or that feature of someone’s experience. It is simultaneously a description of, and intervention into, human experience; it acknowledges that descriptions add meaning to experience, thus changing the content and quality of the experience. (p. 44)

Clandinin and Rosiek described a type of “ongoing sensemaking” (p. 45) as the purpose of narrative inquiry. The narrative inquirer used the three-dimensional inquiry space to inquire into human experience, and understood through the inquiry that additional puzzles and wonders might emerge.
Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) identified that narrative inquirers and Marxist-influenced scholars could share a research interest in “. . . analyzing the way large institutions dehumanize, anesthetize, and alienate the people living and working within them” (p. 47). They acknowledged that the literature on Marxist social theory was vast but for the purpose of understanding Marxism ideology they explained it as:

. . . a system of thought and practice that gives rise to false consciousness in individuals and communities. False consciousness is a condition in which a person acquires a habit of thinking and feeling that prevents him or her from noticing and analyzing the real causes of his or her oppression. (p. 47)

For the narrative inquirer, “analyzing human experience is grounded in a pragmatic relational ontology” (p. 49). Narrative inquirers listen to their participants’ experiences without judgement or question. “Critique of that experience needs to be motivated by the problematic elements with that experience” (p. 62). In other words, using the three-dimensional inquiry model, the narrative inquirer encourages the retelling and revisiting of experiences as the experiences are considered from a temporal, social, and place perspective.

In post-structuralism, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explained that the researcher: . . . may listen to stories that individual persons tell her or him. But in so doing she or he will not be interpreting those experiences as immediate sources of knowledge and insight; instead, she or he will be listening through the person’s story to hear the operation of broader social discourses shaping that person’s story of their experience. (p. 55)
The post-structuralist researcher seeks to explain the experience in terms of larger social discourses but the individuals involved in the experience do not recognize the discourse. Post-structuralists are interested in “. . . looking for a way to move beyond description of the formal qualities of social discourses to transformative intervention . . .” (p. 65). In narrative inquiry, narrative inquirers consider people’s experiences as sources of new knowledge about “social reality” (p. 65). Narrative inquirers find ways to “. . . stay open to complexities, contradictions, and enigmas” (p. 68). Listening to the stories of other people creates new wonders, puzzles, and learning for narrative inquirers.

It is essential for the narrative inquirer to understand what narrative inquiry is and is not, and to ensure the ontological commitments of narrative inquiry are attended to throughout the study.

3.2 Ontological Commitments: The Influence of Dewey

Narrative inquiry is grounded in a Deweyan theory of experience, which is the study of ordinary lived experience. Dewey (1934) described experience as, “. . . the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication” (p. 22). He explained that experiences occur on a continuum and create a sense of whole when a person thinks about their experiences. Eventually a sense of harmony about the experience emerges. “An experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but consists of them in relationship” (p. 44). Dewey (1938) wrote:
In other words, the sound principle that the objectives of learning are in the future and its immediate materials are in present experience can be carried into effect only in the degree that present experience is stretched, as it were, backward. It can expand into the future only as it is also enlarged to take in the past. (p. 77)

My understanding of this, is that in order for learning to occur, we need to think about our past to connect learning to the present, and in doing so we move forward into the future with new learning. Dewey (1944) explained:

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 use, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something. (p. 139)

In other words, experience is “. . . a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). Clandinin and Rosiek explained that Dewey’s ontology is transactional. The purpose of narrative inquiry is “not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower. The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world . . .” (p. 39).

To study experience, Clandinin (2006) explained the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a metaphorical frame that conceptualizes a Deweyan view of experience. Dewey (1938) explained, “[an individual that] has learned in the way of
knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue” (p. 44). To conceptualize this inquiry frame, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described a three-dimensional narrative space in narrative inquiry:

... personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p. 50)

As I learned more about narrative inquiry I gradually began to find greater clarity when I turned my attention to the ontological commitments for the methodology. Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) clearly identified the ontological commitments in narrative inquiry that I synthesized into five commitments for this study: an interest in learning about experience; attending to experiences as interactive, composed, and re-composed in relation with others; entry into the inquiry field with the experiences of both the researcher and participants; attending to lived, relived, told, and retold stories of experiences through negotiated research texts; drawing upon the researcher’s experiences to orient the inquiry and to engage deeply with the experiences as a relational commitment. Caine et al. (2013) explained:
The narrative nature of experience, viewed from within narrative inquiry, necessitates consideration of relational being and knowing, attention to the artistry of and within experience, and sensitivity to the nested and overlapping stories that bring people together in research relationships. (p. 584)

Attending to the ontological commitments throughout a study helps to situate the narrative inquirer as decisions are made about how a study will unfold. Being attentive to borderlands and staying true to the ontological commitments of narrative inquiry provide direction for the narrative inquirer.

3.3 Touchstones

Clandinin and Caine (2012) identified 12 qualitative touchstones for narrative inquiry. “We imagine that narrative inquirers and those that review narrative inquiries will use these criteria to ask questions about whether, and how, each touchstone has been taken up and has shaped the inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 212). The 12 touchstones are: relational responsibilities; in the midst; negotiation of relationships; narrative beginnings; negotiating entry into the field; moving from field to field texts; moving from field texts to interim and final research texts; representing narratives of experience in ways that show temporarily, sociality, and place; relational response communities; justifications – personal practical, social; attentive to multiple audiences; and commitment to understanding lives in motion. The touchstones unfold across time throughout a study and are intended to be used as reflections upon the content in a study. The touchstones are not a checklist, but should be visible upon reflection about a study.
Loh (2013) cautioned researchers engaged in narrative studies to be attentive to concerns about quality, validity, and reliability. Loh described doxa:

. . . as a way of doing things, and a way of understanding. *Doxa* is commonly found in all communities, as communities create a set of practices and conceptual understanding that has become familiar and comfortable, and that will be disseminated and transmitted within those communities. (p. 1)

As a narrative inquirer, I needed to be aware that the method I chose to engage in for this study could be challenged based on measures of quality, validity, and reliability outside of the community of narrative inquiry within which I chose to engage in dialogue and research.

Lewis and Adeney (2014) recognized that, “Researchers are often challenged on the authenticity of their narrative inquiries and may even question themselves about the reliability and trustworthiness of what they have written” (p. 168) but they reassure the researcher that, “. . . the tapestry you create will have a strong and authentic voice” (p. 168). They explained: “Believability and/or authenticity are at the nexus of validity in narrative research work. Are the story and the storyteller believable? Do they engage the human imagination in the sharing of their story? Does it resonate with the broader human experience?” (pp. 169-170). Loh (2013) explained, “For the study, to have trustworthiness, it must also achieve verisimilitude; it must “ring true;” it must have believability. . .” (p. 9). As I thought about the borderland challenges, ontological commitments, touchstones, and questions of quality, validity, and reliability for narrative inquiry, I was drawn back to Dewey, and in particular, his lectures on the philosophy of
education and experience. Dewey (1966) identified the school as a social institution. He wrote:

If we take the conception of reconstruction of experience as the definition of education, it follows that the subject matter of education cannot be separated from the actual everyday experiences of the persons being taught. It is their own experience which is to be reconstructed, it is their own powers, impulses and habits which are to be brought to consciousness. (p. 125)

Narrative inquiry is a deeply relational method grounded in a Deweyan theory of experience. The study of experience, that is ordinary everyday lived experience, within the three-dimensional inquiry space, is a way to reconstruct or recompose experience to deepen understanding about experiences so that new learning emerges.

3.4 Justifications

As I continued, I realized it was important for me to establish a purpose or a need for this study. I needed to be able to justify the importance of the study, and be able to answer questions I might be asked about why I chose to conduct it. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) explained the importance of justification and identified it as a central element for a narrative inquiry. They identified three kinds of justification which are personal, practical, and social:

The personal justification comes from the importance, in narrative inquiries, of situating yourself in the study. . . . Although this justification is important, we also need to justify the research practically, that is, how will it be insightful to changing or thinking differently about the researcher’s own and others’ practices?
The third justification requires a researcher to think about the larger social and educational issues the study might address. In some ways the practical and social justifications point researchers toward an inquiry’s end point, that is, to being able to answer the “So what?” and “Who cares?” questions. (p. 25)

When I began to imagine this study I was drawn to experiences from the educational landscape because I have lived a significant part of my life positioned on this landscape. In Chapters One and Two, I shared memorable experiences that I believe have shaped my professional identity. I had wonders about the experiences of other senior administrators positioned to improve student achievement in school divisions.

As I reflected on my experiences of becoming a senior administrator, I was awakened to the type of leadership learning experiences that I have participated in. I have read numerous books about educational leadership. I have participated in book studies and attended conferences where the speakers were the authors of those books. As I thought about the content of the books that I have read, I realized there was a familiar pattern to the texts, such as how to lead, how to make data-driven decisions, how to improve student achievement, how to transform instructional practice in the classroom, how to become an effective leader, and how to invoke change (e.g., Berry, 2011; Clawson, 2012; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001, 2008, 2013; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Hulley & Dier, 2009; Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Kotter, 1996; Lezotte, 2004; Marzano & Waters, 2009; O’Neill & Conzemius, 2006; Reeves, 2007; Schmoker, 1999, 2006; Senge, 1990; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012; Stewart, 2012). Professional reading
is an important aspect of education leadership, but as I reflected upon my professional reading, it seemed to me that in these books, leadership was addressed as a recipe. If I found the correct mix of ingredients and followed the prescribed procedure, I would have positive educational reform that would change behaviours and ultimately improve student achievement. “The reform literature is almost always dehistoricized, both for the individuals affected and for the system and its value structure” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998b, p. 154). Kooy (2006) helped me to realize, “Almost no literature addresses the fundamental bridge between literature, life, and learning” (p. 661). For me, stories of experience from senior administrators seemed to be missing.

I also searched for narrative inquiry doctoral dissertations about senior administrators in school divisions. As I searched for doctoral dissertations using a narrative inquiry methodology, it seemed most studies focused on the experiences of teachers, school-based administrators, and students. As I read the doctoral dissertations, I began to recognize and become familiar with the design of a narrative inquiry study, but the topics of the studies did not match my research interest about the experiences of senior administrators in school divisions (e.g., Burwash, 2013; Driedger-Enns, 2015; Huber, 2008; Li, 2006; Murphy, 2004; Young, 2003). Clandinin et al. (2007) explained that “the uniqueness of each study, allows narrative inquirers to offer some sense of what it is that can be known about a phenomenon that could not be known, at least in the same way, by other theories, methods, or lines of work” (p. 30). The recounting of stories of experience from senior administrators in school divisions seemed to be missing, and this was an area of personal interest for me.
As I thought more about designing my study, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) reminded me that narrative inquiry is not simply about telling my stories:

Beginning with a respect for ordinary lived experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals’ experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual’s experience in the works and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (p. 42)

I understood that narrative inquirers entered in the midst of storied lives unfolding. I imagined that my study with senior administrators would mean I would enter into the midst of their stories unfolding, and I would have the opportunity to metaphorically walk alongside two senior administrators for a period of time. I hoped that by engaging in conversation with other senior administrators new spaces for inquiry would unfold.

The third justification required me to think about the larger social and educational issues that this study might address. As I thought about this justification, I reflected on the experiences I shared in Chapters One and Two. I identified the influence that dominant institutional narratives had on me as I lived my experiences on the educational landscape. I began to reflect upon my experiences as a member of the colonizing dominant group, and how I reinforced dominance and inequality through my actions and behaviour. It is important for senior administrators to be wakeful to institutional
narratives and the tensions that exist, because inquiry into the experiences will result in new awakenings as multi-levels of complexity unfold.

As I continued to consider the justification for this study, and the “So what?” and “Who cares?” questions, I reflected on the observation of Elbaz-Luwisch (2010):

Thinking narratively, we note that policy makers too are educational actors, their lives and experience a worthy subject for narrative inquiry. Studies of how policy makers and administrators tell and retell the narratives of their working lives would reveal something about their diverse motivations, and might suggest points of contact (as well as divergences) between the concerns of policymakers and those of teachers, pupils, and ordinary citizens. Narrative inquiry offers a way of learning about the language of policy, and might teach us how to engage in conversation with policy makers around important educational matters. (p. 275)

I felt that conducting a narrative inquiry about the experiences of senior administrators in school divisions would contribute to a larger body of research in educational leadership. As Elbaz-Luwisch suggested, a narrative inquiry study with senior administrators would provide new learnings from a different perspective on the educational landscape.

As I continued to think about this study, I understood it would be necessary to use the word “I” as I moved from stories of personal significance to stories of social significance. I understood that to those who may not understand the nature of a narrative inquiry, my personal stories may have seemed narcissistic, but I needed to use the word “I” as the inquiry unfolded. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained:
We need to be prepared to write “I” as we make the transition from field texts to research texts. As we write “I,” we need to convey a sense of social significance. We need to make sure that when we say “I,” we know the “I” is connecting with “they.” (p. 122)

I continued to consider possibilities for my topic of study. I felt compelled to recount my experiences from the perspective of a senior administrator, and in particular, moments of tension, puzzles, and wonders that emerged as I reflected on my experiences.

When I lived the day-to-day experiences as a senior administrator for a school division, I felt positioned, along with other senior administrators, to negotiate multiple tensions, and I experienced high accountability expectations to improve student achievement. As I became an experienced senior administrator, I became aware of the shifting of my professional identity. I wondered about the experiences of other senior administrators in school divisions, and how their experiences shaped their professional identities, especially during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement. I believed that stories of experience shared by senior administrators would provide a different perspective. Such stories could potentially bring new learning to me, and to the participants in and readers of this study. Thinking about education from a different perspective may inform future stories and shifts on the educational landscape.
3.5 Designing a Narrative Inquiry

As my narrative inquiry unfolded, I had the opportunity to engage in conversations\textsuperscript{15} with two senior administrators from school divisions about the experiences that shaped their stories to live by. I defined a senior administrator as a person with responsibilities to improve student achievement. The person would have experience working at a central office in a school division and could be currently employed, recently resigned, or retired from one of a variety of roles in the provincial public or Catholic education system. Those roles include supervisor, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, superintendent, deputy director, or director. Individuals who have worked in these types of roles have experiences on the educational landscape that are different from classroom experiences. I felt this perspective would further contribute to the larger body of research in narrative inquiry.

Clandinin and Connelly (1998a) described the importance of narrative inquiry and storytelling as establishing possibilities for growth and change:

\begin{quote}
We see living an educated life as an ongoing process. People’s lives are composed over time: biographies or life stories are lived and told, retold and relived. For us, education is interwoven with living and with the possibility of retelling our stories. As we think about our own lives and the lives of teachers...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} In narrative inquiry, Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) explained, “methodologically, interviews blend into conversations and are similar to unstructured interviews. In conversation, people are free to engage in an ongoing discussion of topics of interest. These topics and the transcripts of the conversations, become a subsequent basis for analysis” (p. 667).
and children with whom we engage, we see possibilities for growth and change.

(p. 246)

Dewey (1938) described a “permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 25). Conversations with senior administrators provided an opportunity to recount storied experiences from a different perspective. Clandinin and Connelly (1998a) stated, “We see the creation of such autobiographical texts as constituting a narrative reflection on practice. This process of telling our stories is critical to educational development” (p. 249). Krmpotoic (2003) explained, “In order to learn and to grow we must reflect on, not only our intentional actions, but all of our life experiences as these co-create who we are personally and professionally” (p. 31). Recounting the storied experiences of senior administrators and thinking narratively with our stories provided opportunities for reflection and inquiry into the complexity of lives being lived on the educational landscape. Li, Mitton-Kukner, and Yeom (2008) described the importance of reflective practice on school landscapes:

Thinking narratively about school as a textured landscape of interaction composed of teachers’ stories [and senior administrators’ stories] to live by and their personal practical knowledge, as well as stories of school, school stories, and institutional narratives, allowed us to conceptualize and reflect on how our lives were relationally shaped over time. (p. 247)

During this study I attempted, with my participants to create a research community not simply to recount stories, but to explore our experiences on school landscapes in ways
that will result in positive growth that will lead to an awakening of retelling and reliving stories (Whelan, Huber, Rose, Davies, & Clandinin, 2001).

3.6 Negotiating Entry into the Midst of Lives

Ethical considerations were carefully and respectfully attended to throughout this study. The senior administration community is discerning, and I wondered if I would find participants willing to participate. When I considered participants, two individuals instantly came to my mind: Barbara and Alice. Both are well-respected individuals on the educational landscape, and are known for their leadership savvy and insightful knowledge about educational matters.

After I received approval from the University of Regina Research Ethics Board, I emailed Barbara and Alice to invite them to participate. In the email, I explained that during my doctoral studies I focused on learning about educational leadership, student achievement, professional identity, and narrative inquiry. I explained that I had received approval from the University of Regina Research Ethics Board to contact potential participants to begin my study. I attached a participant consent form to the email message to provide specific details. The form included a place for a signature if Barbara and Alice chose to participate. I also encouraged them to email or phone me if they had questions or needed clarification.

The day after I emailed Barbara, she emailed back to say yes. True to her personality, Barbara was willing to accommodate me in any way she could. I gave Barbara the option of conducting our conversations by phone, face-to-face, or via the
Internet using Skype\textsuperscript{16} or FaceTime.\textsuperscript{17} For convenience, we decided to use FaceTime. Each of us had an iPad\textsuperscript{18} and it seemed logical to use FaceTime. Each time we met online, I used a digital voice recorder to record our conversations. Throughout the following months, when we worked together, there were times when the technology did not cooperate. Sometimes we could not connect with FaceTime, so we used Skype as our backup plan. We met online several times over a period of several months. Barbara and I agreed that our conversations would be confidential, and she would use a pseudonym to remain anonymous in the study. We scrutinized pseudonyms to ensure the names and genders we chose to use in the study did not inadvertently identify other individuals we knew in the small community of senior administrators for school divisions. On occasions when our paths crossed at provincial education events, we made no mention of our work together.

Barbara and I looked forward to our scheduled times. For both of us, it became a time to relax and share current events, reminisce about the past, and share wonders about the future. I felt I was able to get to know Barbara in a different manner. Even though we never physically met face-to-face to work on this study, I felt our friendship reached

\textsuperscript{16} Skype is a free download from the Internet that provides the capability for users to create an account to phone, video chat, or message other users with SKYPE accounts.

\textsuperscript{17} FaceTime is a pre-programmed application on Apple devices that provides the capability for Apple product users to create an account to phone, video chat, or message other Apple account users with FaceTime accounts.

\textsuperscript{18} An iPad is an Apple product that is a handheld computing device.
a deeper level. We were able to change out of our formal business suits, and relax in comfortable attire in our respective homes, as we settled in to share our experiences on the educational landscape. Conversing in the comfort of our homes set the mood for relaxed, honest conversations, sprinkled with laughter and a few sombre moments, and created new storied moments.

My experience with my second participant was similar. Alice was aware that I was working on my doctoral degree, and she seemed interested to learn more about my studies. At one point, she had expressed interest in the graduate program, and was considering going back to university. I emailed Alice an invitation to participate in this study. She did not respond right away, and I worried she did not want to participate. I waited two weeks, and followed up with another email. Alice responded and indicated she would be honoured to participate. She had been waiting for an opportunity to see me to confirm her commitment. Upon reflection, I understand this is a quality that is part of the integrity of Alice. She valued and respected my request, and she wanted to see me in person to confirm her willingness to participate.

During the course of this study, Alice and I met several times online using FaceTime or Skype. As happened when I was meeting with Barbara, I experienced technical difficulties with FaceTime when I met with Alice online. During one of our conversations, we were unable to connect with each other using FaceTime, so we emailed back and forth to try to problem-solve the connection issue. I suggested to Alice that we use the telephone to continue our conversation, but Alice preferred to see me while we talked, so we agreed to try Skype. For the remainder of our conversations, we
used Skype as a backup when we encountered technical difficulties with FaceTime. Each time we met online, I used a digital voice recorder to record our conversations. As with Barbara, Alice and I agreed our conversations would be confidential, and she would remain anonymous in this study. Alice, too, scrutinized pseudonyms to ensure the names and genders we chose to use in the study did not inadvertently identify other individuals.

I am forever grateful to Barbara and Alice for agreeing to participate. Their thoughtful comments, insightful observations, and willingness to be open and honest have humbled me and brought me to a level of respect for each individual that is difficult to express in words. Both have become treasured friends.

### 3.7 Being in the Midst of Unfolding Lives

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) identified that narrative inquirers “settle in, live and work alongside participants and come to experience not only what can be seen and talked about directly but also the things not said and not done that shape the narrative structure of their observations and their talking” (p. 67). I did not physically work alongside Barbara and Alice in their respective workplaces, but our responsibilities as senior administrators were similar, and our paths crossed regularly at provincial meetings and events. This commonality set the stage for several in-depth conversations about our experiences as senior administrators.

Before the first conversations with Barbara and Alice, I gave considerable thought on how to begin our conversations. I considered the autobiographical genre of the narrative beginning. “Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative
inquiry plotlines” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). I knew I had to be attentive to ensure this study was not solely autobiographical and simply storytelling, but that our stories of experience became a blending of three storied lives: Barbara’s, Alice’s, and mine. As Clandinin and Connelly wrote, “Our own interests and ways of thinking . . . [are] not enough. We need . . . to have the work connect with larger questions of social significance” (p. 21). This idea was reinforced when I read Anderson (2008):

. . . the knowledge that we seek as researchers is often connected to the relationships we establish in the process. If we don’t have direct contact with the community of our work, we may come away with a watered-down version of the knowledge we are seeking, and thus come out with weaker results. (p. 12)

During the first conversations I had with Barbara and then Alice, we took time to discuss the practical aspects of this study. I explained details about narrative inquiry, and we discussed the logistics for the study. We scheduled several evening times to meet over the course of the next several months. We knew that with our busy schedules it would be difficult to connect, but for the most part we were successful meeting at our scheduled times.

To prepare Barbara and Alice for our continued conversations, I shared two chronicles I developed during my coursework. I created each chronicle using a series of concentric circles to demonstrate difference phases of my life over a series of decades. The first chronicle was about significant experiences from my life beginning with my earliest memories about childhood experiences, and then led up to my most current significant experiences. Within each concentric circle I had written key phrases and
single words to represent my significant life experiences. The second chronicle I created was about my life on the educational landscape positioned over time in several roles. I noted significant experiences I felt had contributed to the development of my professional identity. For me, the development of each chronicle was a continuous process over a period of months as memories surfaced. Certain memories triggered other memories. I explained to Barbara and Alice that many of the experiences I identified in my two chronicles were included in this study.

I encouraged Barbara and Alice to create their own chronicles, or find an artefact from their childhoods that would help them to reminisce about their early years and, in particular, memories of school experiences. Barbara created two chronicles with concentric circles, and she shared an artefact to begin our conversations. Alice created her own version of a chronicle. She created a collage of words on a piece of paper, and selected words to represent significant life experiences. Barbara and Alice referred to their chronicles to begin to recount significant stories of experiences they remembered from their childhoods.

Our conversations continued over the course of several months as Barbara and Alice privileged me with the honour of listening to their experiences. Our conversations were relaxed and flowed easily as we meandered back and forth across decades of time through our memories and recollections of experiences. Over time, deeper understandings about our experiences emerged along with discoveries of new puzzles, wonders, and learning. As the time passed, I began to accumulate field texts such as audio files, conversation notes, personal field notes, email, and expanded chronicles. I
also collected artefacts in the form of memos, newspaper articles, and Ministry reports that seemed to be related to our conversations. As I was collecting artefacts, I was not sure what would become relevant in the final version of this study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recognized this tension in narrative inquirers and explained:

The field texts created may be more or less collaboratively constructed, may be more or less interpretive, and may be more or less researcher influenced. It depends. Researchers need to be attentive to this and need to write journal entries that portray the relational circumstances of the situation represented in the field text. (p. 95)

I knew at some point I would need to create a sense of order in my collection of field texts and artefacts. At times, I wondered how I would be able to assemble my interim research texts into a coherent narrative.

3.8 Composing the Research Text

Eventually the time came for our conversations to be transcribed into interim research texts. Clandinin (2013) described interim research texts as “partial texts that are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further co-compose storied interpretations and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings” (p. 47). Moving from our conversations to printed text was a time of tension for me. Clandinin explained:

As we move from composing field texts to composing interim research texts, the time is marked with tension and uncertainty. Although interpretation is always underway as the inquiry is lived out with participants in the field, at some point
there is a move away from the close intensive contacts with participants to begin to work with the field texts. (p. 47)

I began by transcribing the conversations I had with Barbara and Alice. My original plan was to have a third party transcribe the conversations, but I changed my mind and decided it was best for me to transcribe the conversations. I felt that listening and re-listening to the conversations would provide me with another opportunity to inquire more deeply into Barbara’s and Alice’s stories of experience. Each time I listened to our conversations I became aware of new puzzles and wonders. I then reviewed and reflected upon the transcripts, personal field texts, and the artefacts I had collected throughout the imagining of this narrative inquiry. I reflected on how to take my collection of field texts and transform them into interim research texts that would finally lead to a completed study.

Slowly, I began the painstaking process of weaving the story threads into what I believed to be a coherent manner. Clandinin (2013) explained:

By intentionally focusing on what we called threads, we were interested in following particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through an individual’s narrative account. . . . when we laid the accounts metaphorically alongside one another, we searched for what we, as a team, saw as resonances or echoes that reverberated across accounts. (p. 132)

The conversations with Barbara and Alice began with stories about their experiences being schooled and continued forward to their experiences as senior administrators. As I wrote, I remembered my participants: “. . . are people living storied lives on storied
landscapes” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). Clandinin and Connelly explained it was my task to, “. . . write about people, places, and things as becoming rather than being. (p. 145). They explained: “The narrative research text is fundamentally a temporal text-about what has been, what is now, and what is becoming. The writer must find ways to write a text that is ‘in place,’ not abstracted, but placed” (p. 145-146). I chose to dedicate a chapter to each participant. Each chapter begins with an introduction to the participant, and then follows with several narrative accounts to capture story threads that emerged during our conversations that seemed to resonate with my research interest about educational leadership, professional identity, and being positioned as a senior administrator to improve student achievement. Clandinin (2013) explained:

The term *narrative account*, or perhaps *narrative accounting*, allows us to give an account, an accounting, a representation of the unfolding lives of both participants and researchers, at least as they became visible in those times and places where our stories intersected and were shared. In our use of the term *narrative account* we strive for a sense of being morally responsible to each other and to our negotiated relationships as well as to our negotiated texts. We work toward a sense of mutuality and co-composition in what we write. (p. 132)

As I transformed the field texts into interim research texts within a chapter for each participant, I remained wakeful to the three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place. At times, I worried that I would not be able to accurately represent the stories that Barbara and Alice had entrusted to me. I chose to paraphrase some of the transcribed conversations, and at other times, I included
transcribed text to capture the voice of Barbara or Alice. I wanted to provide the reader with a sense of the conversational tone and context of our conversations.

I struggled over what parts of our conversation not to include. I wondered about the silences I would create by not including parts of our conversations and questioned myself about why I chose to leave out certain parts. I worried about the length of the thesis. I knew from a practical standpoint I simply could not include everything I had learned and gathered into a final document. I repeatedly asked myself if I had accurately captured Barbara and Alice’s stories within the larger whole of this narrative inquiry. I wondered if I would be able to weave the stories into a coherent manner in this study, and maintain the voice of each participant while respectfully sharing her accounts of storied experiences in an educative manner. In the end, Barbara, Alice, and I eliminated stories that we felt could identify them or other individuals. We were attentive to media reports, social media, and personal connections within the education community that could be linked to story threads in this study and used to identify individuals.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identified the challenge I faced in writing the interim and research text for this narrative inquiry as a common struggle, and they cautioned narrative inquirers to be particularly aware of the risk of creating a “Hollywood plot” (p. 10). In a Hollywood plot, the story is told in manner that leads to a storybook ending of “happily ever after.” Spence (2001) explained that “narrative smoothing” (p. 37) can lead to questions about truthfulness and “misremembering” (p. 39). “Whenever we are less than completely faithful to the record, we run the risk of composing a fictional rendition. But even when faithfully captured, the record rarely
speaks for itself” (p. 38). In other words, all efforts to compose a narrative inquiry, that will respectfully retell experiences as lived or heard by the narrative inquirer, will have aspects that are impossible to recapture. Body language, tone, voice, multiple perspectives, and insights cannot be ubiquitously captured. Narrative inquirers need to remind readers about this potential limitation, but for narrative inquirers, this opens spaces for the reader to inquire into the story to begin to imagine new possibilities.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained: “To acknowledge narrative smoothing is to open another door for the reader. It is a question of being as alert to the stories not told as to those that are” (p. 182). In a sense, a well-written narrative inquiry will encourage the reader to a space of inquiry, and open new spaces for imagination as the reader reads and reacts to the stories shared by the narrative inquirer and participants.

Once I felt the field texts were woven together in a cohesive manner that seemed to make sense, I emailed the respective interim research texts to Barbara and Alice to read. I also requested to schedule a set of meeting times to read through the interim research texts together. I experienced moments of anxiety after I emailed the interim research texts to the participants. I wondered what they would think about what I wrote, did I capture the context and intent of their stories accurately, and how would they would react to their transcribed words and the words I wrote in the chapter.

I was relieved when Barbara and Alice responded quickly, and both were eager to work with me on the interim research texts. Again, we scheduled online meeting times so that we could work together on the text. When I connected individually, first with Barbara and then Alice, we began by eagerly sharing updates about our lives. We had
not talked for a few months, while I was transcribing and writing, so we had news to catch up on. Our conversations reminded me that while this study will come to a close, our storied lives will continue. Each of us had a new set of experiences and memories about significant events to share.

To start our conversations related to this study, I suggested to Barbara and Alice that I read the written text out loud, and we could discuss it as it was read. Barbara and Alice engaged and provided honest feedback, comments, insights, and edits. The opportunity to retell and reflect on our conversations added another layer of complexity to the study, and new learning emerged.

Both Barbara and Alice struggled to see their spoken words transcribed into written text. Barbara felt she should have spoken in a more professional manner. Alice realized some of the slang words she used did not exist in the dictionary. I tried to reassure both of them that their transcribed words strengthened the study, and provided the reader with a sense of their voices. We reworked sections of the transcribed text to make it read smoother, and eliminated non-essential details. All suggestions and edits were discussed and negotiated to ensure that Barbara and Alice were comfortable with the written narrative accounts of their experiences. Lewis and Adeney (2014) explained, “What is essential is that an ethic of care be used when conveying information garnered from others. This may include rewriting and rethinking texts, negotiating research tests with participants and using pseudonyms for participant’s names” (p. 174).

Once the final edits were completed, I emailed each participant her chapter for a final read, and received their approval on the completed chapters. The chapters about
Barbara and Alice represent a selected compilation of storied experiences, thoughts, and reflections on the educational landscape that unfolded during our conversations. The narrative accounts are our authentic reflections, responses, and reconsiderations after reading and rereading our work together.

3.9 Completing a Narrative Inquiry, For Now

Moving forward in this study, Chapter Four will introduce Barbara and her narrative accounts. Chapter Five will introduce Alice and her narrative accounts. Chapter Six is purposefully devoted to experiences I have lived as a senior administrator, experiences that seemed similar to those of Barbara and Alice. I feel that the role of a senior administrator may present an element of mystery for some readers, and I will try to provide a small window of insight into my experiences, as well as connections to Barbara and Alice’s experiences.

Chapter Seven is the final chapter, in which I will intertwine my storied experiences and those of Barbara and Alice with literature I read during my studies. As I read and reread our narrative accounts, common story threads emerged. I identified six story threads that resonated across our narrative accounts: being a member of the colonizing dominant group, shifting professional identity, re(composing) stories to live by, becoming awakening to the lives of children and youth, school reform, and the shaping presence of dominant institutional narratives.

I will end the study with an epilogue that will connect to a story thread in the prologue. In the prologue, I shared a story to live by that I experienced with my father in an outdoor setting when I was a young child. In the epilogue, I will share another story
to live by that I experienced with my father, also in an outdoor setting. It was one of the last conversations I had with him before he passed away.

Eventually, I put the chapters and sections for this study side by side. I continually reread and rewrote sections to make the document feel complete. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described a sense of “back and forthing” when creating a narrative inquiry:

We compose one chapter, share it with our response group, receive response, undertake revisions, and work through this process until we feel we have moved the text along as far as we can. We set it aside and begin another chapter. We follow a similar process with it until we set it aside. . . . This is more the process we engage in—a kind of back and forth writing, receiving response, revising, setting it aside, writing another chapter or section following a similar process, then holding it up against the other chapter, until finally there is a sense of a whole, a piece that feels like it could stand, at least for this moment, alone. (p. 167)

At this point, this document represents a completed study, for now. There is a sense of wholeness that surrounds a narrative inquirer as a study nears conclusion. I am aware that lives continue to be lived, stories of experience are retold and recomposed as we live moments in time. In a sense, a narrative inquirer is never quite finished and continues to be attentive to puzzles, wonders, and new learning.
Clandinin & Connelly (2000) explained that “narrative inquiries are always composed around a particular wonder, a research puzzle” (p. 124). They explained that the research puzzle should not have a clear definable expectation towards a solution but more so to carry, “. . . a sense of a search, a ‘re-search,’ a searching again” (p. 124). “Narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). My research puzzle for this narrative inquiry is about senior administrators in school divisions (re)composing stories to live by during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement.

I engaged in conversation with Barbara and Alice to recount our stories of experience as we sought to understand the (re)composing of our stories to live by. “The contribution of a narrative inquiry is often more intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42). Sharing storied experiences from senior administrators, who are leading or who have led during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement, provided an opportunity to retell and reimagine new insights and learning in narrative way. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) explained, “The narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when well done, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 42). Moving from telling stories as senior administrators to
inquiring into these stories may provide seeds of promise for educational reform in a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement.

CHAPTER FOUR: Barbara
In this chapter, I begin by introducing Barbara\(^{19}\), then proceed to share a narrative account about her years of school experiences\(^{20}\). As Barbara and I co-composed her narrative account, I was attentive to the three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place. As our conversations unfolded across time, a number of story threads emerged. The story threads we chose to share in this narrative account seemed to resonate with this study to explore senior administrators (re)composing stories to live by during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement.

Barbara has spent many years in schools in a number of roles including student, teacher, parent, school-based administrator, and senior administrator. Each role has provided Barbara with a different perspective from which to reflect on and learn. As Barbara lives her life positioned in school divisions, her understanding about the complexities of schools continually shifts and unfolds. Barbara’s narrative account

\(^{19}\) The names and places identified in this chapter are pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the participant and people mentioned in this narrative account. At times, the gender of a person is changed to protect the identity of the person in the shared experience.

\(^{20}\) This chapter was co-composed by Barbara and me over a period of several months. A concern the reader may have is similar to what Clandinin (2013) noted, “I realize that in co-composing a narrative account using field texts co-composed between two individuals but that was written, for the most part, by the researcher may create a silence that does not allow the participant to speak, to be heard” (p. 131). Similarly, Neumann (1997) wrote: “. . . with every text that’s told comes a silence that cannot be converted into words or understanding that is fully shared” (p. 92). In other words, this co-composed chapter will have silences that create spaces for the reader to wonder and puzzle about. To do so is encouraged in narrative inquiry so that in a way, the reader also becomes part of this co-composed text.
described her school experiences. Through the recounting of her experiences, it became evident that her experiences have shaped her identity as an educator. Barbara’s personal and professional life are intricately woven together, and the narrative account we co-composed is filled with accomplishments, celebrations, wonders, and puzzles. Inquiring narratively into Barbara’s stories of experience carved a path for a deeper understanding about her complicated life as a senior administrator in a school division.

4.1 Introducing Barbara

Barbara is an experienced senior administrator who has spent the majority of her career working for school divisions. Barbara and I met at a summer short course organized for LEADS members. I remember being drawn to Barbara because of her friendly manner. I felt that she was a person I wanted to get to know better. Over the years, Barbara and I did get to know each other better because we worked together on numerous provincial committees and projects. With each committee or project, I was able to learn more about Barbara as a person and share professional experiences with her. Over time, our friendship grew. If we experienced a difficult situation, we knew we could confide in each other. We could share stories, problem-solve together, and be supportive of each other. Even though Barbara worked in a different school division, our work responsibilities were similar, and I could rely upon her to offer a different perspective. She understood my work, and I understood hers. We could relate to the realities and complexities of being senior administrators in school divisions. Barbara was supportive to me, especially when trying to understand the situations we encountered in school divisions.
In the subsequent sections of this chapter, Barbara begins with stories about her experiences as a child being schooled in rural Saskatchewan. Barbara was born and raised on a farm. She is part of a large family with many siblings who are close in age. Barbara shared stories about her experience entering schools as a student. When Barbara started teaching she became more aware of the deep traditions within schools and she began to bump up against many of the long held traditions and practices of teaching. Her experiences as a teacher introduced her to diverse populations, and she observed educators with diverse teaching styles and classroom management techniques. Barbara also shared her experiences as she transitioned into a senior administrator position in a school division. She expressed feelings about what it was like to leave the daily and routine operation of schools, and she described how she shifted to learn the administrative and business aspects of the school division. Barbara recounted her experiences about the complexities of being a senior administrator. This chapter concludes with puzzles and wonders that emerged from Barbara’s narrative account.

4.2 Barbara’s Narrative Beginning

To begin our conversations, Barbara created two chronicles and shared an artefact with me.

I have a folder. It’s an interesting folder that came from Morocco. I have a very interesting aunt who married a gentleman from Morocco so she gave it to my mom and I ended up inheriting it. I’ve got all of my report cards in it, my baby card, a picture from Grade 3, and then all the way to high school. There I am. [Barbara held up a photograph.] It’s got a variety of papers and documents and
all sorts of things. The report cards are interesting. There is no kindergarten report card because there was no kindergarten in Lamont when I went to school:

In Grade 1, the teacher wrote about me on my report card: “Very well done, Barbara.” In Grade 2, the comment on my report card was: “A very good year, Barbara.” In Grade 3, the comment on my report card was: “Barbara is weak in social studies otherwise her work is good. Barbara is doing good work, continuing to work hard will continue to bring good results. She must follow directions more carefully.” I have a couple of report cards that ask me to pay a little bit more attention in a couple of areas. In Grade 5, the teacher says: “Barbara’s work is mostly satisfactory. She takes a good interest in social studies.” [laughter] I received A’s in social studies. Isn’t it funny in one year I am not doing so well in social studies, but in another year it’s going very well in social studies. (Research Conversation with Barbara, March 31, 2014)

Barbara and I reflected upon our memories about the assessment practices of our teachers when we were students in elementary and high school. We noticed similarities about our report cards. We noted that during our elementary and high school experiences, it was not the typical practice of teachers to provide detailed descriptive feedback. A common word that was used on both of our report cards was “good.” We agreed that the lack of descriptive feedback in our report cards left us unsure about our exact progress in school. We did ascertain that we were both “good” students in elementary and high school, and we surmised it was probably because we both enjoyed school and were well-behaved for our teachers.
The significance of Barbara’s Moroccan folder was discussed in a subsequent conversation. Barbara recalled that the Moroccan folder was quite unusual and an exotic possession to have in a rural, prairie community in the 1960s. She speculated that the cover may have been made from camel leather, and she brought to my attention the gold pattern engraved on it:

Why would someone from Lamont, Saskatchewan have something like that from their childhood? My mother’s family was very down to earth; they settled during the Depression. Hard-working people. I think there were seven or eight children, and as soon as they finished Grade 7 or 8 they all went to work to help support the family. Helen was very pretty. She didn’t really fit into the Saskatchewan kind of mould, and she had a bit of an adventurous streak in her. She was a waitress, and she worked in cafes, but she ended up working in Banff at a hotel which was much larger and exotic. Then she moved out east, and then moved down to Las Vegas with a friend. Who in Saskatchewan had an aunt that lived in Las Vegas? Very few, I would imagine at that particular time. So, she represented the exotic. I think this folder, since I’ve had it since I was much younger, always represented the exotic, the bigger world, the unattainable, or the adventure of Aunt Helen. (Research Conversation with Barbara, March 31, 2014)

When Barbara was a young student she selected the contents for the folder, and over a number of years the folder came to house a collection of memorabilia from her experiences in elementary and high school. It contained report cards, a little poem book, a few drawings from when she was in Grade 2 or 3, and several photographs of friends.
from elementary school. It was obvious that the soft, supple Moroccan folder was a precious artefact that helped Barbara recall memories from elementary and high school.

When Barbara talked about her aunt Helen, I imagined the lively conversations about Aunt Helen amongst Barbara’s family members. Aunt Helen did not represent the status quo for that time period. I imagined the streak of tenacity it took for Aunt Helen to step out of the confines of conforming to the expectations from her family. I wondered about Aunt Helen’s experiences, and what her reflections would be if she shared memories about her life growing up on the prairies and eventually living in Las Vegas.

4.3 Shifting Landscapes from the Farm to School

Barbara continued her story by describing her life growing up on a farm, her memories about attending school, and that time period of her life in general:

In Grade 1, my mom was a little offended that the teacher didn’t think my hair got brushed in the morning because I was a bit of a ragamuffin. I think it was kind of funny she would mention that because my mom wasn’t very nurturing as a mother. She was so busy. We are all just a year apart plus she had broken her leg two months before the youngest was born. (Research Conversation with Barbara, March 31, 2014)

In a subsequent conversation, Barbara and I revisited her memory of her mother being offended by the teacher’s comments about Barbara’s appearance. When Barbara reminisced about this experience she said she felt that there was a disconnection between her mother being offended by a teacher, and her mother’s values about what was
important. Barbara explained that her mother was raised to value the importance of a hard day of work. Her mother valued the ability to grow a good garden or bake an excellent loaf of bread. The importance of school and obtaining an education were not as highly valued. In particular, appearances, such as hair being combed, would be of less importance. As Barbara recalled this situation, she was surprised at her mother’s reaction and pondered the disconnection she perceived:

I came from a family where we just spent so much time together. As children we were so close because there is not much age difference. It wasn’t the kind of family you hear about; you know, the kind of family you hear the stats about the importance of the mom’s influence because of her vocabulary, and her mental health, and her education. Well, I don’t know how I got to where I got. She’s a lovely lady, I love her to bits, but it just wasn’t the kind of family where it had the qualities or characteristics that we would normally associate with success. I think you have to be very respectful of the age and the time period. Some of the criteria they mention today that would be associated with vulnerability wasn’t necessarily the same when we were growing up. (Research Conversation with Barbara, February 2, 2015)

I understood Barbara’s reference to the criteria associated with vulnerability. In 1996, the Ministry of Education introduced a provincial prekindergarten program model to be operated in collaboration with school divisions. Most people in the school divisions believed it was beneficial to communities to be able to access prekindergarten programs in the local school. However, the model, as it was then and now, is
problematic because it is not a universal program for all prekindergarten-aged children. The program targets children who are considered vulnerable. The provincial vulnerability definition creates a dilemma for school division personnel because personnel are expected to pre-screen children for the program. School division personnel are placed in the uncomfortable position of labelling and focusing on the deficits of young children to determine which children are the most vulnerable in the community. In some communities, there are not enough spaces in the prekindergarten program to meet the needs of the children labelled as “vulnerable.” This further complicates the situation, because school division personnel must deny some children access to the program. School division personnel must explain to parents why a child is or is not a suitable candidate. Parents are often upset by the selection process, and sometimes call senior administrators to voice their concerns.

During my conversation with Barbara, I recalled a phone call I received from a young mother. She was upset because her neighbour’s child was admitted into the prekindergarten program, but her child was not. The teacher had explained that the

21 The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2008) established a set of criteria for school divisions to use to determine if the children being considered for the program fit into the vulnerable category:

For the purpose of Prekindergarten, the Ministry of Education defines vulnerability broadly, including: family has low socio-economic status; mother has less than a high school education; home language other than English; mother is young and unmarried; lone parent; child abuse or neglect; family crisis; child/family isolation; and child experiencing challenges in areas such as social, emotional, and language development. (p. 43)
selection criteria was based on Ministry of Education guidelines and shared the guidelines with the parent. The parent called me because she wanted to know the specific details about how the neighbour’s child fit into the criteria because she felt that child was “normal.” I wondered how this situation in the rural community would change the dynamics for the families who did have children admitted into the program. I was embarrassed about the manner in which new families were being introduced to the school system. Their children were being assessed for deficiencies to determine if they were admissible to the prekindergarten program. Barbara also had these difficult conversations with parents, and with agencies such as Social Services and Health Services, to explain the reason that some children were accepted and others not.

Barbara expressed frustration with this inane situation especially when children were denied entry into a program because they were labelled as too vulnerable. She explained that she had encountered children who would be traumatized by the transitional aspect of attending the program. Some young children found that it was traumatic to be separated repeatedly from significant adults in their lives. The transition from home to day care to the prekindergarten program and then back to day care and eventually to the home at the end of the day, combined with being in the care of multiple adults during the day, was extremely stressful and disruptive for some young children. Barbara and I agreed that sometimes the conversations with parents and agencies could be extremely difficult and awkward. As we discussed Barbara’s childhood, I sensed that she wondered if, according to today’s definition, she might have been labelled as a vulnerable Prekindergarten child based on her family situation. Did she wonder if the
label would have changed how her family was viewed by people in her community?

When I shared this wonder with Barbara she agreed with me; this prompted her to reminisce about attending school as a child:

> I grew up around Lamont, so we were farm kids. We went on the bus every day.
> I was very naive and very protected in being brought up on the farm. I had no idea about girl gossip or being any less than anyone else. I guess we were seen as a little bit different, but I didn’t find that out until I went to university, which shows how naïve I was. (Research Conversation with Barbara, February 2, 2015)

### 4.4 Shifting Stories To Live By

During one conversation, Barbara and I reflected upon our childhood memories about students who struggled to learn in school:

Lamont is a small rural community. In Grade 9, there would have been about 40 kids in the class. In Grade 9 or 10 the teachers split the classes according to who took core French and who didn’t. Of course, all of the girls were in one room because we took French. All of the boys, and Melissa, were in the other group. Melissa had failed a grade. She was identified as someone who struggled in school just by where she was placed. I remember going back to Lamont for the grad. In my graduating class, there were under 20 people graduating.

The other thing with Lamont was that it must have been difficult to staff, to find good teachers, because we had quite the variety. We had some that were quite stable, but I am absolutely shocked sometimes to think about where I ended up and that anybody would end up anywhere based on the teachers that were
hired there. There were alcoholics, recent immigrants who didn’t know the language, just didn’t know how to fit into the community, and had some different kinds of ideas about what education should look like. No management skills, marginally competent. I can’t really say I learned a lot during those years. Lamont struggled and I think people who went to school there got disillusioned. There were a lot of teenage pregnancies. There were young men that would quit and go off and work because they could make way more working after they turned 16 than staying in school. (Research Conversation with Barbara, March 31, 2014)

As I reread this segment of Barbara’s story, I became aware of the tension Barbara was experiencing as she remembered her experiences with teachers as a young student, and as she reflected upon her experiences as a senior administrator that had concerns about the quality of teaching that occurred in the classrooms. Barbara recognized that Melissa’s being placed in the classroom with the boys meant she was being labelled as a struggling student. She recognized the significance of the low graduation rate. Barbara did not directly speak to these observations, but there was a mutual understanding between the two of us that our experiences as young students in schools was not what we would want for the students in schools today. In subsequent
conversations, Barbara referred to the research of Marzano\textsuperscript{22} and commented about his research findings. Marzano concluded a student’s achievement level will be impacted if the student spends more than one year with a marginal teacher. Barbara reflected upon this research and her memories about marginally skilled teachers in Lamont. She wondered about the impact on the other students taught by these teachers.

In Grades 11 and 12, Barbara attended a residential Catholic school. It was not her wish, but her father’s, because he believed that she would receive a better education at the residential school than at her local school. Barbara was compliant and attended to appease her father;

It [the residential school] was the place where supposedly if you got into trouble [this] was where your parents sent you. My dad’s sisters went there so it was kind of a family tradition in his family. I went, but I didn’t realize until I had went, people thought I had gotten into trouble. There were other girls that had come there mid-year who had babies. They would come there after they had been sent off to a home for unwed mothers and had given up their babies and then they were sent there. Others were sent there as punishment. And then

\textsuperscript{22} “Based on the research on expertise, we propose five conditions that must be met if a district or school wishes to systematically develop teacher expertise: (1) a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, (2) focused feedback and practice, (3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, (4) clear criteria and a plan for success, and (5) recognition of expertise” (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011, p. 3).
others were sent there, as my dad said, so that I would get a better quality
education.

I got into a little bit of trouble there, but not trouble as in having babies. I
was caught drinking in the graveyard. [laughter] We had to do the dishes for a
period of time. And then we were supposed to phone our parents and let them
know. Well, as luck would have it, when I phoned home to let them know, my
parents, they never go on a holiday, they were on a holiday. So, I was talking to
my brother, and I told him what happened. He said, “Well, mom and dad aren’t
home.” So I thought, phew, okay, I got away with it, but actually it was a party
line so the neighbour kids heard it. And then my oldest brother told my parents.
A friend of mine from Lamont had phoned the nuns, and she pretended to be my
mom so I thought I had gotten away with it. The nuns thought I had told my
mom and then I got into trouble with my mom, but that didn’t cause the trouble.
The trouble was the party line. That was Grade 11 and they did take me back in
Grade 12.

You don’t know sometimes what other people see in you as a leader. I
thought I was just an ordinary, everyday kid, but when things happen where other
people kind of show you they see you as a leader, those are the kinds of events
that make you wonder if you have a skill set in that area. I was supposed to be
the vice president of the SRC\textsuperscript{23} going into Grade 12, and because of my little

\textsuperscript{23} SRC is an acronym for Student Representative Council. SRCs are a leadership structure in
many high schools for elected students to provide leadership and a voice for the student body.
escapade in the graveyard, that was removed, which is fine, I was okay with that. I went back to school there in the fall in Grade 12 and they had another election to pick the person to take my place, which was fine, except the majority of girls wrote my name down. I was called in by Sister Margaret, and I was accused of sabotaging the election and having people write my name down, but I had no idea that had happened. I knew nothing about it. They said, “You know you can’t be.” I said, “I’m alright with that. I’m not looking to have that position. I’m fine.” It was one of my good friends who ended up being the vice-president, but I just got involved and did whatever. I had another punishment because of what I did. They put me in a dorm that normally Grade 12’s don’t go in. My room was right by one of the nun’s rooms. Usually when you are in Grade 12 you get to pick the dorms on the second floor. I had to go on the third floor, and I had to be in the farthest dorm, but there were other Grade 12’s in there. It was okay, but that was another consequence. (Research Conversation with Barbara, March 31, 2014)

Barbara’s experiences in high school were bitter sweet. She acknowledged enjoying her studies and doing well in school. She was pleased with her teachers and felt there was an improvement in the quality of instruction she received. She seemed to enjoy the opportunity to live away from her home on a farm and was eager to immerse herself in new experiences. She felt that living away from home made her more independent, and she appreciated her time at home when she was able to be there. Barbara’s story about getting caught drinking in the graveyard is the only experience that
she shared with me about getting into trouble with the teachers at school. After getting caught for drinking in the graveyard, Barbara endured repeated and random punishments including her teachers’ disbelief that she was innocent in the unexpected results of the student election. This was a significant event for Barbara during her schooling because it put her at odds with the teachers. I wondered if the experience influenced Barbara in how she handled the discipline of students when she was a teacher and eventually a school-based administrator.

4.5 Studying to Become a Teacher

Despite a brush with trouble in high school, Barbara felt her high school experience was successful, and she continued her education by attending university. She received a drama and art scholarship when she graduated from high school, and this led her to begin an Arts degree with a major in English and a minor in Drama and Art. Barbara is not sure what drew her into the discipline of Education, but she did remember that in Grade 3 she was asked to draw a picture of what she wanted to be when she grew up. She remembered drawing a teaching nun. She wondered if that experience was foretelling the future. She finished her Arts degree and, then, after contemplating a variety of post-secondary options, she decided to complete a degree in Education.

Barbara’s story about deciding to become a teacher resonated with me, and I shared with her my decision to become a teacher. I originally thought that I would go into medicine, but the reaction from my parents was lukewarm. They were concerned about the number of years I would need to attend school, and they wondered if nursing, hairdressing, or secretarial work would be a better choice for me. At the time, I was the
first family member to express interest in attending university. My high school teachers enthusiastically encouraged me to consider doing so. The guidance counsellor spent time talking to me about post-secondary education and showed me how to register for university. I reminisced with Barbara about that time period, and we reflected upon the expectation from our families that women should enter into traditional roles. I wondered out loud if my choice to pursue an Education degree was based on comfort and conforming to the expectations placed upon me by my family, expectations which I now realize were influenced by the societal norms of that time period. My parents were not ready to have a daughter enter university and become a doctor. This unconventional action did not conform to their traditional expectations. Barbara commented on the influence of her parents on her decision to continue her education:

> It is interesting when you talk about your parents’ influence. My mom wouldn’t have been influential, but my dad was determined, especially with his daughters. When we were finished high school he asked us what school you are going to go to now. It wasn’t where are you going to go and what work do you want to do, or what do you want to do, it was what school are you going to go to.

> It kind of goes against the flow when you have people that want you to get further education and similarly from my mom and dad, mostly my dad wanting me to go on, probably broke a bit of the trend at the time in rural communities, but still going into what would be more gender specific roles like secretarial, nursing, or teaching. (Research Conversation with Barbara, March 31, 2014)
Barbara’s comments led me to share a conversation I had with my mother when I was in high school. My mother did not want me, as an adult, to experience a situation where I was dependent upon a man for money. I talked to Barbara about my mother being a housewife. My mother waited until her children were out of school to become employed full-time. For most of her married life she depended upon my father to provide her with money to operate the household. Each week he would provide her with a small amount of cash and, in turn, she would organize the cash into envelopes labelled with the purpose for which the money was to be spent. Her work to efficiently organize the household budget and physically make sure there was cash in each envelope ensured that food was always on the table, bills were paid and, maybe, there would be a little bit of money left over for extras such as birthday presents or entertainment. I wondered what it would have been like for my mother to wait for my father to provide her with cash to run the household. Barbara and I both chose career paths that were traditional for women during that time period, but we agreed that our families valued and supported our choices to further our education.

4.6 Re-entering School as a Teacher

When Barbara completed her Education degree she was ready to enter into schools to begin her career as a senior English teacher. Once Barbara began to teach, she began to experience tensions within schools that would have an impact on her life:

My first teaching job was in Heritage. I interned in Heritage at Heritage High. I had a wonderful co-op teacher. At the end of the year, they had some problems
with enrolment. The director came in. He was called the superintendent at that time. He came in, and he observed. So he gave me some feedback.

I remember not having a lot of forewarning that the superintendent was going to come in to observe. You know it’s funny how when you think back now about the conversation we had after the lesson. I mean he was pleased with the lesson. He talked about it, but there was just something in that conversation that wasn’t as [long pause], I don’t know [long pause], it was maybe a little bit [long pause], the conversation went longer than maybe it needed to. You don’t know what it is, right? Two weeks later, the principal called me in and told me that unfortunately there were reduced enrolment numbers so they would have to let me go.

I would have liked to have stayed in Heritage, but you know it is what it is, right? I thought that was the end of the story, but at parent-teacher interviews that spring [not long after being told that her position was being terminated], another teacher on staff who taught English was always hanging around my door. So as parents would come in, and they’d leave, he would just kind of be hanging out there. Eventually when there was no one around, he came in. He sat down, and I thought this was quite odd. I thought it was just going to be small talk. He said, “I just wanted to come and apologize.” And I said, “Apologize for what?” There was nothing I could think of that would cause him to be apologetic. And he said, “For not quitting.” And I said, “What do you mean not quitting?” He told me the superintendent had come to see him because I guess this man was a
farmer and had been saying for years that he’s going to quit and go farming. The superintendent had heard about this, and in order to keep me had gone to him and said, “Listen, we have to cut. You’ve always said you wanted to quit; this is the year to quit.” This was unbeknownst to me. I had no idea he had been approached by the superintendent and encouraged to quit so I could stay. It’s what you don’t know, right? He was genuinely apologetic to me. (Research Conversation with Barbara, April 8, 2014)

As I listened to Barbara’s story I became aware of the complexity of the multiple layers of stories that were unfolding with her recounting this experience. Barbara was remembering key events from her first year of teaching, but she was also understanding the conflicting feelings the superintendent might have had about needing to dismiss a teacher. I thought about the internal turmoil the teacher across the hallway might have had as he lived the dual roles of teacher and farmer. He might have experienced feelings of guilt about holding a job that could potentially have been given to a young teacher.

I understood the frustration the superintendent might have felt knowing he was going to dismiss a bright young teacher because he did not have a job for her. The conflicting feelings resonated within me because I recalled, as a senior administrator, difficult conversations with employees about the changing status of their positions. I recalled the anxious looks that would flash upon their faces as we discussed changes that would need to occur. It was not a conversation that a senior administrator or staff member wanted to experience. For the most part we were able to work out mutually
agreed-upon solutions, but occasionally the only solution was to release an employee from his or her position.

4.7 Tensions on School Landscapes

The teaching position at Heritage High did not provide long-term employment for Barbara, but she was hired to start the next school year in a neighbouring school division. The culture in her new school was very different from the school culture she experienced during her first year of teaching. At her new school, she faced sexist comments and challenges to her professionalism:

I was hired in Beardspeak. There was a gentleman working at the high school and teaching English. He had a difficult time. The superintendent from Heritage had talked to the superintendent from the Beardspeak School Division, and he recommended me, which I think got me the job. The [School] Board was made up of mostly men, and they were all farmers. Some had businesses downtown. One Board member worked in the post office and the other in a store. I remember going in after I was hired and they said to me, “Oh, so you’re going to be the new teacher at the high school.” And they said, “You’re a woman, what makes you think you’re going to be able to do what a man couldn’t do?” [laughter] They said [that my predecessor] had no discipline, and they wondered how I was going to handle those kids.

Those two years in Beardspeak were probably more memorable than the ones in Heritage because it was a smaller school, and you got to know the children. They lived in your community. It’s a rural community. The boys were
not quite as mature behaving as they were in the urban setting. At Heritage they tended to carry themselves with a little bit more maturity than they did in Beardspeak. However, when I moved to Beardspeak, of course being a senior English teacher and having this very strong cooperative teacher, my expectations in English competency for kids and their achievement was, I guess, higher than what they had experienced. There were a number of the students that I felt I couldn’t pass. They were in Grade 11 and 12. They would reach the mark if there was a modified credit that could be offered. They were good kids. They came from farming backgrounds where you know, literature, literacy was not something that was promoted. These kids were going to go work or work on the farm. I really struggled that first year, and I remember the principal struggling with me when I said I can’t pass these kids.

The principal contacted the superintendent and again, here comes the superintendent, right? We talked, and I explained to him that I was very willing. I didn’t want to fail these kids at all. This was not my idea of a great time. Nor did I think it was necessary if we could provide a modified credit for them. It would give them the confidence to still move forward, and yet, I would feel comfortable that I had been very fair in their assessment. The principal thought there was a problem with me and justifiably so because prior to my arrival my predecessor thought everything was fine and was giving them great marks. I show up and the marks aren’t so good. Of course, the principal was trying to look at his school and his community, and he was saying this doesn’t seem to
match and maybe Barbara’s really just too harsh, but when the superintendent
came in and did some investigation, he said, “You’re right.”

Thankfully, I didn’t have to fail them, but we ran into problems because
you had to submit that you had a modified program in your school at the
beginning of the year, and they hadn’t done that. So we were giving modified
marks and the Ministry, the Department at that time, was saying you don’t have
the option to teach modified, but we were able to do that. (Research Conversation
with Barbara, April 8, 2014)

Despite dealing with sexist comments and doubts about her teaching ability
Barbara remained in the community, challenged the status quo, and built strong
relationships. She was determined to ensure that her students were successful. By her
actions, Barbara conveyed to her superiors that the content in the mandated curriculum
was neither relevant nor meaningful to her students. She was determined to find
alternatives for the students to be successful, while at the same time she was concerned
about maintaining her professionalism. She was able to find an ally in the
superintendent, but this alliance put her in a difficult position with her principal and the
Ministry. The past practice of the previous teacher and the high school credit acquisition
procedures of the Ministry left no space for Barbara to meet her students’ needs and
maintain her professional integrity. This tension resonated within me as I recalled my
beginning years of teaching, and in particular, the experience I shared in Chapter Two
about retaining five boys in Grade 2.
Barbara experienced more tensions of a different nature when she eventually moved to another school:

I taught at Saint Marie School in a Grade 5/6 classroom. When I was at that school I reported to the principal this girl had stolen another girl’s pair of sneakers. She had taken them, and even though the girl’s name was written on the outside on the rubber sole of the sneakers, she had crossed it out and put her name down. I reported it to the principal. Unbeknownst to me, my naivety, was that the punishment was the strap. The protocol was that the principal would administer so many whacks of the strap and then the classroom teacher had to administer it [as well]. That was probably the most traumatic experience I’ve ever had as a teacher. Even though I administered some very light blows, it didn’t matter, it was the action itself. I was quite shocked. That had never happened [long pause], when I was in Heritage. When I was in Beardspeak I had never heard of that. I didn’t have to do that. I moved to Saint Marie School and there it was. I felt terrible about it. I didn’t report it. It seemed to have been [long pause], it was the regular discipline policy of the school, accepted by the school and, as far as I knew, the community.

I don’t think she did it [stole the sneakers] to harm the other girl, but it’s so funny. We are talking Grade 5 and 6. She scratched out the name, and you could still see the name underneath and then she put her name on it. You know, she just thought, I’m gonna want them for a while. I don’t know, but after that I made a promise to myself I would never report anything to the principal again.
Nothing. Nothing. The kids could do whatever after that, and I made a commitment to myself, a vow that I would never report. I would take care of it myself. (Research Conversation with Barbara, April 8, 2014)

As I reread Barbara’s recount about this experience at Saint Marie School I sensed her outrage and frustration. She did not want to perform a physical act of discipline towards a child, but she did not feel she had the voice or agency to disobey the principal. Her solution was to handle discipline on her own. Barbara continued sharing her stories of experience at Saint Marie School and some of the frustrations she experienced with the school staff:

I had a five-month-old at that time and a year-and-a-half-old and we took our children with us [to the town] because Jack [Barbara’s husband] was teaching in Saint Marie School at the same time. We had a babysitter, and I was still nursing Kevin. I asked the teachers if they wouldn’t mind, because I was going over to nurse at lunch hour, if I could switch recess for noon-hour supervision. It was a harsh staff to crack. They said, “No.” So the elementary teachers who Jack taught with offered to come down and supervised for me so I could go nurse my baby. It was a hard staff. A very hard staff. (Research Conversation with Barbara, April 8, 2014)

The refusal of the teaching staff to accommodate Barbara’s request to switch supervision times so she could nurse her baby was extremely frustrating for her. She quickly learned that not all of her colleagues shared her views on support, caring, and
compassion. It was a harsh lesson for her to realize the support from her colleagues was not what she expected, nor what she would likely have done in the same situation.

4.8 Shifting Practice and Awakening to the Lives of Students

As our conversations continued, I shared with Barbara my experience teaching in an inner city school where the students were predominately of Aboriginal and Asian ancestry. It was this setting that I felt I truly solidified my understanding of supporting all children in an inclusive manner and where I learned how to adjust my teaching to meet the needs of the children in the classroom. This shift in my practice could not have been accomplished without the collaborative support of the team of teachers and staff with whom I was working:

I think about teachers who really teach kids, like you talked about in your experience, Gloria, and it makes me think you were teaching children. You weren’t teaching content. You know, and I know it sounds like a very simple statement, but [long pause] you knew relationship building had to happen first, especially understanding where the children came from before you could actually start working on the content. They needed to trust you and know you. Kids are so transparent. They believe that if you like them, and they know you like them, they will do anything for you. Anything. I’ve had those experiences.

I remember being a school-based administrator. It was a tough bunch, a very tough bunch of kids. I remember this one time, there was a group of girls that would go out on weekends and they would push all the buzzers in an apartment block, just to give you an example, and they would go in, and they’d urinate on
the floors in the hallways because they wouldn’t want to go home. They were kind of a rough nuts group.

This one girl was sent to me because one of the teachers had asked her to pick up some garbage off the floor. There was some crumpled-up paper, and the teacher asked her to pick it up. She told the teacher to f . . . off [sic]. I was sitting across from her. Her name was Stephanie. I was sitting across and I said, “Stephanie, come on, what would you have done if I had asked you to do it?” She said, “Well, I would have picked it up.” I said, “What? Well, why didn’t you pick it up for Mr. So and So?” And she said, “Because you like me, and I like you. He doesn’t like me. I’m not doing anything for him.” This wasn’t anywhere near where I was trying to head with this situation. It was just surprising to me, but she had it right. If you don’t develop that relationship, and if they don’t have that sense of trust with you, why would they do any work that they perceive as for you? They perceive it’s to please you as the teacher.

(Research Conversation with Barbara, April 8, 2014)

As our conversations continued, we reflected upon our experiences working with diverse groups of students. Barbara reflected upon her experiences working with Aboriginal students. Similar to me, Barbara’s childhood was limited in experiences with diverse populations. As adults, there were times when we were immersed in schools working with Aboriginal students and their families. The experiences we had were rewarding and taught us a deep appreciation for diversity:
I was brought up on the farm and had never seen a First Nations person. I was just isolated, nurtured, and protected. It’s remarkable what you are not prepared for, but how you deal with people, because you have no other idea of how to treat them any other way. You know? The gift we have been given by parents, who didn’t know. They protected me, but they never ever made a racial comment about anybody.

I remember when I was on maternity leave. I was walking down the street to go to downtown, and there was a passed-out woman in the entrance to these apartment buildings. There were people walking by. I stopped. There was a person there! I said, “There is a woman there! She needs our help!” I had my little girl. I had my baby in the stroller so there wasn’t a lot I could do, but I just didn’t understand why people walked right by. How they could do that?

(Research Conversation with Barbara, May 8, 2014)

Eventually Barbara transitioned to a school-based administrator position in an urban school. The school was situated in a geographic area of extreme poverty:

I’ve been in their homes. I’ve seen the dirt floors. It’s truly amazing how people live. It’s hard to believe how other people live. It really is. The school was on a major artery so people would walk by. We found so many needles after the spring thaw. We would have to pick up needles. I’d go out with the SRC, and everybody was trained in safety. We would go out and pick those up after the snow melted. Actually, we kind of made a game of it. How many can you find?
Who found the grossest thing? Who found the most unusual thing? Ooooh.

[laughter] (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 8, 2014)

Barbara shared her experiences about visiting the homes of students. Sometimes, she visited the homes to talk to family members to convince them to allow their children to continue attending school. Some families encouraged their children to quit school so they could work and provide additional income for the family. One family was particularly memorable for Barbara:

The dad was working on putting rafters together, and he was only getting paid minimum wage. And of course, physically, it was a difficult job so it was hard for him. They had relatives living in their home. Their coffee table was a place they would use as a coffee table during the day, but at night time a box spring would go on top of the coffee table for the bed. They slept on the box spring, on top of the coffee table. There were ripped out screens on the windows. The place was in shambles, and they had, I am sure, 15 people living in this little house sleeping in there somehow. I don’t know. There was only the dad that was working. This boy came to us, and he was in Grade 11. He was so bright. He was doing so well. It just broke my heart when he came in and told me he had to leave school. I checked how he was doing, and I said, “But you are doing so well! Why would you do that?” And he said, “I have to go to work. We need the money.” So that’s when I said, “Can I come meet with your mom?”

(Research Conversation with Barbara, May 8, 2014)
Barbara felt that visiting the student’s family might provide the family with a different perspective to consider. She hoped they would reconsider their decision and the student would be able to complete his high school education. The student accompanied her to his house:

His mom was delighted I was there. She was making cookies for a bake sale for their church. She was just so thrilled that I was there. And there is really a bizarre part to this. It was almost like she was trying to show me, just to please me. They had this parrot in the cage, and it was squawking. For some reason they let that parrot out because I commented, “Ohh, you have a parrot. Is that ever cool!” She said, “Oh, yah! Norman, let that parrot out.” I said, “Oh, no, no you don’t have to do that.” She said, “Oh, you go ahead. You show her.” He let that parrot out and that thing was flapping around all over the place. It was screeching. And then they were trying to get it back in the cage, and that was another episode. It was the most bizarre situation I had ever been in, but the whole time she was so kind. She wanted to please. She wasn’t negative. She didn’t tell me to get the hell out and what are you doing here? She could have. She understood her son was bright. She knew he was smart, but God would provide, and they needed him to work so he could help God provide for them.

(Research Conversation with Barbara, May 8, 2014)

4.9 Awakening to Ministry Mandates

Our conversations eventually moved to discussing the provincial Ministry mandate to increase graduation rates by 2020. We knew there was political motivation
for this type of mandate, but we also knew from our experiences with students and their families that there were many challenges to overcome to be able to achieve the goal. Sometimes the challenges faced by students and their families were beyond the control of the school to resolve:

What does a graduate look like? How do you define success as a living, breathing, contributing individual? Do they have to graduate in three years? Can it be four? Can it be five? Can it be six? Can it be somebody that is going to take over the ranch at age 16 or 17 because that’s their passion and their love? (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 8, 2014)

When Barbara and I reflected upon her story about the Grade 11 student, she observed that from the parent’s point of view, the gift their son could provide to the family was to not stay in school. Barbara commented the student’s mother was happy that her son had a chance to be at the school and learn the things he had learned. This was a different expectation for a student than both Barbara and I had, but we respected the family’s decision and tried to think about the situation from their perspective.

As Barbara and I reminisced about our experiences with students, I realized that a significant difference between us was that I worked with younger students and in many ways they were powerless to address family situations that may not have been in their best interests. Barbara spent the majority of her career working with high school students. Older students were capable of making decisions to leave their home and families, or to engage in behaviour in the home even when it was not in their best
interests. I commented to Barbara that it would be a different experience for me to see students starting to take control of their lives in their own way if they could.

Barbara’s teaching and school-based administrative experiences provided her with insight into the realities of the complex lives of students and their families. Throughout her career, Barbara consistently prioritized the needs of the children to ensure that their school experiences were the most positive she could provide. At times, she bumped into institutional and societal situations that were beyond her control. Each time, Barbara learned from her experiences and became even more determined to ensure that students were having positive experiences in school. After many years, Barbara’s eagerness to continue learning turned her towards a path to the central office of a school division.

4.10 Re-adjusting to Become a Senior Administrator in a School Division

Eventually Barbara was hired into a senior administrator position at the central office of a school division. As a senior administrator, Barbara faced several new challenging situations, among them implementing division-wide initiatives to change the existing culture within the school division:

One challenge I had was moving from the pre-amalgamation\(^{24}\) to the post-amalgamation around shared services. There were several school divisions that came together, and they hired speech and language pathologists, educational psychologists, and all those kinds of things. We needed to change the model of

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\(^{24}\) On January 1, 2006, Saskatchewan school divisions underwent a major restructuring, and several school divisions amalgamated (Kirk, 2008).
service. Amalgamation was a critical piece in how service was provided. It changed the format of it. I look back and think about the amount of time we collaborated with other school divisions to provide those shared services and how that collaboration kind of fell along the wayside because you didn’t have that any more. With amalgamation you had your own service providers, and you didn’t have to share them so why would you need to meet? Why would you talk about your needs? Why would you share your reports? Why would you do those things with someone else when you can focus internally? So, that was a bit of a shift.

At first, I remember it was kind of a competition about who was going to get which speech path or ed psych. The uncertainty of personnel impacted people. It impacted how people worked in their central office and how they treated people. It took a while for the post-amalgamation change in service to really take effect. It was years. It was the whole implementation of what amalgamation of services would look like. It was a change in a model of support. It makes me think there were some victims, I guess, of amalgamation. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 13, 2014)

4.11 Accountability on the Educational Landscape

The role of senior administrator typically involves any number of responsibilities. Examples of responsibility are: human resources, finance, transportation, facilities, operations, communications, board relations, media relations, technology, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student services. It requires the individual in the role to be
able to function efficiently and effectively in all areas while at the same time ensuring that the well-being, safety, and education of students are of the highest priority and quality. Barbara was introduced to most of these expectations and responsibilities in her first year as a senior administrator:

Working in central office is not necessarily linear. When I first started as a senior administrator, I did everything. I hired teachers. I hired educational assistants. I evaluated them. I provided student services support with the shared services. I sat at those tables. I represented the other senior administrators at those things that happened in each area. Curriculum, I provided that. Then, we reorganized, and that changed my role tremendously. It’s funny how at the division level you have this authority to make decisions that can impact a pretty significant group of people that all have an impact on the kids. You might be a couple of levels removed, but what your decisions are can have a huge impact on the person who is right beside the kids. That’s a pretty significant responsibility. The other thing I have learned is that the more people you have in central office, the more work you make for the schools. Everybody in the central office has to show they’re worthy of their place, and the only way they can show that is to make work for the schools.

Our people right now are pretty much burnt out. There have been extra things coming at them lately that I feel quite bad about, that I have no control over, but they’re there. I realize every time we hire somebody new that comes to our central office they want the teachers to do this. They survey them. They
send them emails and ask them questions. They tell them to do these things. I see it, and I have to remind our people to back off lots.

It’s that accountability thing. Everybody wants to get the evidence so, where do they get it from? They go right to the schools, and they ask for it. Send me this. Are you doing this? Are you doing that? Are you? Are you? Are you? I believe it can become extremely overwhelming. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 13, 2014)

While balancing multiple responsibilities, some senior administrators may feel a sense of loss when they move from schools to the central office of a school division. Schools are an intricate part of the work for a senior administrator, but the absence of seeing students on a daily basis is noticeable. Barbara commented on the impact that a shift in place had upon her:

The biggest change for me was the change of venue. All my life, when I was a teacher, when I was a school-based administrator, I got to be around kids and teachers in a school. Moving to a senior administrator role, I felt like I got punked from the school community. It was a huge adjustment. I believe that was one of the biggest senses of loss or isolation that a person has. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 13, 2014)

4.12 Improving Student Achievement

The role of a senior administrator is challenging, coming as it does with a diverse range of responsibilities, but it also brings the opportunity to influence learning opportunities for a large number of students, particularly when the school division is
committed as a whole to a particular goal or initiative. Barbara and I discussed successful literacy projects that we led within our school divisions:

I’m very proud of our team around reading. I think we’ve got a solid responsive reading program for the children in our division. We’ve got some excellent results coming back because we’ve established a momentum. I’m very proud of the work. Very proud of the work. I’m very proud of the teachers and what they are doing because they get it now. They didn’t at the beginning, but they get it now. It’s making a difference for kids and for teachers. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 13, 2014)

I understood Barbara’s excitement about the progress she was seeing in reading ability of students in the school division. Both Barbara and I were responsible to lead groups of teachers forward through the “learning for all” movement. The basic premise of the work is to move towards changing the philosophy of a traditional education system from the sorting and sifting of students toward a learning-for-all inclusive approach. Through our literacy projects, Barbara and I were able to provide the schools with extra supports and guidance by making changes in staffing structure, teaching practice, and professional development, and ensuring that appropriate resources

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25 Lezotte (2004) described “learning for all” as the mission schools need to accomplish. It is the belief that all students will be successful and learn to their full potential when seven correlates are present in a school. The seven correlates are effective instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly environment, climate of high expectations, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relations, opportunity to learn, and student time on task.
were allocated to schools to help teachers provide an inclusive classroom environment to meet the needs of all students.

I shared with Barbara my experience leading a successful literacy project. Unfortunately, after a few years, a change in senior leadership in the school division meant a change in strategic direction. Barbara agreed that a common issue for school divisions is the lack of long-term consistent focus. She, too, had experience with a change in strategic direction. When individuals on senior leadership teams change at the school division level, priorities change, and this results in challenges to sustain momentum or complete existing initiatives. When leadership teams change at the provincial Ministerial level, the impact on school divisions can sometimes be even more noticeable and directly impact classrooms across the province. Barbara and I discussed an initiative, Hoshin Kanri,\textsuperscript{26} introduced by the Ministry of Education. Barbara talked about the impact of the new initiative on school divisions:

I see us going in the same direction, and I see us going in the opposite direction, and it’s almost at the same time. It might sound extremely confusing, but I put it this way. We’ve always had, in every school division in this province as far as I am aware in my experience, strategic plans. I believe as LEADS members working in the schools to actualize improved outcomes for kids, every school division had goals in place and had strategic plans. Why they had to change a

\textsuperscript{26} The Government of Saskatchewan (n.d.) described Hoshin Kanri “as a systematic strategy planning/strategic management methodology” (para. 1).
CIF\textsuperscript{27} to a CIAF\textsuperscript{28} to an ESSP\textsuperscript{29} almost makes no sense to me. The only way I can sleep at night is to believe it’s just another term for a strategic plan and to look at the similarities.

I struggle with the complexity of the ESSP and where it puts directors and LEADS members in a responsibility role around the accountability piece. It has required directors to sign off on provincial strategic plans that separately they have no control over and limited resources to be able to reach the outcomes. School divisions need to be provided with resources so that they aren’t asked to improve the outcomes with less resources than what they’ve had before. I get the sense that when targets have been established through the ESSP, and no extra resources have been brought forward to deal with some of the systemic issues, that it is going to take way more than saying we are going to improve our graduation rates by 2020. It is cultural. It is contextual. It is systemic. You can’t just say it, and then say, “Okay Directors, you stand up and said it is going to happen.” If we don’t meet any of those targets, who is going to get blamed? It is colonization. It is, as I said, cultural. It is over time. It is something that is

\textsuperscript{27} Barbara is referring to the Continuous Improvement Framework discussed in Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{28} Barbara is referring to the Continuous Improvement Accountability Framework discussed in Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{29} In 2014, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) was introduced. The ESSP “provides short and long term outcome goals for education leading up to 2020” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014, para. 1).
going to take more than six years for us to change. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 22, 2014)

Barbara and I discussed the challenges and frustrations of being pulled in one direction and then the other in our roles as senior administrators. At times, we were placed in situations we knew did not make sense, but felt powerless to influence. Our conversations led us to discuss the complexities of working with Aboriginal peoples in on-reserve schools and provincial school systems. We wondered if the introduction of the ESSP would damage the relationships we had worked hard to build with Aboriginal peoples in the school divisions. It seemed that provincial and federal initiatives that were introduced to improve their lives often excluded Aboriginal peoples from the discussions and planning. One Aboriginal person encouraged me to reflect on the provincial focus to invest significant resources towards growing the immigration population. This person wondered what the impact on the provincial economy would be if the province invested in educating Aboriginal people to assist with anticipated labour shortages. Barbara had had similar conversations:

I’ll tell you something that happened to me in Swanson because we have a high population of Filipino families that have moved into Swanson. The question was posed at their newcomer centre by the Filipino families. They wanted to know what terrible thing must First Nations people have done to be treated the way they are. It takes someone from the outside to come in to actually put that mirror up. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 22, 2014)
4.13 Responsibility on the Educational Landscape

As our conversations continued, Barbara and I eventually discussed the challenges we had faced as senior administrators in human resources. We acknowledged that our approach to working with people was influenced by our memories of how we were treated and the feelings that resonated about the experiences. At times, being senior administrators positioned us to have experiences that were extremely difficult and involved legal ramifications:

I had to go through a process with an employee that ended up in his dismissal. It was my first year as a senior administrator. It was quite the experience going through the process. Getting support from the lawyer, duty to accommodate, all of those things. It was an interesting experience because it reminded me that no matter what a person does, or how stupid they might be in their actions, they still deserve respect and dignity. It sounds silly, but it is what it is sometimes. I believe that people don’t get up in the morning and think, “Today I am going to do a lousy job and I’m going to do these dumb things.” I believe they’ve got good intentions, but they end up sometimes doing those stupid things and then have a difficult time understanding that they are now accountable for it.

(Research Conversation with Barbara, May 22, 2014)

That conversation led me to reflect on the variety of difficult situations in which I had been directly involved, indirectly involved, or supported colleagues as situations unfolded. The label of “teacher” invokes a variety of stereotypes in people’s minds, but the reality is that teachers are humans who make mistakes. The harsh reality is that there
are situations in which a few teachers exhibit behaviours or make decisions that are not in the best interests of the students for whom they are responsible. Unfortunate situations do occur and senior administrators are often the individuals tasked with ensuring that such situations are handled confidentially and that students are not impacted. This is a major aspect about the senior administrator job that cannot be openly discussed. Even in my conversations with Barbara, we carefully chose our words to ensure that we did not divulge confidential details about situations we had dealt with in our role as senior administrators. We acknowledged, in a professional and confidential manner, how difficult these types of situations were.

Our conversations led Barbara and me to reminisce about being placed in circumstances that positioned us where we did not want to be. I shared an experience with Barbara about a particularly distressing day on which a staff member passed away in the office. As the events unfolded it seemed like a surreal experience where people went into a type of survival mode to deal with the situation. It was not until much later in the day when people were able to decompress to think and talk about the situation. Barbara understood what I meant, and she shared a similar experience:

I think about some of the tragedies of deaths of kids. It’s really an indicator of what leadership is because I think the leader just goes on autopilot. You do whatever you can, and it’s almost [long pause] and you know, I want to say it. It’s the maternal instinct. I think that all of the sudden it turns on, and it says whatever you do, you take care of the survivors. You can’t change the situation, but by God, you are strong for everybody else around. Like when you have
people surprise you at a meal. They arrive and you don’t have enough dessert, so you go without. You go without the sympathy. You go without the comfort. You go without that. You provide it. And then when it’s all said and done, in the privacy of your home, that’s when you release it. I don’t know what that’s called. I would like to say that is maternal, but maybe it isn’t, I don’t know, but I like to think it is. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 22, 2014)

Barbara and I talked about having a “kids first” attitude as teachers in the classroom and transitioning to the central office and expanding that attitude to include “all people” first. It was the way we lived our lives. We acknowledged that placing people first was how we received our energy. We discussed our inner strength and wondered how we developed and maintained it. We talked about our strong family support system as well as our strong group of friends that we could turn to for support:

It’s protecting others that comes first. It’s pretty hard sometimes. I have to tell you, there have been times where there were things I just gave up on. I remember days when there was, it seemed, several crises. You would go from one to the other, to the other. I remember days when I walked out of the office, and I would turn the corner to go out into the hallway, and I said to myself, “Okay God, just bring it on. What’s next?” You know you get to that point where you’re on your knees. You’re just on your knees. You know you’re just coping. You just got to give it up and say, “Okay, if there’s going to be more, then let’s just do it.” If you ever sat down and allowed it to be overwhelming, it
could very easily take you there. (Research Conversation with Barbara, May 22 2014)

At times, the situations that senior administrators deal with are extremely challenging and happen so quickly that at the end of the day it can seem like several days of events have occurred, but you soon realize it all happened in one day. I shared with Barbara the events of one particularly challenging day that began with a death in the school division and ended with the birth of a baby. When I reflected upon the events, it felt like a lifetime was lived in that single day.

4.14 Conclusion

The decision to become a senior administrator places people in an extremely complex and dynamic position. The preparation begins many years prior, when that future administrator is a classroom teacher. As years pass, a portion of teachers leave the classroom to pursue administrative responsibilities in schools or school division central offices. Positions beyond the classroom provide exposure to a diversity of situations that teachers would not typically experience in the classroom.

Barbara and I reflected upon our respective decisions to transition from our roles in schools to senior administer roles in the central office of school divisions. We asked ourselves why we transitioned into those roles. Each of us expressed a desire to learn more and be challenged by experiencing different situations. We wanted the chance to be influential in providing more learning opportunities for students, and this was evident in both of the literacy projects that we led. We acknowledged that moving from a school to the central office of a school division was challenging and rewarding, but the
move did come with a sense of loss because our day-to-day activities no longer included regular interactions with students. We missed the day-to-day activity and familiar rhythms and routines of schools. As we reflected on the question of why, Barbara remembered the words of advice she received from a colleague:

Jonathan Smith always told me, and this was something I always remembered.

He said, “Whenever there is an opportunity, to pay attention to those opportunities because they very much could become a missed opportunity.

(Research Conversation with Barbara, February 8, 2015)

Neither Barbara nor I planned to become senior administrators, but when the opportunity presented itself, we felt we should take it, knowing that we might feel regret later if we didn't. Our years of experience in schools prepared us for some of the challenges in the central office, but it was the mentoring and enculturation from our LEADS colleagues that enabled us to learn more about aspects of education that we were not exposed to in the classroom or in prior supervisory roles. Opportunities to learn from each other were extremely important. The senior administrator role places enormous responsibility on the shoulders of individuals, and the work is often not understood by those who have not been in this type of role. Barbara and I grew as individuals in the role of a senior administrator. We agreed that the benefits exceeded the drawbacks. The role of senior administrator provided us with experiences far beyond what we had originally anticipated. What we learned from being involved in various situations strengthened our leadership skills, deepened our knowledge about education, and made us eager to continue our learning journeys.
CHAPTER FIVE: Alice

In this chapter, I will introduce Alice\textsuperscript{30} to share a co-composed narrative account about her life experiences with schools\textsuperscript{31}. During this narrative account, Alice described

\textsuperscript{30}The names and places identified in this chapter are pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the participant and people mentioned in this narrative account. At times, the gender of a person is changed to protect the identity of the person in the shared experience.
her experiences as a child at school and home, then shared her memories about becoming a teacher, a school-based administrator, and eventually a senior administrator in the central office of a school division.

Alice’s experiences were powerful, and as she recalled them, multiple layers unfolded and, sometimes, silences purposefully remained. Alice described feelings of turmoil and bumps she experienced when she encountered tensions. There was a strong sense of place as Alice’s memories surfaced and she shared experiences about attending school as a young student, then working in schools, and eventually in the central office of a school division. Alice’s stories transitioned across a variety of settings from rural to urban, school to home, and schools to the central office of a school division.

5.1 Introducing Alice

Alice has been a senior administrator for a school division for many years. From my observation, Alice is an informal mentor to other senior administrators in the province because they seem to respect her advice and are interested in learning more

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This chapter was co-composed by Alice and me over a period of several months. Similar to Chapter Four, a desire the reader may have is to question the narrative account for underlying messages or answers to unanswered questions. Clandinin (2000) reminds narrative inquirers, “Our guiding principle in an inquiry is to focus on experience and to follow where it leads” (p. 188). Neumann (1997) wrote: “… though story and author existing in text are readily identifiable, a story and an author exist, as well, but in far less visible form, in the silence and blankness that exist with text, around it, as context” (p. 108).

Readers of this chapter are encouraged to wonder and puzzle about the silences and blankness that exist in the sharing of experiences. In Chapters Six and Seven, I will revisit the experiences shared in this study to intertwine puzzles, wonders, and learning from creating this narrative inquiry.
about how she handles contentious situations, especially those related to curriculum, assessment, instruction, and learning.

I met Alice at a conference we attended. Her easygoing manner, positive attitude, and sense of humour made her easy to approach. When I reminisce about my conversations with Alice I instantly recall her smile that usually lights up her face. I have a deep sense of respect for her extensive knowledge about education and her practical advice. During conversations, she expressed feelings that our friendship was reciprocal, and that she, too, felt respect for my knowledge about education. Alice’s instinct is particularly acute, and I have always trusted her opinion about situations and dilemmas encountered on the educational landscape.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, Alice begins with stories about her experiences being schooled as a child. Alice reflected upon her childhood experiences in a turbulent home situation, and she was attentive to how her childhood experiences have influenced her decisions and actions as an adult. Alice’s narrative account transitioned to her experiences working in schools as a teacher. Alice’s experiences as a teacher made her aware of tensions and, at times, she was frustrated with the traditions found within schools and the impact of traditional teaching practices on students. Alice shared her experiences as she transitioned to become a senior administrator in a central office in a school division. She shared her feelings about leaving the familiar routine of schools, and described how she maintained her relationship with the teachers and students in schools. Alice reminisced about successful division-wide initiatives she led and shared challenges she encountered. Alice shared experiences that are often not told by senior
administrators, and it is through her recounting of her experiences that several emotions surfaced within her, ranging from celebratory to disappointment. I close this chapter with puzzles and wonders that emerged as this narrative account unfolded.

5.2 Storied Beginnings of Schooling

To begin our conversations related to this narrative inquiry, Alice created a collage of words on a piece of paper, with each word representing a significant life experience. In subsequent conversations, Alice’s chronicle became the starting point for some of her storied experiences. Alice began her narrative account by recalling her experiences in kindergarten:

I remember a few key pieces in my K\textsuperscript{32} to 12 schooling. I remember kindergarten. I went to kindergarten in Mrs. Martin’s house. The school division had kindergarten, but she did it in her house. The practice was started by my grandma, who actually had the first kindergarten class in Kamari. When my brother was that age, there was no kindergarten in the school. My grandma, who was a teacher, approached the school and said, “Can I start a kindergarten and can it be part of the school?” They said, “Sure!” So it was in her basement when my brother went, and she did it for two years. I went, too. Then Mrs. Martin took over when I went so I actually am the only person I know that went to kindergarten for three years. I had a very good foundation in kindergarten! [laughter]

\textsuperscript{32} The letter K refers to kindergarten.
I remember one day bringing my cousin to kindergarten with me because her mom was going to be away, and there was no babysitter so she came with me to kindergarten because you could do those things. I remember making cupcakes for people’s birthdays in the oven in her kitchen. You know, it was the home kind of experience that we want for our kids today. I have good memories of that, and then we moved for Grade 1. So I did kindergarten in Kamari, and I moved to Morrison for Grades 1 to 4. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 1, 2014)

Alice’s hands-on experiences in kindergarten left a strong impression on her. Years later as we were talking about this experience she was able to recall amazing detail. She recalled the feelings she experienced, specific details about activities she did in school, and the names of other students in her classroom and the school. Alice excelled academically, and she appreciated when she was given the freedom by her teachers to progress ahead of her classmates and work at her own pace:

When I got to Morrison I remember being terrified to go to school because I didn’t know anybody. I had no friends there. I went to Grade 1. I remember doing the exact same workbook that I did in kindergarten, only I got it all right, and they were so amazed that I got every question in the whole book right. Then in Grade 2, I got to go in a split grade class. The teacher was happy and bubbly and welcoming. Every day you wanted to go to school. She was the kind of teacher that you could work at your own speed, and she helped when she could.
She was really about people and about connecting. Everybody was welcomed in that classroom.

We [the Grade 2 students] did the SRA\(^{33}\) where you read the story and then you did the multiple choice questions. I remember doing those because you worked on your own through whatever colour levels you were in. I remember writing the answers in one of the books, and the teacher was so annoyed. At the front of the class she talked about people that wrote the answers in the books, and they shouldn’t do that for the next and it was like, uhhh! I went and I told her it was me that did it. She was so pleased. She told the class that there was an honest person in here, and that’s what she truly appreciated and valued. She didn’t say it was me, but it made you feel good for doing the right thing. She was about kids and that relationship piece.

I remember in Grade 3, I had Mrs. Perry as my teacher. In Grade 3, I came to love math. Math was fun. I just got it. I remember doing a CTBS\(^{34}\) test. I remember the problem-solving section, and at the end of the test Mrs. Perry asked me to stay back after class. I remember being so worried. Nobody had ever asked me to stay after class. I knew how to do school, right? I was the good kid. I was just terrified. She called me to her desk, and she asked me to explain how I got the answers that I did on the paper. I remember telling her I see the pictures in my head, and I just go through. She said, “Well, you’re very good.

\(^{33}\) SRA refers to the SRA Reading Laboratory available from McGraw-Hill Education.

\(^{34}\) CTBS is the acronym for “Canadian Test of Basic Skills.”
You scored at the Grade 12 level!” She said, “I just wanted to know how you did them.” So we went through some of them. I just talked my way through, and that was the beginning of metacognitive thinking for me as an eight-year-old.

I never found school hard. I hated reading. I never read anything. I received 90’s in English through to Grade 12, and I never read a book because I figured out how to do school at a young age. You don’t have to do the work if you just listen to the cues that people give you, and so that’s how I did school. I was a hard worker. I’d find ways to get it done, but the reading thing, you don’t have to read to go to school. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 1, 2014)

During our conversations about her schooling experiences, Alice mentioned several times that she knew how to “do” school. She was a good student and never got into trouble. She excelled in all subject areas, and her high marks on report cards reflected her ability.

5.3 Storied Home Experiences

School was a safe place for Alice to be, and it was within this type of environment she flourished. Alice’s experiences in her home environment were very different:

We moved in Grade 5 back to Kamari. There’s a whole other side in this story that has had a big effect. My dad was an abusive alcoholic, and so through this whole time there was a lot of things going on at home that were not pleasant or fun. I remember as young as Grade 2 going home at dinner to phone my mom in the hospital because my mom would be in the hospital. My dad would tell me
that she’s going to die, she’s never coming home, and I remember going and phoning. So home wasn’t great. School was good. I knew how to do school because I knew how to stay out of trouble.

My dad was mean when he drank. I remember one time in the middle of the night he was beating my mom, and I got up. I was probably 6 or 7, and it kind of stopped when I was there. I remember shaking my finger at him and telling him I was never, ever going to be like him. I was never going to drink, and I was never going to smoke, and I was going to make something of my life because I was never going to do what he was doing or be like him. I guess it was just seeing that and living that. It was like that’s enough. I had to figure it out because I had to.

I give my mom lots of credit for perseverance. She divorced my dad when I was 25. She had lots of death threats. I remember coming home one night, and mom was sitting at a chair. When you walked in the door the table was there, and she was sitting at the chair with her back to the door playing cards. My dad had a butcher knife that was long behind his back, and he was walking up to her. I remember finding guns behind the curtains when we cleaned the house on Saturday mornings. You just never knew, but, I’ll also tell you the other side.

My dad was the nicest guy in the world. Everybody loved him. He had personality to burn. He was kind and engaging. He had a sense of humour. He was loveable. He was all good things. He really was. My dad was an incredible
hockey player. Someone from the NHL came to get my dad to play with one of the teams. My grandpa wouldn’t let him go. He told him, “No, you have to stay home and take over the family business.” And so, I always wondered how that affects the psyche. How does that affect kids? How can we change that so that every kid feels valued and welcomed? They have potential. There are things that they can do. There’s good in everyone. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 1, 2014)

5.4 Storied Experiences with Teachers

Alice explained that because her life at home was not conducive to studying school work, she turned to sports. Alice was athletic. Throughout her years in school she was involved in numerous sports such as softball, curling, basketball, volleyball, and track and field. To pay for her sports, Alice earned extra money by babysitting in the community. She described sports as a lifesaver for her throughout her years in school. Sports provided a type of hiding place where she could forget about her home life, but it also led to additional challenges that no student should have to experience:

There’s also [long pause], how do I say this? There was also a high school teacher that should probably be in jail. That had a profound effect on me, but who’s going to believe you because you’re the kid from the home that has [long pause], you know. That was hard. That was very hard to try and get through that because you had nobody. Through it all what you’re learning is what makes kids who they are, what gives them persistence, what helps them to be confident.
I’ve had lots and lots of really good opportunities through sports. It teaches you something about teachers as well. You always appreciated the teachers giving you those opportunities, but boy, some of them were shysters. There’s such a double standard. We would go to tournaments. We used to billet in those days, and you’d stay with other kids. You’d end up at the wildest parties because that’s where the billet was, and you were hostage. You had no place to go. The teachers would get after the kids, and yet, the teachers were drunker than a skunk. The next day they would be at the tournament. What’s the standard that we held them to? Some people thought it was so good of them to give up every weekend, but I didn’t think they were giving it up for me. I think they were giving it up to go and hang out with their buddies and drink. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 1, 2014)

As Alice recollected her experiences with sports and the sometimes outrageous behaviour by some teachers, the tone of her voice resonated with me. At times, her voice shook and she spoke very fast to get her words out. I could hear the emotion in her voice and see the conflicting emotions flash across her face. We talked about how she felt as an adult, reflecting upon her experiences as a high school student heavily involved in sports. Alice witnessed and experienced circumstances with a few teachers that were very disconcerting to her. Her trust level towards a few of her teachers was low, and she felt betrayed by their actions. The behaviour of these teachers was incomprehensible to Alice.
Currently in Alice’s life, she has a sense of acceptance about the events that occurred in her past, and she has moved on. Alice reasoned that if she were to openly confront one particular high school teacher from her past, to make him accountable for his inappropriate behaviour towards her when she was a high school student, it would result in innocent people being hurt. I felt a deep sense of respect for Alice, for the strength and courage she exhibited both as a young girl and in the current moment, as she chose to share her experiences with me.

As our conversation continued, Alice reflected on other observations she had witnessed about some teachers’ behaviours. Alice promised herself that she would never repeat the outrageous and disrespectful behaviour she witnessed from a few of the teachers she had when she was a student:

I figured out how to do school, and maybe that was because life had taught me there were times when you just shut up and you just hide. There were teachers that called other kids names, and I can think of several of them, you know, like “gobber.” Who calls a 12-year-old boy “gobber” and thinks he’s going to have any self-concept? I could never call kids by their nicknames. I just couldn’t do it, but there were lots of teachers that did. There were kids that struggled in school. They were just left alone. It didn’t seem like people cared about your circumstances. It was like I’m [the teacher] here today to teach, and you’re [the student] here to learn and too bad. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 1, 2014)
5.5 Stories to Live By Forever

Despite the negative experiences Alice had with a few teachers during her schooling, she shared with me that she did enjoy school, and she decided as a young child that she wanted to be a teacher. When Alice recalled her experiences in school she realized her experiences influenced the type of teacher she wanted to be as well as the type of parent she wanted to be:

When I reflect on all the people in my life, there were a lot of teachers that did a lot of really good things, but there were a few teachers that did some really crappy things to kids. I had some of them. It was always devastating to me to watch the way a few teachers treated kids. I never wanted kids to experience what I experienced in school. That high school teacher that did those things to me; no kid should have to do that. They should have safe people to talk to at school. There should be people there that welcome them when they come in as little people and really make them believe this is a good place to be. All kids have strengths, and they have a lifetime of opportunity ahead. I always really wanted them to believe in their potential.

I felt pretty strongly that I wanted to make a difference. I felt pretty strongly that if I ever got married and had kids that I wanted to be able to help them in a way that I was never helped. I didn’t really need school help as a kid, but it was more about ensuring that every kid could dream their dreams, and that every kid had potential. I think my daughter summed it up best when she was seven. She is so much smarter then I’ll ever hope to be. Susan said to me,
“Mom, you know, I’m only gonna ever understand as much as I can imagine.” I said to her, “What does that mean?” In her little condescending voice she said to me, “Well, think about it. If I can only ever understand the little bit, there’s not much for me to know, but if I can imagine really big, there’s lots I can learn and do.” Truly that’s been kind of my philosophy. She just put it into words. Our job as adults is to dream big for kids and to provide them with every opportunity to get there, because they can. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

Alice concluded that sometimes negative experiences happen for a reason, and as a result individuals become stronger. Alice was able to move past the negative of her experiences, and she emerged strong and true to herself. She refused to let someone else maintain power over her. As we talked, Alice reminded me that she had lots of training on how to look after herself:

Remember, I started that when I was six, with my dad. I guess I’m stubborn. I think when you look at things through life, everything is for a purpose. When I was in schools working with kids, there was one high school girl that struggled a lot. I spent a lot of time with her. Ultimately, the story came out that she had been sexually abused by her coach. We talked about how to deal with that. I was able to be in her shoes with her to share stories and to give her courage for her future. So, for that moment in time, to be able to do that for her was okay. It made it worth it. Sometimes these things come to us, and we don’t know why, and we don’t know how, but they are always for a reason. We have the power to
make those be what they are. We don’t have to live them every day. They are behind us. We just have to make sure. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

Alice’s honest and emotional account of her experiences in schools and being schooled left an impression upon me. I felt humbled that she was able to take her experiences, both positive and negative, and become a stronger individual. She turned negative experiences into positive by drawing upon her past to help students. She was able to sense when students were in need, and she reached out to offer unconditional assistance. As we transitioned to talking about her experiences as a teacher, her caring and compassionate manner became more evident.

5.6 Storied Teaching Experiences

Alice and I discussed our experiences as teachers, and in particular, our experiences as new teachers. At times, we felt the traditional rules in schools did not provide us with the space to properly handle the situations we encountered in the classroom and, at times, we felt students were disadvantaged because of the restrictive traditional culture. We understood that teachers could feel overwhelmed and frustrated as they tried to reconcile feelings about knowing what needed to be done and what they knew was expected from them. We felt sometimes that there were obstacles that prevented us from taking the action we desired. Alice was introduced to this experience quickly because she had a particularly memorable first day of school as a new kindergarten teacher:
I studied. I read. I planned my first unit. It was going to be on apples because what kindergarten doesn’t start with apples? On the first day, I went into my classroom, and the kids started coming in. And they came in. And they came in. And they came in. Thirty of them! Twenty-two boys and eight girls. Three sets of twin boys! I had no help. I didn’t have enough of anything for anybody. I felt like I was going to die. There were parents crying. There were kids crying. There were not enough forms. There were shoes all over. I didn’t know whose shoes were whose.

I thought we’d figure this out. No problem. I was sure I could do this. I thought if they could just get doing something while we get this process over, we’d be good. So, eventually we got started. The principal came to the door and saw 30 kids, three sets of twins, and I don’t know how many parents. There were at least 50 people in my room. He was a brand new principal, and he didn’t really know what to do either. He said, “Well, this is not good. Maybe I could see if I could get somebody to help you.” So he sent Mary down to my room. She was an EA.35 Wonderful, wonderful person. So, we got the parents out the door. We got the kids somewhat settled. We went out for recess at a different time than everybody else because I couldn’t even count them. For the twins, I didn’t know which one was which. We were out on the playground, and the principal came out. He said, “I phoned the director, and he said maybe we should think about splitting this class.” I didn’t know what to do. When I had 17

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35 EA is the acronym for educational assistant.
students I was going to be a .4 teacher. Not full-time. It was a great job. This was totally unmanageable. He said, “We’ve got to check the budgets, and we’ll see if we can split the classes.” Great, but meantime, I didn’t have enough of anything for the day. I didn’t even have enough chairs.

And then, at quarter to 12, we were cleaned up and ready to have lunch. It had been a pretty stressful morning. The principal came to my door again, and he said, “Can I see you? Have you got your kids ready for lunch? Is Mary staying?” He said, “If you can get them eating, there’s a phone call in my office that you need to take.” So I told the kids what I wanted. I told Mary. Everybody was kind of moving in that direction. I went to his office, and on the phone was a hospital in Halifax. They told me my dad had been admitted, and he was not going to live through the day. I had no idea that he was sick. Didn’t know anything about it. And now he’s dying? Today. And I’m here with this zoo. My daughter was sick at home with a 104 fever. What was I going to do? Obviously, I needed to go to Halifax, so I went to tell the principal what the situation was. He said, “Okay. When you get to the end of the day, and once you’ve divided your classes, and once you’ve sorted all the lockers and have everybody divided into two, then you can go.” I was like; you’re kidding me, right? My dad is dying. Now. I really need to go. So I stayed, and I did all that stuff after school. I got home. I hadn’t phoned [my husband] because if I had to talk about it I was going to lose it. So that was my first day. It was really terrible. It gets worse. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)
After Alice received the news about her father on her first day of teaching, she began to prepare for her next steps:

We made plans that we would go to Halifax. We kept talking to the doctor, and there was no way my dad was living through the night, and he didn’t. He passed away at about 2:30 that morning. So I gave my stuff for my apple unit and my bags of apples to one of the teachers for the sub. We went to Halifax, and my grandparents were there. My dad’s parents were so upset. Well, my grandpa was. My grandma had Alzheimer’s and she didn’t know where the nice man was that watered her flowers. We went to dad’s apartment, and well, I’m not even going to tell you what it looked like. He [had] internally hemorrhaged. It looked like the “Texas Chainsaw Massacre.” We had to deal with all that. Get everything ready. Bring his body home for the funeral. Cremate it. It was a week of constant stress. We got home. We had the funeral, and I went back to school the next day. I needed normal. I needed to get it back together. So I went to school. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

When Alice returned to her classroom, she discovered that the lessons she had planned for the students had not been shared with the substitute teacher. Alice was immersed into another difficult situation when she discovered that her colleagues were not what she expected in terms of being welcoming and supportive:

I went to school the next morning, and I walked into my classroom. I’m an early morning person so I was there before anybody. I smelled apples. The box I had sent with all my stuff was neatly put on the back shelf. The neighbour teacher
stuck it there. The sub that came was the director’s wife! Do you know what they told the director’s wife? They guessed I didn’t know I had to plan for a sub. The director must have thought he hired the most incompetent person he knew. My dad had just died. I was crisis-sing [sic]!

That’s how I started work. Yah, maybe it was not your classic first day of school or first week, but you know, what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. Fortunately, the director’s wife was subbing in another classroom that day. I thought, I just have to go and talk to her. I introduced myself, and I said, “No, it was there. Can you tell me what you did or what you know?” She came with me to my room and she saw all the stuff, and she was the one that told me what the other teachers told her. I said, “I am so sorry. I don’t know what else I could have done.” And she said, “No, you did everything you should have done.” She became my best friend. She was so wonderful. She was the best sub you could ever have. She loved the kids, and the kids loved her. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

5.7 Living Tensions Within Schools

Alice’s challenges with the teachers in the school continued, and she struggled to understand why they would treat her in an unfriendly manner. She felt she may have been unintentionally threatening to the teachers because she was quite a bit younger. She represented a new type of teacher, and her teaching methods were very different from the traditional teaching methods used by the other teachers in the school. As Alice reflected upon the teachers, I could hear the frustration in her voice as she struggled to
understand the half-hearted introduction to the teaching profession that they provided to her. Their support for Alice, as a new teacher, was nonexistent:

I said to [the director’s wife], “I don’t know how to break into here because they are like Fort Knox. They do not want me. I am the enemy. I actually had the nerve to walk to the high school end and talk to the teachers. That was a definite do-not-do. That line on the floor might not have been there, but it was there. The bumps I had as a teacher were always with the teachers around me. I have always been blessed to have one or two people that really believed in me. My problems were always the interactions with the other teachers in the elementary end of the school. I got along great with all the people in the high school, but those old school people [in the elementary end of the school] really didn’t like to have somebody new that was going to do something different that maybe would lead parents to the impression that [the other teachers] should be doing something different. I remember having conversations with parents at parent-teacher interviews. They would come to my classroom, and they would say to me this was the only classroom [where] they ever got to know who their kids were and what their kids did. I never knew how to answer that. You can’t really sell out your colleagues. I always felt bad. I always felt we have a real responsibility to the parents. We’ve been given the gift of their kids, and we owe them something. They don’t owe us anything. Some teachers never really got my philosophy.

(Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)
As we talked, Alice shared her experience working through a difficult situation with a principal at the school. Alice described the principal’s inefficient and ineffective behaviour. Her strong advocacy position for students often put her at odds with the principal. One serious incident made her doubt her decision to become a teacher:

We got a new principal for our school. Nice enough fellow. Very social. He was well read. It was easy to see how he could win any competition for a principalship, but it was devastating for us as a school. The principal that left had standards. He was very efficient. When this new fellow came, there were no expectations. A lot of things happened that should never have happened. He would not order any of the supplies. He wouldn’t order us day books. It was easy for me to see things were sliding, but what do you do? A situation came where he crossed the line, and kids got hurt.

I was worried about [a student], and that she was being sexually abused at home. We had the classic symptoms happening at school, but her parents didn’t have a phone. She was staying with her grandma and grandpa sometimes. The vice-principal and I had been dealing with it with Social Services. We explained our game plan to the principal. We needed to make sure the game plan happened in a safe way so the child was protected.

I’ll never forget this day. It was Valentine’s Day. The kids were sharing their valentines, and the phone rang. I went over and picked it up, and it was the principal. He said, “Yep, don’t worry about it! I have the situation solved. I phoned the grandparents, and they say there is nothing to it. We’ve alerted them.
Everything is good. You don’t have to worry about it.” I slammed the phone down before I realized what I did. I was so mad. I was blazing hot. I don’t know if I have ever been so mad at anybody in my life! I went and got the vice-principal and said, “Do you know what he just did? He just sentenced that kid to a life of who knows what?” I phoned Social Services. I was so upset, and I was so angry. We never saw that kid again. They were gone the next day. I was so angry. I said to the vice-principal, “You either phone the central office or I will. And I will tell you what, if I phone them today, I may not have a job tomorrow. So, you better do it.” He phoned. To me he said, “Just calm down, calm down. We’ll get this figured out. We’ll figure it out.” I was just livid.

On Monday morning the central office phoned me, and I was furious. You never endanger a kid’s life! Never! I said, “Look. This is my last year of teaching. I’m done. I can’t be part of this. If that’s the way the school division wants to run things, I can’t be part of it.” They came out that afternoon. Before the end of the day the principal called the staff together, and he informed us that he was leaving at the end of the year. It was really kind of ugly. It was not a fun time, but you know when you talk about those troubled kids they have to come first. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

Alice described a sense of helplessness when she knew that the principal’s actions were wrong and not in the best interests of students. She knew what needed to be done and took steps to address the situation to correct it. As Alice shared with me her experiences working with challenging teachers and an inefficient principal, her
frustration was apparent. It was equally apparent to me that Alice found joy in reminiscing about teaching the students.

5.8 Being Wakeful to the Lives of Children and Youth

Alice expressed delight and humour when she recalled her experiences with former students. I could see the joy on her face and hear the passion in her voice as she shared her memories:

The kids [referring to the kindergarten students she taught in her first year of teaching] were great, and I learned a lot that year. The twins were all wonderful. I had one set of twins that truly, I could write a book about them. Johnny and Ronny were their names. They were farm boys. True farm boys. They had cattle. They would come to school, and they’d always walk with me. They’d walk with me on the playground. They’d follow me. Everywhere I went, Johnny and Ronny went. At Halloween, I had centres set up with orange finger paint. I had other centres going on, but at this one centre Ronny just stood there and looked at it. I tried to be encouraging, but not pushy. I talked to the other kids about how it [the finger paint] was feeling. When I came back, Ronny finally had the very tips of his fingers in the paint with his hands arched up. I was internally celebrating! I asked how it felt. He pulled up his hands, and he said, “Well Mrs. Jones, it’s kind of like when you stick your hand in and pull a calf out of a cow!” [laughter] I could understand why he didn’t want to put his hands in there! They [Johnny and Ronny] were priceless. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)
Alice’s philosophy about teaching was child-centred. She understood the importance of taking advantage of teachable moments. In the classroom, Alice was a spontaneous teacher attentive to unexpected learning opportunities for students:

I believe kids should talk and play. We should build things together. I remember one time in the spring we had ants crawling on the floor, and the kids were screaming. We ran for petri dishes, and we made ant apartment buildings, and learned about ants that day. We just had a blast. We let them go outside the vice-principal’s window because, you know, they could crawl back into his office. We wrote stories about them. You weren’t supposed to do that kind of stuff. You weren’t supposed to set kids up for that kind of experience. I remember my director would come for his observation, and he would say to me, “You know your way works with these kids this year, but it’s not going to work every year for you.” And the next year he’d come back, and he’d say, “You know, your way works with these kids this year, but it’s not going to work every year for you.” Probably if he was alive today he’d say to me, “You know you’re way isn’t going to really work.” It works for me because that’s who I am. So, we had fun in kindergarten. It was a good place to be.

My job [as a teacher] was really about creating a world of wonder. It was about holding that magnifying glass as big as I could get, for as much time as I could give the kids, and really let them become who they are. Kindergarten was a fun place to be. I absolutely hated the first six weeks. Every year I hated it. It was about routines and procedures. It was about respect me now, like me later.
Once you got that going, life was great. I didn’t like having to be the first one to tell their parents that maybe their perception of normal wasn’t quite normal. You know? But, that first year, aside from being totally side-whacked by the teachers, was a pretty good year. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

The connection Alice made with her first-year kindergarten students was profound: many years later, when the students were in Grade 12, they invited Alice to be the Mistress of Ceremonies (MC) at their graduation:

[That] was kind of cool. I opened up with the line, “I was the first one to welcome you into school, and I get to be the first one to say, now it’s time to leave.” (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

Alice had been teaching kindergarten for several years when the Grade 2 teacher retired. The principal encouraged Alice to move to the Grade 2 classroom. Alice took the advice and made the change. She reminisced about the lessons she learned from teaching kindergarten, and how the lessons influenced her as a Grade 2 teacher:

Kindergarten was a great training ground. Each child is a unique gift. Each child, from their parent’s perspective, is normal. We have to really think about that. They’re not doing this to us. That’s who they are. That’s the lens they come to us with. Kids can have fun and learn at the same time. We don’t have to be in rows, in desks. As teachers we have power, and we have responsibility to imagine big and to create believers out of the kids to let them know that they can. We create that world of wonder to encourage their uniqueness.
I get frustrated with people that want kids in rows and desks. Let them be who they are and build on their strengths. Watch them each grow as a flower in your garden. In kindergarten you just nourish it. They just grow and they love it. They’re so loving, welcoming, and appreciative. I think it’s a real blessing to be able to teach kindergarten. That’s where you learn about communication and collaboration with parents and the importance of positive presupposition. That’s when you learn [that] when you love them the least, they really need you to love them the most. Each day is just one day in my life, but it is the beginning of their life. There’s a lot of power in that for us. That’s how you start teaching. Every day after that can only be a gift.

Grade 2 was a different kind of training ground. When I went into Grade 2 the previous teacher had ordered me the plaid phonics books36, the readers with workbooks, and the math workbooks. I was just like, seriously? Not every kid is a carbon copy. This isn’t what this is about! So, I started guided reading when guided reading wasn’t cool. I had math investigation boxes because that’s how kids should learn. They should get to play. I really started to question the practices in classrooms.

I went back to the curriculum documents. I remember taking the math curriculum document and spending about 250 hours one summer taking it apart and theming all of my units together. I themed my math units and tallied how

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36 The plaid phonics workbook that Alice referred to was published by Modern Curriculum Press and was used widely in classrooms to teach elementary students phonics skills.
many times I taught an objective to make sure I had 40% in the numbers and operations strand, but if anybody came in to observe and be part of that, they were scared. I had a guided reading group, and four centres, and I had two projects all going on without an [educational assistant]. It was like, whoa, you can’t do that, but really, if you want it to be about the kids, it has to be like that. (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

Alice and I talked about our experiences as teachers disrupting the status quo. We agreed that as teachers we could choose to be part of the status quo, but we chose to not be that type of teacher. We agreed that teachers needed to disrupt the status quo for the sake of students:

It really is about the kids, right? To stay the same, you go behind. There is no staying the same. I remember when I was teaching Grade 2, the principal literally shook his finger in my face, and said to me, “Alice, you have to get used to being middle of the pack.” I looked at him with total disbelief. When he told me this, I was trying to advocate for something. I remember I shook my finger back at him, and said, “You know what? You can get used to being the middle of the pack. I can’t afford to be because these are kids. This is their future. And I will never, ever settle for one of them.” (Research Conversation with Alice, April 17, 2014)

As Alice and I continued our conversations, we discussed our experiences as teachers learning about the lives of the students we taught. We were both determined to
SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS (RE)COMPOSING STORIES TO LIVE BY

ensure that the time students spent in our classrooms was a positive experience for all of them:

I had one little guy. His name was Prince. Prince was being raised by his mom. His stepdad kind of moved in partway through, and he didn’t want much to do with Prince. You know, it was that kind of storied life? The whole life of Prince was very complicated. The family lived on Social Services, and they were poverty stricken. Prince was one of those little guys, cute as a button, with big, blue eyes and blond hair, but totally disengaged from school. This kid’s whole life had been trauma. He was a poor reader. He was poor at math. Life was work. This poor little guy was six!

Every Friday the kids would write letters home. We would talk about the things that were coming up that week or something they learned in school. Prince hadn’t seen his dad for years, so I asked Prince’s mom if he could write to his dad. She agreed, and she said she would give me the address. And, of course, the next Friday came and there was no address. I phoned mom, and I said, “Can I have him write this letter to dad? I don’t have an address, but is there a way you could give it to me?” She drove the address to me. She wouldn’t give it to me on the phone because the stepdad was there. She gave it to me, and Prince wrote. Prince was so proud, and he sent the letter to his dad. His dad wrote back on computer paper with the borders.

This kid just blossomed. He went to stay with his dad a few times that year. His dad took him to get his picture taken. It was the first time in Prince’s
life he ever had his picture taken. That really struck me when he came back and told me about it. The things we take for granted. They seem so simple to us and yet so many of these kids just don’t have those experiences. I remember one time I asked him to stay back at recess with me to do some work. All of the sudden he stopped, and he looked up at me, and he said, “Mrs. Jones, you were right. I can read!”

We got to Easter that year, and honest to goodness, when he came back after Easter, the wheels fell off. I couldn’t understand it. He was mean. He did terrible things. He refused to do school work. I was trying to figure out what happened to this kid at Easter. This wasn’t the kid that had blossomed. He had come so far. I just couldn’t figure this out. So right away, I started to ask for support, and I called the central office to talk to the student support services consultant. They sent out the ed psych. The ed psych came to talk to me after she talked to Prince, and she said, “Well, I’ve figured out what the problem is.” I said, “Great! What is it?” She said, “Actually, it’s you.” Well, you could have picked my heart out of my feet. I said, “What did I do? What is it?” She said, “He doesn’t want to leave you. He thinks if he doesn’t do the work and if he misbehaves there is no way that he can pass so he can stay in your room.” It was just heartbreaking.

And, you know, I saw him through to high school, but his defence was to do the flight thing. Throw the books. Make a scene. Then he didn’t have to deal

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37 Ed psych refers to educational psychologist.
with it. Some teachers in high school love that because they get to abscond [sic] all responsibility and send them to the office. The principal saw him in the hallway and yelled at him to get into the office. Prince threw his binder in the garbage can. I grabbed John [the principal] before he went into the office, and I said, “Can I just talk to you for a minute? You don’t know this kid and I do. I haven’t been with him for a lot of years, but I know this kid, and don’t go in like that. Go in trying to understand where he’s at right now and what’s happening in his home because my guess is home is hell for him right now and he’s not dealing with that. He can’t deal with this.” Prince was about six feet tall. He just sat down and cried. He knew the connection we had, and it just stuck with him. So, he was one of those little guys that you always just kind of have to know who they are. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

5.9 Expectations to Meet the Learning Needs of All Children and Youth

Alice and I discussed the challenges in the classroom, particularly around the expectation for inclusion. For many teachers currently in classrooms, the concept of inclusion is new. They have had to learn on the job to understand how to be inclusive in the classroom to ensure that all students are learning:

I had a class one year with 32 kids. I had a boy who had severe autism who didn’t toilet or eat by himself. I had Mark, who had Asperger’s Syndrome. I had Abby, who had severe fetal alcoholism and was ballistic, like wild. Rage. Ripped hair out of people’s heads. Stabbed people with pencils. Grabbed. Screamed. Choked. Wild, wild, wild. I had Melissa, [who] had a severe global
delay. And I had .4 of an [educational assistant]. My day book was an 11½-by-
17 sheet of paper. It was set up to show what we were going to do and then one
column for each of the kids and how I was going to adapt all that.

I think that year it really struck me about how much our job is not just
teaching the content, but about teaching citizenship. What does it mean to get
along? What does it mean to support one another? How do you look for the
strengths in your community? I remember working on a social studies unit about
communities now and then. We were doing a pioneer kind of theme, and they
were in groups for research reports. I remember the group that had Mark. The
group was devastated. I drew the names out of a hat. Wink. Wink. You know.
The group that had Mark also had Luke and Luke was the nicest little boy. He
was a tremendously kind, considerate, caring little boy, and they got Mark. Of
course, Mark was typical Asperger’s, right? The social skill thing was not there,
but he was bright. He couldn’t read, or write, or work. I talked to them about
assigning roles and working with people’s strengths. Luke said to me, “Mrs.
Jones, we got Mark. What are we gonna do?” I said, “You are so lucky. I think
you are the luckiest group because Mark remembers everything. You are going
to have the best report. If you just read it to him; he can do his piece. I promise
you. You guys are lucky you have Mark. I wish he was in my group!” I left,
and I never thought any more about it. When the group was finishing up their
report, Luke said to me, “Mrs. Jones, you were right. We were the luckiest
group.”
You can really tell them and make them believe that it is going to be the best thing that everyone has, and they’ll believe you. Little kids want truth. We all do. We all want to believe we’re good.

That year, it was a skill to teach the kids how to handle Abby. I told the kids if she grabbed your neck and choked you and you couldn’t breathe, stand still. Don’t fight her. Don’t move. I will be there. I climbed desks at rapid speed. If she was ripping hair out of your head. Go with it. Don’t pull against it. I was so impressed at how quickly those kids learned. I tried my darnedest to prevent it, but you never knew what was going to send her off the edge. There was no pattern to it.

I remember one time in the spring around Easter time, we were doing bunny hops in math for measuring. Abby went wild. Just wild. It was a little bit of an unstructured environment for her. It was everything I could do to grab her. I had to get her out of the room because I couldn’t let her hurt anybody. I got her in this hold, and Jamie said, “Mrs. Jones, shall I open the door for you?” [Alice mimicked Jamie’s comment in a very polite and calm voice.] And I said, “Oh, thanks!” And the kids said, “Should I move this desk out of the way?” Great idea! They moved the furniture. They got the door open. They shut the door. I was like, wow, what just happened? I got her into the office across from my classroom, and she was just all over the place. I phoned to try and get help because I had left 31 kids, three of who knows what they were going to do. It took about 15 minutes for somebody to come and help me.
They came and I went back into the classroom and honest to goodness, you knew these kids were going to be fine for the rest of their lives. When I went back in I saw one had taken Michael and was just sitting reading a book with him. One had taken Melissa and they were helping her with every step. You know, “I am going to let you think you are my partner, but really I am doing it for you.” It was just so amazing to me at the way they all assumed the right kind of helpful roles. Grade 2! Absolutely, truly citizenship. We teach content, but through content we teach so much more. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

Alice and I reflected upon the content we were expected to teach in the mandated curriculum, and we both agreed the content served as a vehicle to teach important citizenship skills such as cooperative learning, caring for others, and learning how to get along in a group. We felt the content gave us purpose and a common learning ground, but the learning that occurred as we worked with the content was more important than the content.

5.10 Stories to Live by with Children and Youth

Alice and I reminisced about students we met during our careers who had demonstrated tremendous potential for success, but sometimes their family situation was overwhelming. That situation unintentionally created a barrier that kept the student from exploring new learning opportunities. We agreed that it was our role to try to help students succeed, even when the family situation seemed impossible to overcome:
One year I met a high school girl. Samantha had a kuzillion [sic] tons of potential in sports, and she had a life of ruin. She was from the local reserve. She played on the national woman’s team in a couple of international championships. The Canadian woman’s team asked her to come to camp with them, but she said she couldn’t be away from home. When she was in school, she struggled. She had lots of struggles. I nominated her for one of the Aboriginal awards. Her mom said I could, and she signed the nomination paper. The awards committee wanted Samantha to go to the banquet, but her family wouldn’t take her. I knew Samantha’s aunt really well so I phoned her. I phoned, and I said, “Listen, you have no idea. She is amazing. She has such skill and talent. She’s been nominated for this, and they want her to come to the award banquet.” So Samantha’s aunt picked her up and took her there. It was this great night. She was the runner-up for the award. I remember Samantha’s aunt saying to me, “It’s really sad that it takes a white person like you to know the goodness in us. I just wish her family could see it.” There are so many of those kids. Every kid has a story. We just don’t take the time to listen to their stories. We need to slow down and listen to the stories. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

After teaching for several years, Alice was approached to become an administrator for the school. She was reluctant to leave the classroom to pursue administration, but decided to try the new position:
When I became an administrator, one of the things that was a huge worry for me was the relationship with the high school kids. I had only ever had relationships with the younger kids. I had a perception that when they got to the high school they became something different because that is what I had always heard. On my first day I was doing supervision, and I was walking the halls in the high school. Suddenly I had two girls fall into line with me, and we started walking down the hall. I wasn’t five feet with them and they said, “Hey, Mrs. Jones, you are still wearing the same perfume!” [laughter] Seriously. They notice your clothes. They know what you smell like.

As an administrator, I went in to cover a Grade 10 English class one time. I was in fear because I didn’t know how to teach high school. I went in, and the kids looked at me, and said, “Are you teaching us?” I said, “Yes, I have your assignment.” They said to me, “Are you going to teach us like you used to?” That comment struck me. I said to them, “How did I used to teach you?” They said, “As long as we were working on what we were doing, we could be with partners or in groups around the floor, but we had to get the work done and we had to be quiet about it.” They remembered everything about how the room interacted, what it looked like, what it sounded like, and what it smelled like. It is absolutely amazing the things kids tune in to. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

As Alice shared her memories about her years of teaching and administration experiences with me, I reflected upon the uniqueness of her situation compared to my
experiences teaching in schools. Alice had the opportunity to watch children grow and mature from their first experiences in kindergarten up to Grade 12. She was able to develop long-term connections with students and be part of a significant portion of their lives. I felt it truly was a gift to experience that type of long-term connection with students:

I had some really good connections with kids. It always struck me at grad when they did their most memorable moments. Every year at grad, there were three or four students that would comment about something that happened in Grade 2. I always would tell them that this year [the year in Alice’s classroom] was going to be your best year in school. Ever! I promise.

I have had a blessed career. I always had tremendous parent support. It was fun. Teaching is fun. We’re there to have fun. We can and we do. As teachers, you don’t always get to see the end result. I think that teaching in a K to 12 school I got to see the end result. I’ve had numerous kids write me letters or send me cards to thank me for everything I’ve done. It’s kind of unheard of, and it’s just that I’ve been really blessed to have kids that have come back to say thank you. They [the students] were always good to me. They were my reason for going to work every day. They thought I was giving to them, but what they gave back was so much more. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

5.11 Transitioning to Central Office

Eventually Alice made a decision to move to a central office of a school division to try a new role as a consultant. She reflected upon her experiences during this time
period and, in particular, the point when she came to the realization that not all teachers had the same knowledge or philosophy about education as she did:

I was a little bit outside the box for the times. I remember I went to the central office for a half-day orientation [for] the role of consultant. We went to a school to meet with two teachers. They didn’t know how to teach a split grade class. They honestly had no idea how you could take an outcome in Language Arts, which is the same in every grade, and teach. They had no idea how to teach in a split grade classroom. They wondered how you could group kids, and why you couldn’t just teach them all one thing. It didn’t make sense to them. I always knew in my school I was outside the box, but when I went there I went, “Oh boy.” There are lots of different teachers out there.

I came to understand there are people that teach kids and people that teach subjects. If I’m teaching kids, I have to care what that kid’s story is and understand what makes them tick. What are their strengths? I have to help them to know that they can do it. If we want to teach subjects and we want mastery learning in subjects, we’re not teaching kids. I think a lot of teachers have had a hard time not teaching subjects. There are a lot of teachers of subjects, not teachers of kids. (Research Conversation with Alice, May 1, 2014)

Eventually, Alice was hired as a senior administrator for a school division. Alice’s learning curve was steep, but she enjoyed the challenge and new learning opportunities. Similar to mine, her transition into the senior administrator role was quick and the orientation period was brief. Her orientation into her new role went like this:
“Congratulations, you’ve got the job. Don’t worry, I’ll [the director] teach you everything you need to know. There are other senior administrators at this table, and you can tell them anything, but you must also hold their trust. When they tell you things, nothing leaves. That’s where it has to stay.” (Research Conversation with Alice, June 10, 2014)

5.12 Tensions Within the Central Office of a School Division

The role of senior administrator quickly led Alice into a world of high accountability and scrutiny about her performance as she conducted her duties. Alice was prepared and comfortable with the responsibilities of being a senior administrator. She understood that she needed to be accountable for her performance. As the years progressed she experienced an increased degree of scrutiny along with a higher level of expectations:

I had to produce documentation to prove I did my job. I had to prove I had done my job with hard evidence. I refused to spend time collating it during work hours because I think my job at work is to help the teachers, principals, and kids. This was not a good use of my time. I spent evenings and weekends working on it, which was wrong, too. It should be on work time, but that hurts kids and that’s wrong. It’s absolutely ludicrous the time we are wasting producing paper to prove that we did something. (Research Conversation with Alice, June 10, 2014)

In her role as a senior administrator, Alice spends significant periods of time creating reports for the school division board members, and she frequently presents at board meetings. Over several years, as Alice’s knowledge and understanding about the
purpose and role for school boards increased, so did her level of frustration with school boards in school divisions. Alice observed and experienced inappropriate behaviour from board members. At times, she felt her integrity was under attack. Alice questioned some board members’ depth of knowledge and understanding about the current realities in schools:

This board is the reason we should have appointed boards. We have some board members whom [sic] have a real grudge to bare. We have one board member that is very old and a former school teacher. She believes school should be the same place now, and that we should all think the same. When I’ve presented data at board meetings, I’ve had board members say things to me like, “Liars figure, and figures lie; which one is you?” I’ve had them challenge a young student and ask how much I told her to say before she came in. Totally, uncalled for and disrespectful behaviour. Some board members don’t support us in making the changes we need to make, like in assessment. I think it’s the board members that are the hard ones to change.

We don’t give the board members a day of PD\textsuperscript{38} on assessment. Maybe we should. More and more when I look at the board, I wonder about appointed boards. We have several board members that say they are going to come back and fix things. I’m now [of] the belief that appointed boards would not be a bad thing. I used to think an appointed board wouldn’t get the local context, and I do think local context is important, but I think they need to let school divisions do

\textsuperscript{38} PD is an acronym for professional development.
school division business. I think we have to let the people that have strengths play to their strengths. I think an appointed board could bring a variety of perspectives. I think right now we are not rounded enough in that. The more I look at the agenda-driven nature of some of the board members, the more I think an appointed board could be beneficial. (Research Conversation with Alice, June 10, 2014)

In Saskatchewan, school divisions are governed by an elected board of education consisting of board members from the community. In Saskatchewan, the Education Act defines the duties of the board of education.39 Alice recognized challenges existed on school boards, but she also recognized that board members, similar to teachers and administrators, were undergoing transformational change across Education. We agreed that board members, too, needed time and professional development to become current with the latest research and practice. We felt it was part of our responsibility to find opportunities for board members to connect their past with current realities in schools:

We talk about the head and the heart. With any new initiative, what sustains the momentum is the heart. It’s your sense of urgency. It comes from heart. You

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39 The Education Act (1995) states 29 duties of boards of education. Examples of duties are: “. . . exercise general supervision and control over the schools in the school division and make any bylaws with respect to school management that maybe considered necessary for effective and efficient operation of the schools; appoint and employ under written contract qualified teachers for the schools of the school division, and any principals and other assistants as the board of education considers necessary; and suspend or expel pupils for cause. . .” (pp. 44 – 45).
never want to lose that. That’s where story comes. People can connect to that emotion that comes from there, right? So what we need to do is to take those pieces that are important and attach the pieces of their [board members] stories to them so they can find themselves in what we are trying to move ahead.

(Research Conversation with Alice, June 10, 2014)

As our conversations continued, Alice and I reminisced about the difficult challenges we faced when trying to implement division-wide change. There were numerous factors that could influence the speed and success of change, but at times the slow pace of change was frustrating, particularly when it was colleagues that didn’t have the forward thinking needed to understand the long-term sustainability benefits of initiatives. Alice talked about a professional development initiative she designed and developed to support new senior administrators as they transitioned into their new roles. Alice recalled her transition experience into a senior administrator role, and she wanted to improve the process. Unfortunately, Alice’s director [her boss] had difficulty understanding the need for the initiative:

I went through a process of identifying best practices for a senior administrator. I wondered what would be the best practices or behaviours that have leverage to impact results. I went through a process, and I identified some of those things for me. At one senior administration meeting, we put charts up about what does a senior administrator need to know? What do they need to believe? What do they need to do? We started filling it in so we could start to compare them and see where our gaps were. We were going to have another meeting, but the director
said, “You know, I just don’t know where to go with this. I don’t know how this is going to help us to move on. I just need to take a break from this.” And so, instead of helping people understand what they needed to do, how they needed to act, what they needed to look for as senior administrators, we took a break from it. (Research Conversation with Alice, June 10, 2014)

When Alice introduced the initiative, the director did not understand the long-term benefit of investing in the professional development of the new members of the senior administration team and felt that time would be better spent on other priorities. Unfortunately, several months later, the gravity of the mistake took its toll on the director:

[The director]’s in a meltdown phase. . . . [The director] sat in my office and cried. . . . [He/she] said [he/she] doesn’t sleep at night. I had been trying to help [him/her], but [he/she] wouldn’t listen. (Research Conversation with Alice, June 10, 2014)

Alice and I recognized that the pressure of a senior administrator role can be very stressful. The multiple demands on time and the complex situations that senior administrators deal with can make the role extremely challenging. For some people, the stress becomes overwhelming.

From our perspective as senior administrators, Alice and I discussed our observations about and experiences with disrupting the status quo on the educational landscape. We noticed a current trend in Education for non-educators to be more involved in decision-making for school divisions. We felt in some cases it was an
improvement because different perspectives and practices were introduced to the Education sector that were beneficial, but we felt in some circumstances it disrupted the forward progress of school divisions. Sometimes decisions seemed to be made in the spirit of maintaining the status quo and were based on individuals’ experiences from their past. Some individuals simply did not have the depth of knowledge or experience to understand the progressive nature of growth in school divisions, or understand that the status quo needed to be disrupted. Disrupting the status quo ensured that school divisions shifted their focus from teaching to students.

Alice and I recognized that people in school divisions are living during a period of heightened accountability and at times this results in senior administrators becoming buried in paperwork and report writing. Some senior administrators in this situation may feel powerless and unable to prioritize their time to focus on the important aspects of students and learning in the. Senior administrators buried beneath accountability reports and requests for information sometimes become disconnected from the students, teachers, and staff:

You feel like you have less agency. Less control to be able to impact power. I love my job, and I love it because it is working with kids. I can get down to the kid level in my job. I’m in schools and in classrooms. I’m looking at data, and it’s about teachers and kids, but we have senior administrators that hardly ever see a kid. They’re hiring our teachers and that scares me. They’re hiring the [educational assistants] that work with kids. They are producing the communication for the school division about all of the glowing things we are
5.13 Expectations to Improve Student Achievement

While the administrative nature of the role of senior administrator was at times frustrating to Alice, she found synergy working with teachers on plans that ultimately led to improving student achievement. Alice reminisced about a literacy project she developed with a team of teachers and implemented in the school division. It was an example of a successful division-wide change initiative designed to disrupt the status quo and refresh teaching practice:

We started our literacy project several years ago. We had teachers doing who knows what for early reading. It was all over the map. The plaid phonics workbook reigned supreme. There were so many things wrong with that. Some teachers were just doing their own thing with no intentional explicit strategy instruction. There was no intentionalness [sic] that needed to be there. No [Professional Learning Communities]. No discussion times. We had a whole bunch of these fragmented pieces. We had a common reading assessment which was horrible to try and implement. It wasn’t useful because people didn’t know what to do with it. The literacy project was about saying we have a common assessment that tells us when kids can’t read, but it doesn’t tell us what the underlying issue is. It was about trying to attack that piece in the context of authentic reading. No plaid phonics workbooks. It was about really doing it
through a collaborative approach using student data and a common screening instrument.

It was fragmented at the school level, and we were fragmented at the division level as well. The [speech-language pathologists] who have a large part to play in the oral language foundation didn’t see themselves as having a part. They saw their job was to pull kids out, one student at a time, fix them, and send them back [to the classroom]. That’s the state we were in. It sounds kind of mean, but that was the reality of it. So we started, and we got together. We sat down together to try and figure it out. We went through the curriculum and supporting resources. We asked, “What does this look like?” We got teachers together, and we did a pilot. I kept data, but that was horrendous, trying to get teachers to understand. That data piece was just scary. There were some long discussions about things like that. So, fast forward to where we are now, and the teachers are the best data users you have ever seen. The common reading assessment is purposeful because they know how to use the data. We get the whole explicit teaching piece now. There’s no plaid phonics books anymore. We’ve gone to one-on-one student-first kind of thinking. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

When Alice reflected upon the challenges in the literacy project’s introductory stages, and compared her observations to the current state, she was extremely pleased. Student achievement was improving, and teachers were more comfortable using data in a formative manner to measure progress:
Schools have gotten really good at looking at what data they are collecting and what meaning it has. They are meeting regularly around that. They’re really having good purposeful discussions about where students are, why they are, and what they do. I am so incredibly impressed at the depth of conversation that the teachers are having about data, about how they’re tracking for individual kids, and how they’re measuring growth. We’re identifying who those kids are and putting strategies in place so growth can happen. In two or three years kids are back at grade level. I proudly say that student support services and the curriculum people are working together towards goals. This is a huge shift from where we were several years ago. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

5.14 Learning as an Adult on the Educational Landscape

Alice’s strong interest in learning, transitioning traditional teaching practice, and professional development drew her to a provincial initiative she found intriguing. Alice talked about a 2013 Government report called “Voice, Vision, and Leadership: A Place For All,” which is about improving education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal peoples. Alice shared her perspectives about the report and, in particular, the Joint Task Force’s identified challenges and barriers for Aboriginal students. The Joint Task Force expressed concern about the traditional teaching practice in classrooms and the misguided beliefs about Aboriginal peoples. Within the report, the Joint Task Force (2013) mentioned Te Kotihitanga in New Zealand, which is, “... described as a researched-based professional development program...” (p. 49) designed to make
classrooms more culturally relevant and improve student achievement for Maori students. Te Kotihitanga caught Alice’s attention, and she was curious to learn more about it. From her research she knew that Te Kotihitanga was a professional development initiative for teachers. Teachers who participated were changing their mindsets and changing classroom practices, and Maori children were experiencing tremendous improvements in achievement. Alice learned that a key element of Te Kotihitanga was a shared vision, a common purpose to come together. The Maori’s call it a “kaupapa” and it is the focus around which the classroom and school revolve. Alice felt that the concept was the piece of the classroom puzzle for which she had long been searching:

Their kaupapa is Maori students learning as Maori students. So what does that mean? It’s about teacher pedagogy. Agentic thinking is a huge piece of that. It’s something that I truly believe we’ve been missing for a long time. When I have talked to teachers I’ve tried to do a little bit, but I didn’t get it. I didn’t get how to do that. They would say, “Oh Alice, they’re [the students] missing from school, and you don’t understand. They’re never here. They have attendance problems.” My answer was “So when they are here, you have to do double time. What are you doing in the classroom to engage them?” Those are the conversations that I always had with teachers. I really believe that teachers have agency. When you are there and the kids are there, you can do something. You can do something in your classroom to make them want to come there because I’ve seen it. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)
Alice believed that all students had the ability to succeed, but sometimes when they entered the classroom, the mindset of the teacher, or how the instruction was provided unintentionally placed them at a disadvantage. She shared an experience to explain her point:

I wanted to try planning a unit with parents. I wanted to know what they think we’re missing because I knew First Nations parents thought we were missing something. I just couldn’t figure out. What were we missing? I met with the principal, teacher, and consultant. We laid down the outcomes that had to be taught. We had no wiggle room there. We are curriculum bound, but how they’re taught is wide open. So we invited parents and Elders in. At first, I got chastised fairly firmly. The unit we had chosen was one where kids were relating the past to the future. An essential question was about how learning about people in other times and places helped us. Some of the parents and Elders had a residential school background, and they worried about the impact on the students. We worked together and planned an inquiry unit.

From mid-May to the end of June, not one student in that classroom missed one day. We used First Nations culture to teach the curriculum outcomes, and parents came in. I went on the day when the kids presented their performance tasks. I remember one little girl did a dance, and she said that her mooshum\textsuperscript{40} had always wanted his grandchildren to dance. He had 26 grandchildren. She was the only one that danced, and she was going to dance

\textsuperscript{40} Mooshum is a Cree word for grandpa.
forever for him. She talked about the story of dance, and what it meant, and how it was important for her to connect that path to her future and her children. One little guy brought in some moose meat that they cooked at the school and shared. He talked about hunting and the stories he learned while hunting about culture and life. And the list went on. One little girl said, “I learned that I’m Métis.” She was 12 or 13 years old. And I said to her, “How did you learn that?” And she said, “Well, I always knew my mom was Métis, and my dad was Métis, and in the summer we went to events, but I didn’t know that made me Métis.” The unit really helped them understand their identity. It was really powerful for them. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

Alice went on to explain that she felt it was our mindsets that sometimes disadvantaged the students in our classrooms. Te Kotihitanga provided her with the understanding and words she had been seeking. Alice talked to me about agentic thinking:

Agentic thinking is really about thinking nothing is a stumbling rock; everything is a stepping stone. It’s about “how do we,” not “we can’t do that.” It’s about “yes, you can.” It’s really about growth mindsets. So how do we instill growth mindsets as opposed to fix mindsets in people? Sometimes we hear people have lots of reasons why things would never work in Saskatchewan. We shouldn’t underestimate people because that’s not agentic thinking. When you think like that, you are right. Nothing will ever happen. You will stay like that for the rest of your life. If that is what you want, congratulations because you’ve got it. It’s
a very powerful message. In Te Kotihitanga, no one believes they can’t do things for kids. No one gets to say, “It’s never going to happen.” The question is, “How does it happen? What do we have to do to make it happen? How can we do it?” So, that’s what agentic thinking is. It’s a really powerful message. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

During Alice’s research into Te Kotihitanga she became interested in the aspects of the professional development program that focused on relationship building. Similar to striving to find balance between the heart and the mind that Alice and I had previously discussed, Te Kotihitanga distinguished between different kinds of caring:

In Te Kotihitanga, they talk about the Maori relationship piece, and there’s two parts to that. There’s the hard caring part and soft caring part. Soft caring is really about liking you as a person. Making sure that students have had breakfast. Making sure that what students need happens. Every one of those sentences ends with a so that. It’s not in the words, but in the actions. It’s so that the hard caring can take place because I care enough about you as an individual that I’m not willing to let you go down. I care about you enough as an individual that I have high expectations. I don’t have just expectations. I have high expectations for what you can and will do in my classroom. So the soft caring becomes a so that. I think in our schools, and I’ll only speak for ours, they will disagree with me. They will think they do have high expectations. I don’t think we have high enough expectations.
When I think about our First Nations kids and expectations, the expectations we have for those kids is minimal. One time I was in a school and I was in the library talking with some teachers. This kid walked by. He looked like Dick Tracy with his hat and long trench coat, and he was moping down the hallway. He walked to the door, and he said, “Mrs. Jones! And I went, “Anthony!” He was a student from [a school where Alice taught.] So I stopped to talk to him. He told me he had a kid, and he was back in school to earn his Grade 12. He said, “I’m gonna get my Grade 12. I’m gonna graduate this year. And I’m gonna work hard.” I realized the teachers were just staring. I said, “Ooh, you’ve got to get to class. I’ve made you late. Tell them it’s my fault.” I apologized to the teachers, and they said, “No, you know what? We’ve never heard him speak.” I said, “Pardon me?” They said, “He just doesn’t talk to anybody in the school. We would never have expected him to do that.” I said, “I would never have expected him to not do that.” I would never expect him to walk by me and not talk to me. It’s totally about what we expect. You’re going to get what you expect. Everything I hear about Te Kotihitanga is everything that I have thought and I’ve seen, but I haven’t been able to put the words. It’s like in your gut, you know. It’s here. You’ve tried it, and you’ve seen those bits. Now, I have the words for why it works so incredibly well. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

Alice’s excitement about Te Kotihitanga was contagious, and I eagerly asked her to tell me more about her learning. While Alice was sharing her insights with me about
Te Kotihitanga, I began to realize the gift she was giving to me. Alice was providing me with the opportunity to gain insight into how she began to grow a seed of an idea. She was opening the door for me to talk and walk alongside her as she learned about something new, and began to connect her learning with her experiences. I began to wonder what her next steps would be, and how she would bring this type of initiative into classrooms:

In Te Kotihitanga they have an effective teaching profile. It’s the way you structure your pedagogy and form relationships. The classroom is culturally relevant. Kids can see themselves in the classrooms. They put Maori words on the walls. There are pictures of Maori kids doing things. It’s all about the kaupapa. Maori students learning as Maori students. They bring in their perspectives, and they see themselves in the learning. I go back to what my daughter, Susan, said, “I’ll only ever understand as much as I can imagine.” Te Kotahitanga is about imagining big, and they’ve giving their kids that big future. We’ve imagined a peanut can, and that’s what our kids are gonna get. We have not given our kids enough. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

As Alice learned more about Te Kotihitanga she became intrigued with the New Zealand assessment system. She felt their national assessment system made sense and captured the needs of both the national Ministry and teachers in the classroom.

We have no idea in our province what goes on in our classrooms. We have no idea how people are measuring anything. In New Zealand they use e-
asTTle\textsuperscript{41} which is essentially a test bank of items for the core curricular areas. When teachers teach a unit they can access the test bank. They choose questions and give the assessment to their kids. The data is fed back in so teachers have comparative data. The Ministry has their comparative data. And, it’s in context! Imagine that? You can reassess. It is formative. It’s for the teachers to know in their classrooms what they’re doing to be able to teach to the future. In the end the Ministry has all the data they need. The teachers have a standardized assessment in their classrooms. There has to be some educating about how to score the assessments, but it is so incredibly powerful. That’s my dream!

(Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

Alice and I discussed the need to have a coordinated effort from the Ministry and school divisions to assess students properly. Alice expressed frustration with provincial goals that were being developed for school divisions to achieve. The problem that Alice identified was that the data was impossible to collect:

The early learning outcome says by 2020, 90\% of Saskatchewan’s students will be at acceptable levels in four out of five domains of the EYE.\textsuperscript{42} I’m trying to get

\textsuperscript{41} The New Zealand Ministry of Education (n.d.) described e-asTTle as an “online assessment tool, developed to assess students’ achievement and progress in reading, mathematics, writing, and in pānui, pāngarau, and tuhituhi. . . . Many teachers . . . have found it to be a great tool for planning, for helping students to understand their progress, and for involving parents in discussions about how well their children are doing” (para. 1).

\textsuperscript{42} EYE is an acronym for Early Years Evaluation.
the baseline data. I have looked at the spring EYE data. Then I have to go to look at that same teacher’s class in the fall because in the spring we only reassess the ones that weren’t there in the previous fall. Then I have to go and compare that list to this list. Then I have to go to the class list to see who is missing from either of those lists because of the transient population, so I can see where they went. I have to determine if they are still in our data set, or are they gone? This means I not only have to go to that class list, but every other kindergarten teacher’s class list in the school division. How is that going to happen?

They can’t write goals that we can’t collect data for. They don’t understand. The data needs to be able to be collected. We need to have data protocols. Teachers don’t want to do assessments because they don’t find them purposeful. We need the assessments to get meaningful data so that we can use it for instruction. The problem is that we are dealing with politics, and there are so many blockers in the way. Provincial goals are being developed, and we can’t collect the data. This is my frustration. We need the assessments to get meaningful data so that we can use it for instruction. (Research Conversation with Alice, July 5, 2014)

5.15 Conclusion

As Alice and I drew our conversations to a close, we reflected upon the journey we had travelled together, beginning with Alice’s first experiences as a kindergarten student in the basement of her grandma’s home to her experiences as a senior administrator in a school division. Alice’s experiences caused me to pause and wonder
about the unique journeys of senior administrators that led them into their roles. During conversations with Alice, her passion for learning and being an advocate for students was consistently evident. Alice’s passion for learning and growth for herself, teachers, and students within the school division have had a positive widespread impact, particularly on student achievement. As I reflected upon Alice’s experiences with initiatives to improve student achievement, I wondered about the impact on students across the province. Is the focus on improved student achievement making a difference in children’s lives?

When new interests captured Alice’s attention she eagerly researched to learn all she could. Her natural ability to connect her learning to practical situations and her ability to translate research into meaningful practice resonated with the teachers in her school division. Alice experienced frustrations and challenges along her journey, but she has persevered. Her commitment to learning and doing good things for students and teachers is unwavering. Alice summed it up best by simply stating, “I’m a learner and I like to do that.”
CHAPTER SIX: Shifting and (Re)composing Stories to Live By

In this chapter, I share experiences I had as a senior administrator, within the school division where I worked, that I believe may have led to the shifting and (re)composing of stories to live by for some teachers, administrators, students, and me. I will demonstrate the interconnectedness of my experiences with the experiences shared by Barbara and Alice. I will begin, again, to weave in literature that I have read.

My stories to live by have shaped me, and continue to shape me, as I face complex and challenging situations positioned as a senior administrator. After the research conversations with Barbara and Alice, I began to see that I have shifted and (re)composed some of my stories to live by as new puzzles, wonders, and learning
unfolded for me across many years. I know I have shifted in how I respond to situations that I may encounter in schools, especially when I compare my thoughts and actions many years ago when I was teaching in the classrooms, to more currently my thoughts and actions as a senior administrator. The experiences I share in this chapter will further explore the shifting and (re)composing of my stories to live by, while I reflect upon some of the division-wide initiatives I led, and recall many conversations I had with people in school divisions.

6.1 Introducing PLCs to a School Division

During the research conversations with Barbara and Alice, we talked about division-wide initiatives we led. The three of us have led multiple initiatives with various degrees of success. I shared with Barbara and Alice that the most challenging division-wide initiative I led was to introduce Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to the teachers in the school division. It was an initiative that I felt shifted and (re)composed stories to live by for me and potentially for many people in the school division:

Rick and Rebecca DuFour, two educators from the United States, travelled across the province to introduce teachers to the concept of PLCs. They advocated for teachers to work in collaborative teams improve student achievement. They introduced a compelling amount of research as evidence to support the concept that teachers working together to meet the learning needs of all students would result in improved student achievement.
The DuFours used several analogies to explain their views about the shortcomings of the traditional classroom. One memorable analogy was about assessing students’ ability to pack a parachute. He explained that the first student failed the initial series of exams on how to pack a parachute, but as the course advanced, the student gradually became more proficient, and by the end of the course, the student excelled on the final exam. The second student did not demonstrate consistency when packing a parachute. On some exams, the student did well, and on other exams, not so well. DuFour asked teachers, “Which student’s parachute would you like to use for sky diving?” His argument was that when a teacher grades all attempts for a student to learn and then averages the grades into one final grade, the teacher is not providing a true picture of what the student has learned. He argued that this traditional assessment practice, the averaging of marks, penalizes students for practicing learning.

DuFour concluded by advocating for the de-privatization of classroom practice. He stressed the importance and need for teachers to share their successful practices and strategies with each other. He believed the correct way to measure student success was to use common assessments, and teachers should be collaboratively engaged in the examination of assessment data to ensure all students were learning. He stressed that research clearly demonstrated frequent, formative assessments had a tremendous impact on improving student achievement, and it was a powerful strategy to use to assess student learning.

(Personal Field Texts, January, 2013)
As I thought about this experience within the context of this study, I had new awakenings and concerns about the DuFours’ message. The DuFours were encouraging teachers to disrupt the status quo in the classroom, which I supported. They encouraged teachers to question and think differently about the instructional and assessment practices that have been normed in the traditional classroom. I supported thinking differently about teaching, and I believed refreshing instructional and assessment practices were part of lifelong learning. I wondered what it was about the PLC message that bothered me.

PLCs have a prescriptive structure. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) defined PLCs as “composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to the purpose of learning for all” (p. 3). PLCs were purposefully structured and focused on producing evidence of student learning. DuFour et al. explained:

The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student. When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it. (p. 3)

In a PLC, a team of teachers worked collaboratively to develop common assessments aligned to curriculum learning outcomes. In the classroom, teachers assessed students using the team-developed common assessments. The results of the common assessments were brought to the PLC meeting, and the team examined the data
to determine if all students were moving toward achieving curriculum outcomes. As the data was shared, the team analyzed the results for emerging patterns and discussed observed successes and challenges. The team determined the next steps for instruction. DuFour et al. (2006) encouraged teachers to consider four guiding questions:

(1) What do we expect students to learn? (2) How will we know when students have learned it? (3) How will we respond when students have not learned it? (4) How will we respond when students have learned it? (p. 91)

The DuFours believed that if PLC teams focused on the four guiding questions during PLC meeting time, conversations would focus on learning for all students.

As I reflected upon the concept of PLCs, I felt the prescribed structure of PLCs limited opportunities for relationship-building and sharing personal practical knowledge. There seemed to be an element of “sameness” that was expected in the structure. I came to realize that ironically, the collaborative approach the DuFours encouraged from the teachers excluded the voices of other people such as students and parents. As I continued to think about my introduction to the PLC concept, I recalled my beginning years of teaching and the experience I described in Chapter Two, when I met with other teachers to discuss whole language instructional practices. The prescribed PLC approach seemed contrived. I sensed that when I was teaching in the classroom, I would not have appreciated being told that I must use a prescribed approach to improve student achievement. I would have wondered if what I was doing in the classroom was wrong.

After hearing the DuFours speak, senior administrators across the province began to look for opportunities to introduce the concept of PLCs to teachers. In Chapters Four
and Five, Barbara and Alice shared their experiences implementing division-wide initiatives during this time period. I, too, was assigned to introduce PLCs to the school division in which I worked:

Four non-student days were scheduled throughout the year to introduce the PLC concept to teachers in the school division. The introduction of PLCs meant a significant shift from the professional development days that the teachers had attended in previous years. Typically, on professional development days, teachers listened to a keynote speaker, and they had the choice of attending a number of smaller breakout sessions throughout the day.

Conversely, PLCs had a prescribed structure and necessitated the active involvement of all teachers on the team. A steering committee consisting of teachers, school-based administrators, consultants, coordinators, and I decided to organize the teachers into three regions across the school division. To facilitate the days, approximately 200 teachers would meet at each regional site, along with a facilitation team of two or three people from the steering committee. The facilitation team carefully designed the four days to introduce teachers to PLCs and guide them through the process of setting up PLC teams. We spent hours planning the PLC days, striving to design them to be meaningful, purposeful, and relevant for teachers. The end result seemed that the majority of the teachers hated PLCs.

The introduction of PLCs seemed to trigger an emotional response from many teachers. Some facilitation team members told me they were treated poorly
while they facilitated the PLC days. Some teachers were disruptive during the presentations. Some denounced the DuFours because of their nationality, and criticized the research. Some were dismissive about the PLC concept and criticized it as being just another fly-by-night initiative that would soon pass. Some did not want to talk about whether or not students were learning what was being taught. Some did not want to be actively engaged in conversation about their practice. The sharing of assessment results made some feel vulnerable, and they expressed concern it might raise questions about their competence: What if students were not learning? If students had poor assessment results, did it mean the teacher was ineffective?

The facilitation team did not expect the negative reaction. Some of the team members expressed hurt feelings to me. They were shocked at the way some teachers reacted. As a facilitation team, we believed in the concept of PLCs and saw it as a framework to expedite change in traditional instruction and assessment practices. We knew that the traditional instruction and assessment practices we observed some teachers using in classrooms were not meeting the learning needs of all students. We knew that students would continue to fall through cracks in the education system if we did not try to do something different. This shared commitment to learning for all students kept us moving forward.

In the second year, we continued on the PLC journey with teachers. Some of the PLC teams committed to the process and began to make progress.
Some teams built common assessments, administered the assessments to students, and analyzed the results. The dialogue was fascinating as some teachers began to inquire into the four guiding PLC questions. Some teachers became intrigued, and they continued to meet with their PLC team outside of the scheduled PLC days. Some became confident to share their assessment results, and analyzed the data in a collaborative manner. Some talked about challenges they faced in the classroom, and they shared instruction and assessment strategies that seemed to be successful. The most valuable aspect of the PLC process seemed to be the professional dialogue focused on student learning. I felt that we reached a tipping point in the second year when we examined feedback from the teachers, and it indicated that the majority wanted to continue PLCs. (Personal Field Texts, January, 2013)

As I thought about this challenging period of time, new awakenings began to surface within me. Clandinin et al. (2009) explained that “part of sustaining teachers and ourselves as teacher educators is knowing how to navigate, to live on and in, shifting landscapes” (p. 146). When I thought about my introduction to PLCs and my initial reaction, I realized some of the teachers had a similar reaction. I believed teachers were well-versed in knowing how to handle shifting landscapes. My personal experience in the classroom, and my research conversations with Barbara and Alice, revealed memorable teaching experiences that shifted our thinking and demonstrated we were quite capable of handling shifting landscapes in the classroom. Some of the memorable experiences led to the (re)composing of our stories to live by. For example, I shared the
experience of failing five Grade 2 boys, and I shared how that experience influenced my
decision to not support the retention of children in school. Barbara shared her
experience about inflicting corporal punishment on a student, and that experience led her
to never go to the principal for support when dealing with difficult situations in the
classroom. Alice experienced a chaotic upbringing, and at times, she felt when she was a
student that some teachers did not have her best interests in mind. This led Alice to be a
strong advocate for students, and she shared experiences that demonstrated her strong
conviction to be present for students in need.

I believed the introduction of the PLCs to the school division was perceived by
some teachers, similar to my initial reaction, that they were doing something wrong in
the classroom. It may have been deeply offensive to some, because similar to Barbara,
Alice, and I, they were quite capable of handling shifting educational landscapes. As I
continued to think about this within the context of other provincial education initiatives
that were unfolding during this time period, the reaction of the teachers should not have
been surprising to me.

While PLCs were being introduced, teachers across the province, including the
school divisions where Barbara and Alice worked, were experiencing a significant
number of government mandated shifts on the educational landscape; school division
amalgamations, K-12 curriculum renewal, and new provincial assessments. It was not often that a new school division was formed during the career of a teacher, but in the school division in which I worked, there were two amalgamations within a period of three years. Each amalgamation meant new people were positioned in leadership roles, and this typically meant a change in the direction of the strategic plan for the school division. At the same time, the Ministry of Education was undergoing an aggressive curriculum renewal process that impacted all grade levels and subject areas. Also, new provincial assessments were being introduced, and the assessment results were being reported to the Ministry and the public. As I recalled this turbulent time period, I realized the PLC movement contributed to the shifting of the educational landscape, and the introduction of PLCs to the school division was another initiative that was mandated.

While I was immersed in this experience, I did not consider the reason or extent of the turmoil in the education system, but in this present time, as I reflected deeper upon the experience within the context of this study, I was awakened to how the various initiatives were connected to a deeper issue; colonization. I became distressed when I realized my role as a colonizer was to ensure the government initiatives were successful in the classroom. When I was teaching in the classroom, the only government initiative that I could recall that influenced my instructional or assessment practices was the

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43 The Government of Saskatchewan (2004) announced the establishment of “. . . a three-member Education Equity Task Force . . . to recommend new division boundaries based on a map of no more than 40 school divisions, with no fewer than 5000 students in each division . . .” (para. 4). In 2006, several school divisions experienced mandatory amalgamations.
introduction of the occasional renewed curriculum document. I felt I was in control to make professional decisions to meet the learning needs of the students I was responsible to teach. I am sure I am naïve about this period of time, but to this day, I could not name a specific government initiative, outside of curriculum renewal, that I felt impacted my teaching in the classroom. As a superintendent, I was positioned to work closer with the government, and I became more aware of political agendas, but at the time, I did not question wholeheartedly the purpose of the agendas, and I worked diligently to implement the initiatives into the school division.

At the time, I thought we were disrupting dominant institutional narratives, and I wanted to see change in the traditional classroom. As I conducted my research for this study, I began to realize I learned my colonization lessons well. Similar to the history of schooling that I described in Chapter One, I was implementing what I believed was the correct way to school children and youth. Some teachers probably felt their personal practical knowledge was irrelevant to the central office personnel in the school division, and this may have made them feel devalued as professionals. There was a lack of agency and voice for the teachers. Hulley and Dier (2009) observed:

Most teachers are caring, committed professionals who are doing what they believe is right. At the suggestion of change, there is a natural tendency to resist because most people are comfortable with the status quo—the way things have always been done. The first reaction might be, “It’s not broken, so why are we trying to fix it?” The fact is, there is always room for growth, and learning is never complete. (p. 21)
Some of the facilitators for the PLC initiative felt teachers were being resistant to preserve the traditional classroom, but as I reflected upon this, I came to the belief that the resistance to PLCs had nothing to do with teachers not wanting to grow and learn. I think it was because the concept was another mandated initiative, and it did not consider the personal practical knowledge of the teachers.

6.2 Introducing a Literacy Initiative to a School Division

When I reflected about the introduction of PLCs to the school division, I wondered about the impact of the shifting educational landscape on the lives of children and youth. When I reminisced about some of the children and youth I met with during this time, I could not be certain, but it appeared to me that the rhythms and routines of the classroom remained unchanged. The introduction of a division-wide literacy initiative brought new awakenings and may have shifted and (re)composed stories to live by for some people:

As the PLC pedagogical storm rolled across the educational landscape, the school division became focused on improving literacy achievement scores. In my role as a senior administrator, I was assigned the task of developing a heightened focus on literacy in the school division. To begin work on the initiative, I organized a steering committee of teachers. We read research about improving literacy rates and explored literacy initiatives implemented in other school divisions.

I was reluctant to introduce another new division-wide initiative alongside the PLC initiative. I wanted to be strategic in the design of the literacy initiative
to ensure that it was relevant and fit into the context of the realities that students and teachers experienced on a daily basis in the classroom. I led the steering committee to create “Pathways to Literacy” which focused on research-based instructional practices that aligned with the provincial English Language Arts curriculum. At that time, the English Language Arts curriculum contained hundreds of objectives for teachers to teach in the classroom. We physically cut apart the curriculum and began sorting and categorizing the objectives into meaningful categories. Gradually patterns began to appear, and we narrowed down the objectives to 15 key instructional strategies for before, during, and after reading. The English Language Arts curriculum became the foundation of the literacy initiative, and upon the foundation we built a framework to provide professional development and direct support in classrooms for the next three years.

Five literacy coaches were hired to work directly in schools with students and teachers to assist with improving literacy levels. I worked closely with the literacy teachers and English Language Arts consultant to lead and manage the initiative and to ensure that the resources and supports we needed were in place. I spent time in classrooms with the literacy teachers, and for me, talking with students made for some memorable experiences. During a visit to a Grade 7 classroom, I was reminded of the complex lives young people lead.

The literacy teacher began her lesson promptly at 9:00 a.m. and commented to the class that there were a lot of students away that day.
Throughout the morning, students slowly trickled into the classroom. Some had slept in, others did not have a ride to school and had to find an alternate way to get to school, and some had no apparent reason for being late. As I listened to the stories of the students, I reflected on the professionalism of the teacher. The teacher did not miss a beat in the rhythm of her lesson. She was warm and welcoming to each person as they entered the classroom. She quietly and efficiently kept all the students focused on their learning task and moved from student to student to ensure that they were comfortable with the task she had designed for them.

During another visit, a literacy teacher was working with a small group of Grade 6 students. She was focused on teaching the students a new reading strategy. I watched in awe as I observed a master teacher in action. She engaged the students; they were eager to participate as she patiently adapted her instruction to meet the needs of each individual student in the group. It was truly inspirational to watch. I talked with one boy who seemed particularly engaged. He told me he loved working with the literacy teacher and felt she had “saved” him. I inquired into what he meant by this comment, and he proceeded to tell me his story.

Previously, he had experienced anxiety in the classroom because he was always worried the teacher would ask him a question, or ask him to read out loud. He felt he was not a good reader and often struggled with his school work. The literacy teacher gave him confidence. This young boy could read, but the literacy
teacher taught him strategies that helped him comprehend what he was reading.

Now, he explained, he was confident to raise his hand in class and hoped the teacher would ask him to read out loud. Looking into his eyes and seeing the earnest look on his face as he told his story touched my heart. I felt we definitely made a difference in this young man’s life. (Personal Field Texts, January, 2013)

As I thought about the introduction of the literacy initiative to the school division, I recalled Barbara and Alice described similar reactions from teachers. Some teachers resisted the initiatives and hoped they would go away. Most teachers seemed to accept the literacy initiatives we introduced. However, specialist teachers sometimes faced adversity when they were first introduced and had to work alongside teachers. Some teachers refused to work with the specialists. Some teachers expressed concern that working with a specialist felt supervisory in nature. Similar to the concerns some teachers expressed during the PLC days, I sensed some were worried that their instruction and assessment practices might not meet the expectations of the specialist teachers, and they felt judged.

Earlier in this chapter, when I reflected upon the resistance to the introduction of PLCs, I believed it had nothing to do with teachers not wanting to grow and learn. Similar, with the introduction of a new literacy initiative, I think it was because the initiative was mandated, and we did not consider the personal practical knowledge of the teachers. I continued to see examples of how I learned my colonization lessons well. The literacy initiative I supported and implemented was what I believed was the correct way to develop literacy skills for children and youth. Again, some teachers probably felt
their personal practical knowledge was irrelevant to the central office personnel in the school division, and this may have made them feel devalued as professionals. As I thought more about this, it was not surprising that some teachers reacted in the manner they did to the introduction of the literacy initiative.

To add to the complexity of this time period, when the literacy initiative was being introduced, alongside the government mandated school division amalgamations, K-12 curriculum renewal, and new provincial assessments, plus the school division PLC initiative, there was a shift in expectation for teachers to meet the learning needs of all students. Traditionally, the expectation was for the teacher to meet the learning needs of the average student. The purpose of the literacy initiative was to assist with the shift in expectation for teachers to meet the needs of all students in a diverse inclusive\(^{44}\) classroom environment.

The shift to accommodate the learning needs of all students was extremely challenging, and some teachers shared with me that they felt ill-prepared to meet this challenge. As the expectation to improve student achievement became more visible, the anxiety level increased for some teachers. Some teachers expressed frustration about

\(^{44}\) Henley (2004) defined inclusion as “a controversial shift in how students with disabilities are educated. Inclusion bridges the gap between regular and special education by minimizing the practice of separating students for special education” (p. 5). Karten (2011) explained, “Educators must explore a variety of strategies to determine which create the desired connections between the students and the curriculum . . . . Inclusion interventions connect the instruction to each and every students’ unique needs” (p. 1).
some of their colleagues. They felt the education community needed to be more accepting of differences, and teachers needed to be willing to accept that students could learn in different ways. They expressed frustration with the lack of willingness by some teachers to use differentiated instruction.\textsuperscript{45} Some teachers explained to me that some teachers, as well as students and parents, needed to understand that fair\textsuperscript{46} did not look the same for all students. As I thought about this, I realized that in their own way, these teachers, too, were trying to disrupt dominant institutional narratives. Bateson (2000) described the importance of taking time to listen:

> When you pass strangers on the street, the unfamiliar faces blur. When you let your lives touch and make the effort of asking questions and listening to the stories they tell, you discover the intricate patterns of their differences and, at the same time, the underlying themes that all members of our species have in common. (p. 5)

As I thought more about this, in the context of colonization, I came to realize that I was not alone in being a colonizer. I was surrounded by educators trying to do good things for students, but similar to me, all within a colonized mindset. It seemed like history was

\textsuperscript{45} Cooper (2011) explained that differentiated instruction “is a response by the educational community to 21\textsuperscript{st} century demands that all learners leave school equipped with the knowledge and skills they will need to function in an ever-changing global community. While many teachers have not been trained specifically in differentiation methods, all educators have a professional responsibility to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of diverse learners” (p. 19).

\textsuperscript{46} Cooper (2011) advocated for teachers, students, and parents to examine the notion of fairness in today’s classrooms.
repeating itself. Teachers were dealing with a complex web of initiatives, all designed to ensure a heightened accountability to improve student achievement. We all felt we needed to be doing something to fix something that was broken, but in the midst of living the experiences, we seemed to be going in different directions all at the same time. Similar to what Barbara said in Chapter Four in this document, “I see us going in the same direction, and I see us going in the opposite direction, and it’s almost at the same time. It might sound extremely confusing, but I put it this way” (p. 140). With good intentions, Barbara, Alice, and I, introduced extra supports, resources, and professional learning opportunities to support the teachers in the school divisions in which we worked, but unintentionally we were adding additional stress to some teachers. For example, the collaborative approach to teaching students to support teachers to meet the learning needs of all students, may have be interpreted by some teachers as not being able to do his or her job. The extra supports we provided may have made some teachers feel incompetent. In a traditional classroom, typically only one teacher is responsible for the students. We were introducing collaborative responsibility for the learning of all the students. This did not match the traditional model of schooling.

As I reflected upon the introduction of initiatives to school divisions, as well as my classroom visits with the literacy teachers, and conversations with students, I continued to think about the dominant institutional narratives to which most people unquestionably subscribe. “Schooling exhibits a periodic cyclic temporal order. Schools are ruled by the clock on a daily basis and by promotion on an annual basis” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 160). Dominant institutional narratives have a familiar rhythm
that provide comfort to some people and are difficult to disrupt. The introduction of
PLCs and Pathways to Literacy were two initiatives I shared about my experiences as a
senior administrator that I believe disrupted and (re)composed the stories to live by for
me and some people in the school division.

6.3 School-based Administrators Shifting and (Re)composing Stories to Live By

In thinking about my conversations with Barbara, Alice, and teachers, I recalled
my conversations with school-based administrators. As a senior administrator, I
regularly spent time in schools engaged in conversation with school-based
administrators, and over time, certain topics began to have a familiar rhythm. These
topics added another layer of complexity and perspective about shifting educational
landscapes.

School-based administrators were also tasked with improving student
achievement. Many school-based administrators talked to me about concerns and
challenges that they faced on a daily basis in schools. Sometimes they, too, were
overwhelmed and frustrated with the multiple directions and initiatives they were
expected to implement. Some school-based administrators expressed concern about the
provincial goal to improve high school graduation rates by 2020. They felt, without
extra funding and supports, this was an impossible goal to achieve. Some expressed
frustration about the current credit system at the high school level, and they identified the
need for alternate pathways for students to earn a high school diploma. They explained
that the standardized high school pathway did not meet the learning needs of all students.
In the elementary schools, some school-based administrators identified the need for more
support on how to work with traditional parents. They explained that parents of
kindergarten children registered their children expecting the same school system they
had experienced. Some parents became upset when they observed diversity and
inclusion in classrooms. Some struggled to understand how students could achieve the
same learning outcomes, but have different learning paths. Some challenged the teachers
and school-based administrators about the classroom being unfair because the learning
process looked different for some children.

There seemed to be general agreement amongst people that contemporary
instruction and assessment practices were needed to replace traditional instruction and
assessment practices. However, within this desire to change, dominant intuitional
narratives seemed to prevail. The traditional structure of curriculum, time schedules,
grading practices, and large groups of children congregated in one classroom space with
one teacher remained a common narrative in most schools. Dewey (1938) reminded me
of the problematic structure of traditional education:

The school environment of desks, blackboards, a small school yard, was
supposed to suffice. There was no demand that the teacher should become
intimately acquainted with the conditions of the local community, physical,
historical, economic, occupational, etc., in order to utilize them as educational
resources. A system of education based upon the necessary connection of
education with experience must, on the contrary, if faithful to its principle, take
these things constantly into account. (p. 40)
As I thought about the tremendous amount of turmoil and initiatives during this time period, I wondered if there was improved student achievement. At the time, I thought we were disrupting dominant institutional narratives that have existed for many years, but upon reflection I am not convinced that many things did change in the classroom. It seemed the more I learned, the more I felt I did not know.

6.4 Tensions and Silences when Shifting and (Re)composing Stories to Live By

As I continued to think about the stories shared in this study, I became aware of multiple tensions and silences. I felt the tensions and silences could be described as the messy part of experiencing multiple plotlines and multiple stories to live by. “Change is difficult. We can expect it to be messy and upsetting because it shifts the culture of the school. Because change is so complicated, the change process must be well-understood and treated with respect” (Hulley & Dier, 2009, p. 36). After many years in the role of senior administrator, I discovered that the passion I felt about learning and the feeling of uncertainty I sometimes experienced, were similar to the emotions I felt as a teacher in the classroom. There is not a prescribed amount of training, planning, or experience that can prepare an individual for a senior administration role. I felt, similar to my role as a teacher, senior administrators must remain open to new ideas, be attentive to shifting landscapes, and remember that people’s stories to live by could shift because of a decision I made.

As I began to gain more experience as a senior administrator, I began to become more attentive to tensions and silences. I realized in these spaces were opportunities for
me to learn and grow as a senior administrator. Bateson (1994) described the importance of learning through stories:

Wherever a story comes from, whether it is a familiar myth of a private memory, the retelling exemplifies the making of a connection from one pattern to another: a potential translation in which narrative becomes parable and the once upon a time comes to stand for some renascent truth. This approach applies to all the incidents of everyday life: the phrase in the newspaper, the endearing or infuriating game of a toddler, the misunderstanding at the office. Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories. (p. 11)

I began to realize it is through the process of listening to stories, especially similar stories that I began to become aware of the stories on the outer edges of my knowing.

“Sometimes change is directly visible, but sometimes it is apparent only to peripheral vision, altering the meaning of the foreground” (Bateson, 1994, p. 6). Bateson explained that being aware of the outer edges of my knowing was not enough. “Openness to peripheral vision depends on rejecting such reductionism and rejecting with it the belief that questions of meaning have unitary answers” (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). Bateson continued, “No single narrative is sufficient for understanding, no single model sufficient for aspiration” (p. 12). The varied points of view painted a complex landscape in schools and classrooms. Bateson stated:

Sometimes a narrative which seems to fit into one category metamorphoses into another. These are all ways of learning, by encountering and comparing more than one version of experience, that the realities of self and world are relative,
dependent on context and point of view. Because we live in a world of change and diversity, we are privileged to enter, if only peripherally, into a diversity of visions, and beyond that to include them in the range of responsible caring. (p. 12)

Bateson (1994) encouraged me to “become open to multiple layers of vision” (p. 12). It is through the diversity of thought and experiences that new awakenings would began to occur. For example, a reoccurring tension I thought about was the differing perspectives about differentiated instruction. As I continued to reflect on my conversations with people in school divisions, I was drawn to those that seemed to question differentiated instruction. Some individuals seemed to feel instruction should be the same for all students. They wondered how fairness could be achieved if the instruction was not the same for all students. For some, there seemed to be a desire for “sameness.” They seemed uncomfortable with the prospect of differentiated instruction to meet the learning needs of all the students.

As I continued to think about this, I became aware of a silence during the conversations about differentiated instruction. I imagined the silence was about disadvantaging the “good” students to advantage marginalized students to become “good.” The hesitation, by some people, seemed to be questioning how we could expect all students to achieve, and if all students demonstrated achievement how could that be fair. During my conversations with people in school divisions, this silence was not spoken. Later, as I drew upon my memory of these conversations, I sensed that this silence was indeed present.
Another recurring tension I sensed was about the heightened accountability to improve student achievement. Government and school division mandates were very clear. Student achievement needed to improve, particularly for Aboriginal students. There were significant dollars and efforts being spent to demonstrate improved student achievement. I sensed that for people in schools divisions to be able to meet the expectation of improving student achievement for all students, stories to live by for many people would shift and be (re)composed.

I also became aware of the silences about the heightened accountability expectation to improve student achievement. Some questions were rarely asked out loud, such as: Who is responsible when students do not learn? If I am expected to be accountable for all students learning, what will happen to me if they do not learn? How can I be accountable for all students to learn if I do not have the supports and resources in the classroom?

As I continued to think deeper about the tensions and silences about heightened accountability to improve student achievement, I was drawn back to thinking about the colonization process, and I questioned the notion about improving student achievement. In Chapter One, I wrote about the low achievement results for Aboriginal students using data from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. I also wrote about how generations of students have been taught with teachers using a curriculum written from a colonial perspective. I reflected critically about privilege and domination in culture, and I thought about how my middle class background positioned me as a member of the colonizing dominant group. I think, in education, we are harming our efforts to improve
student achievement by using the blanket statement: improve student achievement. In a colonized mindset, I felt this translated to perpetuating dominance and inequality. It implied student achievement is deficient and needed to be fixed. Similar to the research conversation with Barbara, in Chapter Four, when we talked about the awkward conversations we had with parents about whether or not their child was labelled vulnerable enough to be placed in a government funded preschool, this too, placed emphasis on the potential deficiency of the student. As a colonizer, I was perpetuating dominance by applying my values and attitudes to assert my understanding of my experience. In other words, the initiatives I was introducing for the government and the school division, were another way to perpetuate colonization. Something was wrong and needed to be fixed. At the time, I did not consider that something was wrong with the curriculum and how we assessed learning could be disadvantaging an already marginalized population.

6.5 Who Are These People?

The experiences I shared in this chapter captured memorable moments for me during my transition from my role as a teacher to a senior administrator in a school division. The experiences demonstrated the complex, and at times, chaotic educational landscape. I hoped that the experiences I shared in this chapter would demonstrate the complexities, challenges, and uncertainties faced by some senior administrators. Connelly and Clandinin described the depersonalization of administrator stories, pointing out that teachers use the word “they” instead of calling the administrators by their names or even their titles. They asked: “Who are these people [administrators]? What are their
identities, their stories to live by? What are their institutional stories, told from their positions, which loom so large in teacher stories to live by?” (p. 172). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explained:

We want a sense of our administrators as people who care and have personal experiences to which we can relate and from which they can communicate with us. We want people who have beliefs, values, and personal outlooks about schooling that we can agree with, disagree with, and deliberate upon. (p. 188)

It is important to live alongside those positioned on educational landscapes to ensure a shared understanding about how new plotlines can be created, and to understand how stories to live by shift and (re)compose. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) stated:

Somehow pockets of space for alternatives need to find a home on the landscape. They need to be places where administrators and others can work together in ways that do not place them within a hierarchy, ways in which the “natural” tendency is not to look up and down but for us to look to one another for sources of ideas, sources of authority, and sources of action. (p. 175)

The shifting and (re)composing of stories to live by on the educational landscape creates tensions and silences. As a senior administrator, I needed to create spaces for conversation to live alongside as our stories to live by shifted and (re)composed. I felt that spaces for conversation and collaboration created new opportunities for learning and hope. Hulley and Dier (2009) explained:

In schools, hope is the belief that all students can learn. It is hope that inspired educators to make that happen. It prevents panic and discouragement when
success seems out of reach and keeps teachers searching for strategies and resources that will benefit all students. Hope is a powerful emotion that is essential to sustaining the efforts of both students and staff. When adults join forces to collaborate on behalf of children and youth, the result can be dramatic. (p. 204)

The educational landscape is complex and difficult for teachers, school-based administrators, and senior administrators to navigate alone, but it is the synergy of collaborative teamwork that provides seeds of hope. Teachers, school-based administrators, and senior administrators working together in a collaborative manner create “spaces of belonging, knowing they are ‘for now’ spaces of belonging” (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 152). Senior administrators must ensure that all people are valued and supported through shifts and be attentive to tensions and silences. Ranells, as cited in Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002), explained:

The journey of providing a quality education to every child is not an easy one. We continue to have great debate over issues that challenge our old belief system. What we are doing is not innovative or glitzy. It’s just hard, often tedious work. (p. 182)

This chapter explored experiences that have shifted and (re)composed my stories to live by as a senior administrator. As I recalled initiatives and conversations, I continued to have puzzles, wonders, and new learning about senior administrators in school divisions shifting and (re)composing stories to live by during a period with heightened accountability expectations to improve student achievement. The next
chapter in this study will intertwine my puzzles, wonders, and new learning as this study moves towards its conclusion.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Intertwining Our Stories

As I continued to read and think about the experiences shared in this study, I reflected on how the experiences of Barbara, Alice, and I were intertwined. There were similarities between our teaching and senior administration experiences. It seemed the successes and challenges we faced as classroom teachers were very similar to the successes and challenges we faced as senior administrators, except on a larger scale. From the perspective of a senior administrator, the school division seemed like a large classroom comprised of hundreds of teachers and thousands of children and youth. Similar to teaching in a classroom, we knew each day would be unique, and there would never be a dull moment as we lived in the midst of unfolding experiences with children, youth, and adults.

7.1 Entering in the Midst

I felt honoured to have experienced travelling alongside Barbara and Alice for a period of time as they shared their experiences about their childhood, teaching, and senior administration. Both women have had remarkable experiences on the educational
landscape. Each time we met to engage in conversation, I was humbled at the depth of their knowledge, the deep understanding about matters related to education, and the openness and sincerity in which they shared experiences. While we travelled together to co-create their narrative accounts, my stories of experience entered my mind and into our conversations as I made connections with the stories that they shared. I felt a deep sense of respect for Barbara and Alice as I learned more about their experiences, and I was humbled to have received their trust.

Similar to me, Barbara and Alice started their narrative accounts by sharing stories from their childhoods about their experiences being schooled. The three of us attended kindergarten to Grade 12 during the 1960s and 1970s. Hard-working parents instilled a strong work ethic into us early in our lives. As children, we had stay-at-home mothers who committed their lives to running households and raising children. Our fathers worked hard at their respective jobs to earn a living to support their families.

In school, we excelled academically, and our report cards showed that we had reasonable marks in all subject areas. Alice excelled in math. This was evident in Grade 3 when she scored at the Grade 12 level on a standardized assessment. We self-identified that we did well in school, and our report cards confirmed that we were labelled as good students. We understood the rhythm and rules of school. We knew how to stay out of trouble, and we knew how to make sure our school work was completed to the standard expected by our teachers.

When we reminisced about our experiences as students, we had similar memories about the workbooks and readers we used, and the standardized tests we took. We
recognized the inadequacy of the “one-size-fits-all” approach to instruction and assessment. We remembered classmates who were not able to succeed in school, and we recognized that some were marginalized. Eventually, in high school, those classmates silently disappeared from our classrooms. At that time, students who were not succeeding in school were encouraged to drop out and find other paths to follow.

Our experiences with our families and the location where we were schooled were different. My schooling experiences were in an urban setting. When I began high school, new doors opened for me to have different friends and opportunities. In my family, I am the youngest with two brothers, 8 and 12 years older respectively. I was the first member of my family to attend university, full-time, and on-campus. Barbara was raised on a farm, and she is from a large family. Her siblings are very close in age, and she remembered being close with them. Barbara grew up in a family with strong Catholic values. She attended a residential Catholic high school operated by nuns. Alice was raised in a small town on the prairies. She had a chaotic childhood; her father was an abusive alcoholic. Alice recalled stories from her childhood that demonstrated the unpredictable environment in which she lived. Alice excelled in school, but identified sports as her motivation to stay engaged. She experienced incomprehensible behaviour with a few teachers, and this left her feeling powerless and betrayed by certain authority figures.

By the time we reached high school, we all knew that we wanted to become teachers. As we reminisced about our first years of teaching, we recognized commonalities in the tensions and bumps we had encountered. My mother passed away
a few months into my teaching career. I reminisced about my experience being supervised immediately when I returned to school after her funeral. I also reminisced about my experience failing five Grade 2 boys in my second year of teaching. The experience left me feeling I had failed. In Barbara’s first year of teaching, she experienced job loss and had to find a job in another school division. She experienced sexism and questions about her competency as a teacher when she discovered that the students in her senior English class were not meeting the expected grade level expectations. Alice’s teaching career started with a tremendous amount of stress when her father died on her first day of school as a kindergarten teacher. She talked about her experiences dealing with this trauma, and then her difficult experiences with her colleagues when she returned to the classroom.

Eventually, the three of us became interested in pursuing senior administration roles in school divisions, and we shared our experiences transitioning from schools to the central office of school divisions. Upon transitioning, we were immediately immersed in roles and responsibilities during a turbulent time on the educational landscape. We experienced the challenges of school division amalgamations, and we shared our experiences about introducing division-wide initiatives intended to improve student achievement. We came to realize that the stories we lived by as senior administrators began many years ago with our families, and when we entered the educational landscape to start kindergarten. Over time, our stories to live by shifted and were (re)composed.
7.2 Story Threads

As we recounted, reread, and retold stories about our experiences, and we created the narrative accounts for this study, I became more aware of the presence of tensions, silences, and new awakenings. For months, after the research conversations with Barbara and Alice concluded, I continued to reread and rewrite the chapters around Chapters Four and Five. I strove to find a sense of coherence within my field texts and literature I read. Eventually, I began to notice reoccurring story threads. I identified six story threads that resonated throughout this narrative inquiry: being a member of the colonizing dominant group, shifting professional identity, re(composing) stories to live by, becoming awakening to the lives of children and youth, school reform, and the shaping presence of dominant institutional narratives.

7.2.1 Being a member of the colonizing dominant group.

When I reflected on the stories Barbara, Alice, and I shared during the research conversations and the literature I read for this study, I began to understand that we were members of the colonizing dominant group, and we had unconsciously learned to perpetuate dominance and inequality. We were privileged at a very young age and along the way we were positioned to colonize other people. When I reread our conversations, I began to “hear” it in our words. I began to recognize it in our actions. We were schooled in an education system designed to ensure people of the colonizing dominant group were afforded privileges that were not always visible. Schick and St. Denis (2005) explained: “Because whiteness in public schools is not usually talked about, it is consequently recentred as an invisible standard of success against which others are
marked” (p. 308). Throughout our stories of experience, we struggled with situations that placed us in less than favourable positions and tarnished our desire to be good. Schick and St. Denis described a racial marker of whiteness to “construct an image of innocence and goodness” (p. 308). I began to see this as I reflected upon our experiences.

I struggled with the decision to fail five Grade 2 boys in my second year of teaching. During the years I taught in community schools, I struggled to understand the lives of the young children I taught. As a senior administrator, I struggled when I was positioned to introduce large-scale initiatives that were not popular, especially when I too, questioned their value and intended impact. Barbara and Alice also identified times of struggle. Barbara was faced with a decision about what to do to ensure a class of rural high school students passed their senior English class, she struggled to understand why some students left school to support their family, and she, too, struggled to introduce unpopular large-scale initiatives intended to improve the lives of students. Alice struggled at home with an alcoholic father, and later in life, with teachers that behaved incomprehensibly to her. Throughout her teaching career, she identified points of contention when she struggled between what she believed was right and wrong.

As I reflected upon our stories of struggle, I began to see the impact of colonization on our actions and decisions. We each had our own version of perceived “normal” and when situations did not match our perceived version of “normal” we set out to fix or save. We did not question if our perceptions of normal were right or wrong; we assumed everyone would agree. For example, when I introduced PLCs to the school
division, along with my team of colleagues, I was surprised by the negative reaction from teachers. When Barbara went to the home of one of her students, she was surprised that the student’s mother would support her son leaving school early and not earn a high school diploma. Alice enjoyed teaching kindergarten but was uncomfortable when she felt she had to tell parents their child did not fit into the colonizing dominant group’s version of normal. As colonizers, we were taught us to accept and not question the colonizing dominant group’s version of normal.

In my continued reflection about our experiences, another story of “saviour” began to emerge. Each of us shared stories about doing good work for others, but I came to understand how our perception of doing good things for others was part of being colonized, and positioned us to be colonizers reinforcing dominance and inequality. For example, all three of us introduced large-scale literacy initiatives designed to improve literacy achievement scores. We felt pressured by our school boards and the Government to produce evidence of improved literacy achievement scores, but we questioned how this could be possible for all students. Graff (1979) published a comparative study that examined the lives of illiterate and literate men and women in three Ontario cities. Graff discovered that the promise of education to improve livelihood was contradictory to the experiences of the men and women. The patterns of inequality in class, sex, race and age remained intact and relatively unaltered by the influence of literacy. In describing the myth of literacy, Graff (1979) stated:

Primary schooling and literacy are necessary, it is so often repeated, for economic and social development, establishment and maintenance of democratic
institutions, individual advancement, and so on. All this, regardless of its veracity, has come to constitute a “literacy myth.” (p. xvi)

We acknowledged that literacy skills were important, but we did not question if literacy would improve the lives of the students. Graff’s research suggested that improved literacy achievement scores did not improve the lives of people that were marginalized by the colonizing dominant group. Littlejohn (2006) supported this when she explained Aboriginal students trained for the workforce in residential schools discovered that they were not employable, even though they had the skills and competencies to work. Discrimination and racism prevented Aboriginal peoples from finding employment off their reservations. As I reflected on my conversations with Barbara and Alice, I came to understand that each of us were on a different journey in our understanding of colonization, our role as a member of the colonizing dominant group, and the impact of colonization on our personal and professional lives. We did not discuss colonization during the research conversations. Each of us was striving to improve student achievement in the school divisions in which we worked, to the best of our knowledge and experience. We do not know if we improved school divisions to make schools better places for students. I suspect the answer would vary depending on who responded. I recognized that we were not successful in creating school divisions free of colonization, and instead, helped to perpetuate it. I came to realize, as senior administrators, we needed to gain a deeper understanding of colonization, and explore ways to disrupt dominant narratives to move towards transforming our education system.
7.22 Shifting professional identity.

When Barbara, Alice and I were hired as senior administrators, we were eager for new challenges and learning experiences. I wanted to begin a new adventure, and just as I felt as a new teacher, I was determined to become the best senior administrator I could be. I knew the role would present challenges and opportunities, but I was eager to embrace them.

For the first few months, after I became a senior administrator, I felt a sense of loss. I did not anticipate that moving into a senior administration role would mean giving up my professional identity as a teacher. Even today, it sometimes feels odd to me that people do not consider me a teacher simply because I do not spend every day in a classroom with children. Barbara and Alice expressed this feeling, too. It felt odd not to be referred to as a teacher. It puzzled me to think that the many years we taught children and youth could be dismissed by people because we had a change in our job title. Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) suggested that:

Using a concept of “stories to live by” is a way to speak of the stories that teachers live out in practice and tell of who they are, and are becoming, as teachers. Important to this way of thinking is an understanding of the multiplicity of each of our lives—lives composed around multiple plotlines. (p. 141)

As I thought about this sense of a loss of identity, I sensed I was experiencing a new plotline in my life, and the tension I was experiencing seemed to be my resistance to the shifting and (re)composing of my stories to live by. Clandinin (2013) was inspired
by a poem by Okri that described the possibility of changing our lives if we change the stories we live by:

Okri’s [1997] last two lines [of a poem]—“If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives”—suggest the possibilities that are created by attending to the relational, by thinking narratively about how relationships unfold in inquiry. Okri’s words help me to think about how thinking narratively about experience illuminates new understandings. (p. 23)

I think the change in my stories to live by, teacher to senior administrator, unsettled me because I was moving to a space of uncertainty. It took time for me to adjust and compose new stories to live by.

In Chapter Two, I introduced Lugones (1987) and her conceptualization about world travelling. Lugones described a state of confusion she experienced about having or not having a particular attribute: “I was sure I had the attribute in question and, on the other hand, I was sure that I did not have it” (p. 9). She described people who have experienced this sensation as “world travellers.” World travellers have a sense of experiencing different worlds. Lugones explained:

The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call “travel.” This shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different than one is in a different “world,” and may not recognize that one is in a different “world.” (p. 11)

A shift in my role on the educational landscape made me feel like I had travelled to a different world. To this day, I continue to identify as a teacher. My life experiences
as a teacher cannot be erased or discarded. Clandinin and Huber (2002) described identity as “storied life compositions, a story to live by. Stories to live by are shaped in places and lived in places” (p. 161). As I thought about this description about identity, and I reflected on my continuum of experiences on the educational landscape, I realized how I have been shaped and (re)composed the stories that I live by. As Barbara and Alice shared their continuum of experiences, and we co-composed their narrative accounts, they, too, became awakened to how they have been shaped by their stories of experience. As I lived new experiences as a senior administrator, my stories to live by continued to shift and influence me as I navigated layers of complexity on the educational landscape. I realized that with each new experience, I (re)composed, and continue to (re)compose, my stories to live by. As I reflected on my resistance to and the (re)composing of my stories to live by, I wondered how other people experienced the shifting and (re)composing of their stories to live by on the educational landscape. This wondering led me to recall initiatives I introduced and led in school divisions that may have influenced the shifting and (re)composing of stories to live by for people that work in school divisions.

7.23 Re(composing) stories to live by.

A resonant story thread in the narrative accounts that Barbara, Alice, and I shared was about (re)composing stories to live. I chose to write the word “(re)composing” in

47 The online Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2015) defined the word compose as “to form by putting together . . . to arrange in proper or orderly form.” The same source defined the word recompose as “to compose again . . . rearrange.”
this manner to emphasize that when stories are shared in a particular moment over a
temporal span, they are composed, and then may be (re)composed over time as new
experiences inform and shape stories to live by. Huber, Li, Murphy, Nelson, and Young
(2014) explained, “Inquiring into stories to live by in this multi-perspectival way shapes
additional layers of complexity, uncertainty and, often, tensions” (p. 184). As stories
unfolded, and at times, were reimagined “. . . it is messy, often tension-filled and never
finished” (p. 185). Huber et al. explained that as narrative inquiries unfolded there was a
sense of potential for “counterstories, stories that hold promise for shifting the dominant
institutional narratives…” (p. 185). As I continued to think about (re)composing stories
to live by, I was reminded of Nelson’s (2008) words:

These stories are lived out, told and retold on the landscapes in which we live our
lives. As the experiences of our lives take us into new spaces and places, our
“stories to live by” become threaded with the new stories of experiences we
encounter therein. (p. 207)

Nelson explained that when we inquired into our experiences as part of reflective
practice there was opportunity for us to reflect on change, and potentially consciously
grow as a result of the reflection on change. “This is a process in which our identities
are exposed, reconsidered, maybe even questioned, and then affirmed and reinforced in a
way that characterizes more closely the teachers we desire to become” (p. 208). Nelson
explained that when studying experience, shifts could be difficult to detect. “For change
to become visible, it needs a lot of time. It needs a whole series of shifts, slight
movements in new directions” (p. 216).
As I thought about what Huber et al. and Nelson explained, I understood the stories that Barbara, Alice, and I shared demonstrated a shift in our knowledge and identity as we continued to live experiences on the educational landscape. As the shifts occurred, ever so slightly, over a long period of time, I sensed that our stories to live by were (re)composed on professional knowledge landscapes. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described professional knowledge landscapes as:

. . . the context for teacher knowledge in terms of individual teacher knowledge, the working landscape, and the ways in which this landscape relates to public policy and theory. On this view, we imagined the professional knowledge landscape to be positioned at the interface of theory and practice in teachers’ lives. (p. 24)

Thinking about professional knowledge landscapes and the re(composing) of stories to live by on those landscapes brought me to reread the stories of the experience that Barbara, Alice, and I shared while working on this study.

As I reread, I became attentive to the silences present, and wondered why we chose to share the stories we did. I wondered: Why were these stories the ones we seemed to live by? Clandinin (2013) wrote about the relational aspects of narrative inquiry, “Narrative inquirers understand that a person’s lived and told stories are who they are, and who they are becoming, and that a person’s stories sustain them” (p. 200). Clandinin explained a narrative inquirer shapes for belonging marked by “ethics, attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care” (p. 200). Neumann (1997) explained that every text will have silences and within the silences there are other
stories that exist in silence. In Neumann’s studies, she learned, “. . . that the stories I hear of others’ lives are composed only partly of text; they are also composed of silence for which no text can exist” (p. 92). I learned as a narrative inquirer, my purpose was to respectfully embrace the experiences being shared and understand that some silences would never be spoken. The spaces were silences existed where also potential spaces for unspoken stories to be shifted and (re)composed similar to spoken stories.

7.24 Becoming wakeful to the lives of children and youth.

A resonant story thread present in the narrative accounts shared by Barbara, Alice, and me was about becoming wakeful to the lives of children and youth. Greene (2014) explained being wakeful when she used the term “wide-awakeness.” Greene described an experience she had when she visited a museum and became aware of how Rembrandt used light. “I realized that if you looked carefully you could see how the light created the wonderful image. I think that was one of the beginnings; it opened my eyes and took me into a new way of understanding” (p. 123). Greene explained wide-awakeness can lead to spaces that accepts differences. She wrote:

“Wide-awakeness” can lead to the development of openness toward difference and a proper sense of humility. It counters one of the worst dangers, and that’s indifference and distancing. The opposite, if there is an opposite of wide awareness, is indifference—just not looking, not giving a damn. (p. 124)

When Barbara, Alice, and I became teachers, we became more aware of the complexities some children and youth in our classrooms faced in their homes and communities. During Barbara’s career she worked in schools in urban and rural settings.
She became wakeful to the dynamics of the communities as she endeavoured to meet the
unique learning needs of her students. In one school setting, she became aware that the
subject matter she was expected to teach had neither meaning nor relevance for her high
school students. She was concerned about her students passing. It was through her
efforts to find an alternative pathway that they were able to complete their schooling.
Aoki (1993) described the tension that teachers experience as they live between the
curriculum as planned and the curriculum as lived. He explained that the tension
unfolded when planned curriculum and lived curriculum bumped into each other in the
classroom: “These two discourses are different in kind: they resist integration” (p. 261).
Barbara also experienced schools situated in communities that struggled with poverty
issues. Barbara’s caring and compassionate attitude towards her students was evident
and, at times, she went to the homes of students so she could meet with their parents,
especially when students were considering leaving school and not completing their high
school education.

Alice’s experiences sometimes positioned her to be an advocate for students, and
at times, put her at odds with her school-based administrators. Alice’s keen sense of
intuition enabled her to reach out to students and demonstrate an ethic of caring. She
called the mother of one student to obtain the student’s father’s address so the student
could send him a letter. She supported another student through a difficult time when she
suspected sexual abuse.

My experiences, particularly in community schools in an urban setting, gave me
insight into children’s lives. As I reflected upon my experiences, I became awakened to
tensions I did not realize were present when I was living the experiences. For example, the volunteer service organization that coordinated the purchase of Christmas gifts for all the students in the school may have caused additional stress for the families in the communities, particularly for those who did not have the means to purchase gifts at Christmas. On another occasion, I introduced a reading competition that not all children could participate.

As I thought about the narrative accounts in this study and the literature I read, I remembered Clandinin’s (2013) comment about making visible “how teachers, and administrators, might attend differently to school curriculum making if their starting points were the lives of children, families, and teachers” (p. 37). I wondered how student achievement would be impacted if curriculum making started with the lives of children, families, and teachers.

As I continued to think about the experiences described in this study, about being wakeful to the lives of children and youth in schools, and the literature I have read, I was drawn to Clandinin (1985) and her research about personal practical knowledge. Clandinin explained, “Teachers develop and use a special kind of knowledge. This knowledge is neither theoretical, in the sense of theories of learning, teaching, and curriculum, nor merely practical, in the sense of knowing children” (p. 361). In the phrase, “personal practical knowledge” Clandinin explained “personal” as:

. . . knowledge that has arisen from circumstances, actions and undergoings which themselves had affective content for the person in question. This use of
“personal” draws attention to the individual local factor which helps to constitute the character, the past, and the future of any individual. (p. 362)

Clandinin continued and defined “knowledge,” as used in the previous phrase, as a “body of convictions, conscious or unconscious, which have arisen from experience, intimate, social, and traditional, and which are expressed in a person’s actions” (p. 362).

When I thought about personal practical knowledge within the context of the narrative accounts in this study, I came to realize that the experiences Barbara, Alice, and I lived in classrooms became the personal practical knowledge that guided our decision-making as senior administrators. Our experiences living alongside children and youth in classrooms carried our passion forward as we introduced new initiatives to the school division, hoping to make a difference and improve student achievement. Similar to our experiences, the teachers currently in classrooms have personal practical knowledge they draw upon to make decisions in the classroom, and to address the learning needs of the children and youth. Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) explained:

> Our research clearly shows that to more closely relate ideas about teaching and learning with the practice [of] teaching and learning, we need to be concerned with what it is that teachers know and with the knowledge environment in which they work. . . . Those concerned with improving education need to be concerned not only with what it is they wish to happen in learning but also with teachers’ knowledge and the professional knowledge landscapes in which teachers work. (p. 674)
When I reflected on the division-wide initiatives that I introduced, as well as the initiatives that Barbara and Alice introduced, I wondered about space for the personal practical knowledge of the teachers and school-based administrators. I wondered about the rationale for thinking about the classroom as a space of deficiencies, that is, a deficient model in which something was identified as wrong and needed to be fixed. If the division-wide initiatives were introduced in a narrative way and drew upon the personal practical knowledge of the teachers, school-based administrators, and senior administrators, would they have been received differently?

7.25 School reform.

A resonant story thread in the narrative accounts of Barbara, Alice, and me was our experiences with reforming schools. As I reflected upon this story thread, I struggled with the label of “school reform.” The online Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2015) defined the word “reform” as “to improve (someone or something) by removing or correcting faults, problems, etc.” The word “reform” was problematic to me because it implied something was wrong with schools, and the use of the word filled me with tensions. I decided to continue to use the word “reform” for this study because I felt it emphasized the tensions I experienced when I tried to initiate change. Our narrative accounts described shared experiences about being positioned to lead division-wide initiatives intended to change the instructional and assessment practices of teachers, to improve student achievement. I thought about the numerous leadership resources I listed in Chapter Three; they were used by some senior administrators to study the topic of school reform. The resources described how to make large-scale changes on educational
As I read and reread a variety of educational leadership resources and research studies, I came to realize that there seemed to be a common theme that focused on the deficiencies of instructional and assessment practices used by teachers in the classroom. It seemed to me that as I continued to think about this, the common message was that we needed to eliminate the deficiencies to improve student achievement.

Similar to the auditor’s report I referred to in Chapter One, the auditor did not consider the contributions that the teachers made to improving graduation rates, but instead felt that the Ministry of Education needed to tell teachers how to improve graduation rates. Clandinin and Connelly (1998b) helped me to think more about this when they observed:

> There has been and continues to be a working belief in the power of theory to shape school practice. On this view, the emphasis of policymakers, researchers, developers, and implementors is on figuring out impediments to the ideal and, by removing them, making possible, they believe, the shaping of practice by theory.

(p. 153)

Gallego et al. (2001) agreed that there was a need for school reform, but questioned reform efforts based on changing the instructional practices of teachers. “As others before us, we will also argue for a school reform, but from a different angle—one focussing on the nature of relationships that can change educational cultures” (p. 240).

As I continued to read Clandinin and Connelly (1998b), I was drawn to their imagining of a new story for school reform, “This notion structures not only the personal practical knowledge of teachers but also the professional knowledge landscape of teachers and policymakers” (p. 158). I considered this new story of school reform, I
realized that it could open new spaces for stories to live by for people in school divisions. I found support for my thinking when I read Gallego et al. (2001); they stated that “. . . to change a culture requires more than new laws, it requires new insights” (p. 241). They continued to support my thinking when I read the following:

It is clear from these stories that reforming education means to reform school and university cultures. The stories also imply that relational knowing—or the braiding of knowledge of curriculum and instruction, knowledge of self and other in relationship, and knowledge of critical action—is a promising means for achieving educational reform to benefit students’ learning. (p. 261)

Thinking about this literature and the narrative accounts in this study about the introduction of school division-wide initiatives, I was wakeful to the absence of the voice of children and youth. There was an implied assumption that something was wrong and needed to be quickly fixed. Gallego et al. (2001) recommended “. . . self-examination as a key part of the process to reform educational cultures” (p. 262).

When I continued to think about school reform, I found support in the writings of Clandinin and Connelly (1988), specifically their theory about the relational aspect of personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of teachers, school-based administrators, and senior administrators. As I reflected on the relational aspect of narrative inquiry, I considered the potential of working collaboratively within a relational knowledge construct to consider school reform. Clandinin and Connelly identified eight working principles that explained what it means to work collaboratively with schools: (1) Negotiation of entry and exit; (2) Reconstructing meaning versus
judgement of practice; (3) Participant as knower; (4) Participants as collaborative researchers; (5) Openness of purpose; (6) Openness of judgment and interpretation; (7) Multiple interpretations of text; and (8) Ethical quality of the co-participant relationship. When I considered the eight working principles, I was able to reimagine the division-wide initiatives described in the narrative accounts in this study.

For example, the PLC initiative I introduced to the school division provided a prescribed approach for teams of teachers to collaboratively to examine assessment results to determine the next steps of action for instruction. The DuFours explicitly stated that the traditional instruction and assessment practices in classrooms were not meeting the learning needs of students. While this may be true, it is important to be aware the PLC structure was built on a deficit framework, and assumed that teachers did not know how to change their instruction and assessment practices to meet students’ learning needs. From my observations and conversations with teachers, it was the opposite. I demonstrated this in my narrative accounts about changing my teaching practice as I became awakened to the students’ learning needs. In Barbara and Alice’s narrative accounts, they, too, described situations where they were awakened to students’ learning needs. We all expressed frustration when we felt that the administration or Ministry put up roadblocks and prevented us from doing what we believed was right.

As I reimagined school reform and thought about the narrative accounts within this study, I was awakened to the absence of thinking in a broader context about the division-wide initiatives we shared. An aspect of the initiatives not typically considered in school reform was the examination of school division and Ministry of Education
policies. In the narrative accounts in this study, we did not specifically discuss policies in our conversations, but as I continued to think and reimagine division-wide change initiatives I was awakened to policies that created additional tensions. For example, when PLCs were introduced, there was an assumption that collaborative time could be found within the school for the teachers to meet. The realities of mandated instructional time from the Ministry\textsuperscript{48} left no time for teachers to meet during the school day. Barbara shared her frustration about the introduction of the Ministry of Education’s Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). She was concerned the Ministry introduced the ESSP without understanding the strategic plans that school divisions had created and worked hard to implement. Alice identified that provincial education goals were being set with targets to achieve, but when she tried to collect the data she discovered the complexities involved to collect the data made it impossible for her determine if the school division was meeting the target.

As I continued to puzzle and wonder about school reform, I was drawn to the work of Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) and their studies about relational leadership. They observed:

\begin{quote}
48 “Beginning in the 2013/14 school year, the number of instructional hours for students from kindergarten to grade 12 will be set at a minimum of 950 hours each year. “The range of instructional time across the province varies from a low of about 910 hours to a high of 940 hours,” said Education Minister Russ Marchuk. “(With this program) we have quality teachers delivering a quality program on a more consistent basis across the board. The concern of inconsistent instruction hours in Saskatchewan schools was raised in a 2011 provincial auditors report” (Mackey, 2013, January 23).
\end{quote}
... many leadership theories and self-assessment tools attempt to capture a simplified and coherent version of a world and position the leader as a discrete individual who can change situations by applying leadership techniques, principles or strategies. While such theories may offer a way of reflecting on practice, they do not necessarily help leaders to grapple with the complexities within experience. (p. 1427)

Cunliffe and Eriksen’s puzzling about leadership and change initiatives led them to the notion of relational leadership. “What we offer . . . is a way of ‘theorizing’ and ‘doing’ leadership differently, not in terms of applying models or recipes, but as embedded in the everyday interactions and conversations – the relational practices – of leaders” (p. 1428). They explained:

As we grappled with how to move away from conceptualizing leadership as discrete individuality and in object/discursive/technique-oriented ways, to leadership occurring in embedded experience and relationships, we gravitated toward the literature on relational leadership as a means of making sense of our ‘data.’ (p. 1429)

They explained that “a relational leader sees people not as objects to be manipulated but as human beings-in-relation with themselves” (p. 1431).

Similarly, Brandon, Hanna, and Negropontes (2015) identified building purposeful professional relationships as a leadership lesson during their research study. They examined six school districts in Alberta to determine effective leadership practices. They explained:
Relational trust emanating from senior leadership encouraged participants at all levels to work effectively together to support learning, engagement, and well-being of all students and all staff members in the jurisdiction. Professional conversations were most often characterized by respect and challenge, summoning the best available pedagogical, content, and assessment knowledge to keep the best interests of student learning, engagement, and well-being of students at the centre. (p. 82)

As I continued to reimagine school reform, I wondered about the possibility of exploring relational leadership with a narrative inquiry methodology. I imagined the personal practical knowledge of children, youth, parents, and community, and the professional knowledge landscape of teachers, school-based administrators, and senior administrators engaged in collaborative work guided by the eight working principles for narrative collaborative work identified in this chapter. I imagined the possibilities and awakenings that could occur when people passionate about education began to (re)compose new stories to live by together.

**7.26 Shaping presence of dominant institutional narratives.**

A resonant story thread that was present in the narrative accounts of Barbara, Alice, and me was the shaping presence of dominant institutional narratives. As I co-composed the narrative accounts with Barbara and Alice, I became wakeful to silences and gaps in our stories of experience. It seemed that dominant institutional narratives were present in the silences of our experiences.
As I thought about this, I was drawn to the experience I described in Chapter One about attending Grade 12 graduation ceremonies, and to Alice’s experience that she described in Chapter Five about being the MC for a Grade 12 graduation ceremony at her school. Similar to Huber and Whelan (2001), I wondered “what might happen if the careful and predictable order of school communities were disturbed? (p. 224). Huber and Whelan described a “still pond story of community” (p. 229) on school landscapes where stories were smoothed over, and on the surface, all seemed well. They worried that “disruptions and over-flowing edges . . . [would] be seen as disorderly, chaotic, or unacceptable” (p. 234). As I thought about what they were saying, I puzzled about the dominant institutional narratives at work that seemed to perpetuate still pond stories. There seemed to be a desire to ensure that there were no ripples on the still pond. As I reflected on the narrative accounts in this study, and my conversations with teachers and school-based administrators, I became wakeful to many still pond stories. I believe it was dominant institutional narratives at work to silence the stories that may have seemed disorderly, disruptive, or unacceptable. I now see, as a member of the colonizing dominant group, I was also part of silencing stories that seemed beyond my notion of “normal.”

I recalled conversations with teachers and school-based administrators when they shared their frustration with me about a particular process or procedure. Sometimes, when I inquired as to why they continued to create frustration for themselves by following a particular process or procedure, they would tell me that “others” expected it. They would look at me, silently, as if to suggest that I should know: I was the other. I
was always surprised at this realization. During the conversation, I was typically
unaware I was being positioned as “other” based on my position as a senior
administrator. We would resolve the frustration together when we realized there really
was not a problem; it was simply an issue that needed discussing. As I continued to
think about this, I came to realize that the “other” was dominant institutional narratives.
They were silently working to ensure that the educational landscape remained a still
pond, because that is the desired state for schools.

As senior administrators, Barbara, Alice, and I advocated for change, but the
reality was that the division-wide change initiatives we implemented in the school
divisions were being equally countered by dominant institutional narratives that had been
normed and perpetuated by us. Bateson (1994) described the importance of being aware
of peripheral vision. She explained:

This is a pattern of attention that leads to a kind of peripheral vision which, if you
limit roles to separate contexts, you may not have. Sometimes this multiplicity
can be confusing and painful, but it can also become a source of insight. (p. 97)

As I thought about Bateson’s words, I understood that dominant institutional narratives
would always be present, but that as a senior administrator, I must be aware of this silent
presence. Bateson observed a trend in society towards specialization, which she argued
will lead to a narrow perception. She wrote that “more peripheral vision, offers richer
and more responsible living” (p. 100). Bateson explained that “an effective leader must
be a generalist who knows what to ignore. . .” (p. 101). “We need a broader vision, to
match the world in which we act with an image that includes the forest and the trees, the
baby and the bathwater” (Bateson, 1994, p. 110). As a senior administrator, I needed to remember to have a wide perception and to be aware of dominant institutional narratives. This awareness could lead to further learning.

7.3 Living in the Midst

The narrative accounts shared by senior administrators in this study, alongside the literature I read while engaged in this study, have created new puzzles, wonders, and learning for me and hopefully for readers. As I wrote the final words for this document, I was keenly aware that Barbara, Alice, and I, as well the individuals referred to throughout this study, were living in the midst of new experiences and (re)composing new stories to live by on educational landscapes. Each new experience would create additional spaces for inquiry. Clandinin (2013) described a sense of changing as a result of participating in narrative inquiry. She explained:

Narrative inquiry as a deeply relational practice sees research as an unfolding of lives in relation. New people join in and others drift away in the spirit of for now, knowing that their lives will always be shaped by their experiences in each narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry does not allow each of us to walk away unchanged from our experiences alongside each other and alongside our participants.” (p. 142)

For now, this narrative inquiry has a sense of completeness for me, and my attention has turned to new inquiries that are unfolding as a result of this study. I believed that the experiences of senior administrators needed to be shared to open new spaces for inquiry.
Stories of experiences shared by senior administrators may offer new imaginings that lead to new possibilities and learning for people on educational landscapes.

**Epilogue**

This narrative inquiry explored the experiences of senior administrators in school divisions as they (re)composed their stories to live by during a period of heightened accountability to improve student achievement. As I read through the study, I observed how my stories to live by shifted and (re)composed over time. I have a deeper understanding of living in the midst of experiences. When I wrote this document, focused on the experiences of senior administrators, I was also living in the midst of other unfolding stories on different plotlines. When I reflected on this, it gave me a deeper understanding of the complexities of living in the midst of experiences. At the time, I was a full-time doctoral student, wife, mother, daughter with responsibilities to care for her aging father, and a full-time senior administrator for a school division. It was challenging to balance my responsibilities. As I thought about this difficult period of time I was drawn to a memory of one of my last conversations with my father before he passed away. Reflection on the conversation provided me with new learning about my father’s shifting and (re)composing stories to live by:

My father and I were seated in the courtyard of the nursing home where he had become a permanent resident. It was a beautiful day, and we welcomed the opportunity to breathe the fresh spring air. We were both weary, but we did not
talk about why we were feeling that way. The details of the circumstances for
our weariness, and why we were at the nursing home, would have tarnished the
moment.

I looked around the courtyard and noted the new presence of green; the leaves on
the trees were beginning to bud. Birds were chirping, and I noticed the nursing
home staff had started to plant flowers in pots. I smelled the scent of fresh
potting soil.

Despite the weariness, my father seemed content. It seemed that his
mobility had diminished quickly, and the outdoor adventures that he loved had
come to an end too soon. He was wheelchair-bound. Even though he fought to
avoid the wheelchair, many times putting himself at risk of a fall, on this
particular day he seemed comfortable in the wheelchair. He leaned over to gently
touch a new leaf on a tree. His large hands, scarred and worn from years of hard
work as a mechanic, gently stroked the new life emerging on the tree branch. His
blue eyes, once sharp and alert, seemed interested for a brief moment in the leaf.
He appeared to be attentive, and I wondered if his body had given him a rare
reprieve from his dementia.

We talked about what we were seeing around us, with each of us
observing something the other did not. My father noticed a robin perched on a
branch. I noticed new buds on the ends of branches on the pine trees. We talked
about our brief road trip the previous week to a local city park. There had been
several goslings and geese in the park, and we had parked on the side of the road
to watch them. We had not been able to leave the car as it would have been too difficult to maneuver the wheelchair on the grass, but we had been content to watch from the windows, and had laughed at the antics of the goslings and aggressive behaviours of the geese. In the courtyard, as we talked, it felt normal, with no talk about health care and medical needs. We reminisced about experiences from my father’s life over the past 80 years.

My father eventually wanted to talk about his wishes for his funeral. I did not want to have the conversation, but I sensed it was important for my father, so I listened intently to make sure I would not miss a detail. He spoke calmly and clearly explained his wishes. As he talked, I began to cry, and I wondered out loud how I would manage without him. I could not imagine my life without him in it. I asked my father if there were any words of wisdom he had for those of us whom he would leave behind. He sat in his wheelchair and thought for a minute as he gazed up at the pine trees that towered over the building, and he noted the singing of the robins while he pondered his reply. He looked at me and simply said, “Just live your life.” (Personal Field Texts, July, 2015)

This memory is vivid for me. I took time to consider the landscape on which this experience occurred, and the learning that the moment provided for me. When I was in the moment, engaged in conversation with my father in the courtyard of the nursing home, I did not realize the gift he was giving me. It was unusual for me to be at the nursing home during the day because I was typically working, but on this particular day I felt inclined to take the day off. I do not know why I chose this day, but something
inside of me compelled me to want to spend the day with my father. Two weeks later my father passed away. When I gave his eulogy, I spoke about our conversation in the courtyard of the nursing home. I explained that the four seemingly simple words of advice he shared with me were not simple, but his way of delivering a very powerful message to those of us who understood his words. To understand his meaning meant looking upon the continuum of his life experiences to understand that he did, indeed, just live his life. His strong work ethic, determination, willingness to help those in need, and desire to provide a home for his family, along with his work-hard-and-play-hard attitude, left a legacy of memories for those of us who had the honour of sharing moments or years of their lives with him. He created those moments in time, those years of memories, by living his life through a multitude of layered experiences. As I reflected on this, I understood that my father’s stories to live by had come to an end, but many of his stories to live by were being carried forward by me, and shared with his grandchildren. As a family, we, too, shared stories to live by.

My work in narrative inquiry helped me to understand that my father’s stories to live by were influenced by dominant narratives and the societal expectations that surrounded him as he lived his life. There were times when I did not understand his actions or his words, and times when I did not agree with him. As an adult working on my doctorate studies, I puzzled about the tensions he experienced during his life. As I reflected on my memories about him, the shifting and (re)composing of his stories to live by began to emerge for me. Similar to the experiences I had as a senior administrator, he too, struggled with making sense of the world surrounding him. He, too, was shaped by
his family, schooling, and life experiences. His life spanned decades, and as societal expectations changed so did his stories to live by. Similar to the experiences of those positioned on educational landscapes, when dominant narratives are disrupted on landscapes, stories to live by shift for people.

For the readers of this narrative inquiry, it is my hope that learning about narrative inquiry and about senior administrators from a different perspective, will provide new puzzles, wonders, and learning. The experiences of senior administrators may seem like a mystery to some people, but the reality is, senior administrators, like everyone else, are just living their lives.
REFERENCES


Huber, J., Murphy, M. S., & Clandinin, D. J. (Paper in Progress). *Reverberations from narrative inquiries: Reliving our lives*. Unpublished manuscript.


APPENDIX: Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval
Research Ethics Board
Certificate of Approval

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DEPARTMENT
Education

REF# 2016-001

SUPERVISOR
Dr. Janice Hubar and Dr. Alac Couret - Education

FUNDER(S)
Unfunded

TITLE
Exploring the Connectedness of Identities and Leadership in School Divisions: A Narrative Inquiry

APPROVAL OF
CONSENT FORM
February 12, 2014

CURRENT EXPIRY DATE
February 12, 2019

COSTRELEASE FORM

Full Board Meeting ☐

Delegated Review ☑

CERTIFICATION
The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS
In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.uregina.ca/research/REB/main.shtml

Signed

Dr. Larena Hoeber, Chair
University of Regina
Research Ethics Board

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