REFRAMING BEGINNING TEACHER EXPERIENCES:

PEDAGOGICAL AGENTS NEGOTIATING CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Within the field of education, many argue that the first year of teaching has lasting impacts on teachers' practices and determines whether they remain in the profession. Teacher educators, policy makers, school leaders, and teachers themselves continue to discuss the attributes of successful preparation for teachers to enter into classrooms and the professional support, once they have begun independent practice, necessary for them to succeed and to continue in the profession. The increased concern around teacher retention has resulted in a greater emphasis on providing beginning teachers with support to be successful and effective during the induction period.

The nature of the support provided to beginning teachers varies widely in the number and kinds of activities and is unevenly valued within the field. Current approaches often appear to construe learning to teach in overly simple and linear ways: beginning teachers consume practices and strategies and become more equipped and effective educators. This misrepresents the complexity and dynamism of beginners' contexts for learning (and the interactions within and across contexts), assumes too little about the beginners' thoughtfulness and positions them as if they have no agency. Hence, the purpose of this study was to better understand beginning

teachers' experiences and how they negotiate and construct their teaching practices as they enter the profession.

Using a post-intentional phenomenological research design, including data drawn from teacher reflections using reflection mapping, dialogues, observations, focus group interviews and a collection of artifacts, this research explored the experiences of two beginning high school History teachers in a "high needs area", with a specific focus on how they negotiated their encounters and interactions within their school environment and how they made decisions in their pedagogical practice. Ultimately, this study revealed the potential power in situating beginning teachers as agentive actors embedded within a system of ongoing, dynamic interactions that collectively influence their development as educators. This dissertation concludes with implications for practice and research, suggesting a reframing of beginning teacher experiences where their unique perspectives are recognized as essential assets to their school communities and the broader educational landscape.

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There are many individuals to whom I am deeply grateful for their dedication, guidance and support throughout the entirety of my graduate studies. Even though many people in my life have come to conscientiously refer to my dissertation as "that which shall not be named", I am forever indebted to their patience, reassurance, and unwavering belief in my ability to complete this journey. There are not enough words to fully express my gratitude to everyone who has helped me along the way, but I hope that my expressions of appreciation below mark an acknowledgement of all the contributions that have left a lasting impact on me.

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A.E.G

DEDICATION

For my family

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

"We all remember milestones...but what did you *think*, from day to day? What were you conscious of? What did you say? Whom did you run into...and how did these encounters reinforce or interfere with the idea of yourself that you carry around?" (Halliday, 2018, p.136)

Glimpses...

The first year or years of teaching, often referred to as critical to the process of "induction" into the field, is fundamental in shaping teachers' practices and profoundly impacts whether they remain in the profession (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strom & Martin, 2015). Research shows that within the United States, 10% of new teachers leave after their first year, 15% leave the classroom within 3 years (Gray & Taie, 2015) and recent studies have confirmed the long-standing trend that as many as 40% of teachers leave within 5 years (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). In the years following the Covid-19 pandemic, the trends of early career teachers leaving the profession along with an increase of teacher retirements have contributed to "a dramatic increase in the number of teachers who are beginners—which [researchers] have labeled the 'greening' of the teaching force" (Ingersoll et al., 2021, p. 11). Although the retention and attrition rate of teachers is an issue experienced across different educational communities, the statistics show that "urban areas and 'high-need' areas (those serving poor children in particular) have the highest attrition" (Yonezawa et al., 2011). In reaction, teacher educators, policy makers, and school leaders are engaged in discussions around the required preparation for teachers to enter into classrooms and the

professional support necessary for teachers to succeed—and, it is hoped, to choose to stay. K-12 education stakeholders expect teacher preparation program graduates to successfully execute professional responsibilities, expand their skills and abilities, adjust to a school's culture and climate, and navigate issues of identity, belief, and expectation (Shoffner, 2011; Thomas et al., 2019).

Most first year teachers face tensions and contradictions as they navigate the induction process and explore the principles, ideals, and experiences encountered during their pre-service education and the demands and restrictions of their teaching practice within their school context (Strom, 2015). The problem presented within the first year is not exclusively one of retention. There are a clear set of related problems around the quality of induction for first year teachers, defining components of their entrance into the professional community, and the ways first year teachers' views of teaching and learning are shaped, for better and/or for worse, by multiple contextual factors. Given the increased concern with the "quality" and "effectiveness" and "readiness" of new teachers, and the worry about teacher retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), the purpose of this dissertation study is to better understand beginning teachers' experiences from, first of all, their own perspectives, and to explore how they construct their own teaching practices. This research invited beginning teachers to share their accounts of and reflections upon their experiences, to explore how they made decisions in their pedagogical practice and how, if at all, their decisions, understandings, and the like, are drawn from their prior educational experiences, current teaching context, and/or shaped by their teacher preparation programs.

What kinds of experiences and decisions might shed light on the beginning teacher and the construction of their teaching practice? The following vignettes are constructed from my

observations and noticings in schools to dramatize an imagined narrative of the *beginning teacher*. My hope is that these vignettes illustrate possible, researchable, tensions existing within the experiences of beginning teachers and help to illuminate the problem at the heart of this study.

On an afternoon early in the school year, the stuffy summer heat lingers in the hallways, incongruous with the newly polished floors and the fresh beginnings of fall. After the final bell rings dismissing the students for the day, the teachers file into the art room for a faculty meeting, the only room large enough to fit the entire staff. Mica Whitaker[1], a beginning teacher, falls in line smiling at other teachers she hasn't seen since professional development at the start of the school year. Exhausted from her classes and preoccupied with the list of things she needs to do, she is surprisingly energized to be around her colleagues. As she enters through the doorway, however, she becomes overwhelmed with the heat, but also by the choice of where to sit, as she notices the tables quickly filling up. Luckily, the administration indicates they want all the teachers to sit by departments, so she confidently begins walking towards the Math table. The faculty meeting has been scheduled to engage in "reflective conversations" about feedback from a recent visit from the State. For the last three years, the school has been identified as a Focus School based on the performance of one or more identified subgroups of students, but the simple meaning of, not to mention the larger implications of that designation, is lost on Mica. She has yet to receive any clarification, but sits in anticipation among the other colleagues.

The administration addresses the plan to implement significant interventions to "ensure" improvement among student outcomes. For example, intensive professional development for

[1] These vignettes are my compositions drawing on my observations, but they are not literal reports of one experience, Mica Whitaker is a fictional character.

teachers, new data systems to better track and analyze student progress, enhanced parent engagement efforts, and "expanded learning activities" before and after school as well as on weekends. There is an obvious tension within the room among the entire faculty, as the administration suggests that the instructional practice and pedagogy are the areas in which the school most desperately needs to improve. As Mica scans the room, she is acutely aware of several agitated facial expressions and the sharp tone underlying the few questions that were raised. There are fewer opportunities to engage in reflective conversations or brainstorm next steps than promised and the meeting concludes abruptly, leaving the beginning teacher keeping her feelings of confusion to herself. She doesn't know what to expect from the meeting's announcements or how the proposed changes will personally impact her in the upcoming weeks. The other teachers quickly gather their belongings and exit the room in retreat to their classrooms or to head home for the day. Lost in her wonderings, the beginning teacher realizes she is alone.

A few weeks later, where upon entering into the faculty lounge a group of teachers are settling into their prep period. Most are visibly engrossed in their computer screens as their fingers feverishly hit the keyboard. Some wear headphones to drown out the various conversations happening around them. Mica sits among the others. She is in a bit of a hurry as she tries to finish revising the last practice problem for her 4th period. But it is hard to concentrate on that: she is trying to shake off the frustration from her 2nd period. As she replays the moment in her mind, the sense of helplessness reemerges as tightness in her chest. She feels her face becoming flushed as she remembers the words she uttered, the ones she never envisioned saying in her classroom. Her thoughts are interrupted by the paraprofessionals' emphatic conversation gaining volume from across the room. They are sharing grumbles about a

student deciding to cut class and how they, instead of the student, were reprimanded by an administrator. For a moment, the new teacher finds it refreshing that she is not alone in her vexations. Only then does Mica realize she has been clenching her teeth.

The seemingly focused environment of the other teachers creates a sense of urgency to refocus and maximize the remaining time of the period. And yet her feelings of deep disappointment remain consuming. Moments later, the beginning teacher turns to a colleague sitting at the same communal table and asks, "How do you get your students to listen to you?" Before waiting for a response, the beginning teacher starts to recount the events that occurred during the previous class.

Generally, the conversation within the teacher's lounge revolves around frustrations with administrators, students, and other colleagues. Mica has noticed that teachers rarely share fundamental values or perspectives that drive their daily work and classroom philosophies. As she is sharing her worries out loud about what happened in the previous class, her assumptions about education and students as well as beliefs and values, whether they are tightly held or unexamined, are nonetheless latent in the words, but remain just below the surface. As she speaks, there are values and perspectives clearly evident throughout her retelling, but these are not what drive the current conversation nor does this seem to be the space to consider such issues.

Instead of remaining sealed up and keeping her concerns and frustrations to herself, she is bringing the experience from her 2nd period into the public, for others to shed light on. Mica felt compelled in the moment to raise her question to her colleague, but as the conversation continues, she's not sure whether she's venting, seeking confirmation or affirmation, or is she longing for answers to her dilemma. The norms within the space of the faculty lounge and the

desires and hopes of the teacher don't allow her to discover what impulses are behind her question.

In these vignettes, as the beginning teacher seeks to establish her place within the profession, the school, and the classroom, these interactions with her colleagues and students alongside her encounters with the physical space of the school building have the potential to become important moments that shape her experiences and possibly the construction of her teaching practices. The interactions with her colleagues might help her to understand how to engage in staff meetings, respond to centralized and administrative mandates, or how to utilize planning and prep periods. Her physical encounters and feelings associated with the heat in the hallway, the desk arrangement in the art room, or the focused environment of teachers' lounge and her impressions of how to engage with those spaces are formative and have the possibility to influence future encounters. These glimpses, composed on the basis of multiple observations and the customary arrangements and rhetoric surrounding teacher induction, begin to raise the various and simultaneous tensions that exist for beginning teachers.

Personal Path to the Problem

My formal K-12 education, the perspectives and values during my undergraduate and graduate studies as well as my years as a practitioner have shaped my journey as a teacher, and now researcher. I've always viewed myself as a lifelong learner and considered the process of learning to teach as ongoing. I understand the tensions existing for first year teachers because I have experienced them. In sharing my experiences as a beginning teacher, my hope is to provide a personal path to the problem that this study intends to address.

As early as elementary school, a large portion of my identity has consisted of envisioning myself as a teacher. I remember having an affinity for several of my elementary school teachers,

in a similar way that other children with positive schooling experiences might idolize their teachers. I was hypersensitive to the qualities of their teaching that I admired. Ms. Dixon, my kindergarten teacher, was able to recognize each student's uniqueness. For example, she nicknamed me the quiet warrior as she noticed that I didn't academically compete with other students, but with myself. Ms. Shelton, my fifth-grade teacher, instilled a sense of academic confidence in students as preparation for the transition into middle school. These two examples demonstrate my early exposure to the importance of the interpersonal and relational connection forged between teachers and their students.

In middle school, I began to pay attention to the pedagogical moves my teachers were making within the classroom. Without having the appropriate language or knowledge to describe their actions, I distinctly remember observing my teachers' implementation of the curriculum; I was not, and did not experience myself as, merely learning the required content of my classes. Ms. Atkins, my seventh grade English teacher, enthusiastically encouraged a love for learning beyond the confines of the classroom by acknowledging and making space for each individual learner and their interests. I began to internalize the instructional moves of my teachers by carefully listening to my peers' comments about their experiences. This included their reactions to how the class was taught, the aspects they enjoyed, and changes they felt were needed. I remember noticing how my teachers responded to individual students and how they created engaging classroom environments.

In high school I found myself fostering relationships with teachers who served as mentors in forming a foundation for my teaching practice. As an elective during my junior and senior year, I was enrolled in the Teachers for Tomorrow program where I worked directly within the classroom as a teaching assistant. During my senior year, I was student teaching with Mr.

Schumacher in a sophomore English class. As a result of the rapport, I developed with Mr. Schumacher as my mentor, rather than eating in the lunchroom with my peers, a few days a week I would join a group of teachers in their classroom for lunch. In reflecting on these formative years, I realize that I began to develop a kind of double consciousness, as a student and prospective teacher, which I now recognize as the underpinning for my process of learning to teach.

The influence of my teachers throughout my formal education has significantly impacted my perceptions of learning to teach and continues to shape my pedagogical practices. In addition to these personal relationships, my undergraduate and graduate education afforded me opportunities to further build a theoretical framework to ground my practical understandings. As an undergraduate I was immersed in the LaSallian philosophy[2] of the humanistic approach to service. My studies fostered fundamental ideologies for my participation and preparation to enter the classroom, a sense of respect and awareness of the increasingly multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic student population. These experiences cultivated ideas for adapting and experimenting with the structure of my own pedagogy as well as formulating an even deeper understanding of myself as a teacher.

In contrast to this gradual process, my formal entry into the status of 'teacher' was abrupt: four days before the start of the academic year, during the lunch break of my graduate school orientation my phone rang. The assistant principal at the school where I completed my student teaching placement called requesting I come in for an interview the following morning. I was shocked. With the hiring freeze across New York City's public school system and students

[2] A Lasallian philosophy of education comprises of five core principles: (1) a belief that everyone has valuable gifts to contribute to the world, (2) a commitment to social justice, (3) a concerted effort to respect the dignity of all people, (4) an emphasis on creating inclusive communities, and (5) a constant pursuit of quality education, which is characterized by the ability to critically examine the world (Van Grieken, 2019).

returning the following week, I had written off the possibility of being in a classroom. And yet, unlike many of my undergraduate colleagues, I was fortunate to receive a job offer. I was also in the unusual position of entering into my first year of teaching having spent seven weeks becoming familiar with the school community, the administration, the faculty, and the students. I can still see the smiling faces of students passing in the hallway in September as they congratulated me on *becoming a teacher*.

As a beginning teacher, I shared Mica Whitaker's range of feelings, including being overwhelmed, alone, occasionally connected, and grateful for colleagues. I was simultaneously filled with doubts, uncertainties, questions, and also curiosities and an eagerness to learn. There were moments I felt supported enough to take risks where my creativity and passion for teaching was encouraged. However, there were frequently moments when I adopted strategies or techniques simply because they were touted as best practices and seemed to be effective for other colleagues. I felt an unspoken pressure to adopt the normalized tendencies of other teachers in order to fit into the expectations of the school environment. I accepted classroom systems and structures from my colleagues that were seemingly effective, such as grading policies, attendance routines, and the organization of classroom space, and to some degree molded myself and my teaching around them. Although there were personal adaptations and implementations of these normalized behaviors, I don't remember any conversations or explanations, nor did I ask any questions, it was simply the way it was done. With little thought, I "implemented" teaching methods and classroom structures that were available because there wasn't time for reflection; I felt the need to survive.

While I remained the youngest teacher in the English department for several years, I came to admire the veteran teachers for their years of service, grateful for the nuggets of wisdom

I was able to gather from their stories or their demeanor in the shared space of the staff lounge or meetings. Though many of the first-year pressures faded, along with the acceptance of "the way it's done,", I continued to carefully observe, spoke up when I was addressed, and remained very cognizant of my place in the ranks. I quickly identified mentors among my colleagues who I am still indebted to today. I learned who to go to with problems and was able to ask questions about the curriculum, but also about union dues and contributing to my retirement plan. Among those mentors who went out of their way to welcome me, I became comfortable seeking a listening ear to explore my frustrations, vocalizing my ideas, asking for feedback on lessons and units, and at times offering my own suggestions to other colleagues in the department.

With only three years of experience and still a recently tenured, early career teacher, I served as a cooperating teacher for pre-service teachers in their undergraduate and graduate preparation programs. I remember feeling grateful for the opportunities to dialogue about teaching and learning. These conversations felt different from my experiences as a student in undergraduate and graduate classrooms because of their pragmatic nature. Through the questioning and problems of practice that arose with each student teacher, I became inspired, invigorated, and reaffirmed of my own passion for teaching. These conversations with student teachers around their observations and feedback allowed for me to reflect on my pedagogical decisions. I remember noticing a shift, as if I could now, with assurance, give voice to my teaching practices and some of my reasons.

I began to vocalize my beliefs about the curriculum as a means for critically examining the world and challenging existing social, political, and economic structures. In my classroom, it was not merely about demanding and forcing academic excellence as determined by standards and achievement benchmarks in test scores, but rather constructing a curriculum that represents

my students and promotes experiences of power, autonomy, and internalized expectations of success (Ladson-Billings, 1995). An established rapport with my students allowed for the creation of a classroom culture that encouraged the disruption of the assumed notions of curriculum and instead allowed for creative and expressive applications of ideas and concepts (Anyon, 1980). My pedagogical practices fundamentally located teaching and learning within the culture of the school and the community, where students contributed to the co-construction of their learning.

With five years of experience, I felt I was finding my place in a profession at the point when many people decide to leave, or have recently done so, when suddenly my school was forced to restructure, reorganize, and ultimately downsize. I was "excessed" and faced with the reality of finding a new school. Though there was only a five-mile difference between the buildings, I needed to learn a new school community, new administration, new faculty, new students and new expectations around teaching. Despite joining a faculty where five years of teaching experience placed me among the veterans at the school, I was a beginning teacher all over again. While it is widely recognized that the process of learning to teach does not end with the close of "pre-service preparation", it is perhaps not as widely recognized that it continues into the second five years of teaching.

My transition to a new school challenged what I considered to be valuable in my teaching practices and created doubt and uncertainty in my understanding of myself as a teacher. I felt pressure to learn the collective tendencies, practices, and expectations of a new building and mold them into my own-- as I had to do during my first year of teaching-- but these were not the same practices and norms, nor was I the same teacher. The expectations, from both students and administrators, included an emphasis on the explicit development of reading and writing

skills. For example, writing as a form of expression should be taught in a technical and formulaic way, with a focus on the skill as the means for content delivery. Students remained persistent in wanting the "correct" way to write a paragraph response to a reading passage or wanting the "correct" interpretation of a text. The school's philosophical emphasis on skill-based teaching and learning felt limiting. I experienced it as restricting my ability to do what had been a priority of mine, to build a classroom community that honored students as sources of knowledge and encouraged them to think critically. These disparate notions of teaching and learning created doubt and uncertainty in my teaching practices, my core values and beliefs as an educator, and disrupted my process of learning to teach.

Remembering my experiences as a beginning teacher and the comparable feelings as, five years on, I entered a new school environment, I've come to appreciate the multiple factors that contribute to the construction of my teaching practice throughout my teaching journey. Whether I was fully cognizant at the time or not, I was certainly drawing from my previous learning experiences, thinking back to my K-12 schooling experiences and understandings from my teacher preparation program. Within each school context, I tried to make sense of the school community and culture and expectations and norms through interactions with co-teachers, mentors, colleagues and students.

Over the last fifteen years, I've witnessed beginning teachers in conversation with their mentors, educational coaches, professors or supervisors, where their hopes, desires, visions, or perspectives remain latent. The conversations are focused on observations of teacher moves, classroom management, general curriculum design or the latest educational focus: "rigor", "critical thinking", "common core alignment", and "formative assessment" to name a few. Rarely are beginning teachers encouraged to reflect on their own negotiation and

construction of their teaching practices as they enter the profession. This negotiation and construction *are* happening, however, whether schools and teacher education attend to these processes or not.

Overview of Study

This dissertation study aims to better understand the experiences of beginning teachers embedded within a system of ongoing, dynamic interactions. As post-intentional phenomenological research, it uses qualitative methods to explore the ways in which beginning teachers make sense of their contextual realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The study, therefore, seeks to understand the experiences of two high school teachers in their first year of teaching in the History department. I draw on resources of the following types- teacher dialogues, reflection mapping, focus group interviews, observations, the collection of noteworthy moments and several artifacts -to invite the thoughts and honor the perspectives of beginning teachers during their induction.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework grounding this dissertation study draws from a Deweyan notion of "experience", complexity theory, and key tenets from critical race theory. The following sections detail how these theories are employed and how they together comprise an essential framework for understanding the experiences of beginning teachers.

Beginning Teachers and Experiences

As individuals living in the world, our circumstances in any given situation or context and the interactions with others constantly influence and shape our perspectives, beliefs, values and understandings. This process of steady shaping and re-shaping by our contexts is also of course, and consequently, something teachers are both undergoing and doing. I am adopting a

Deweyan conceptualization of "experience" in order to frame the experiences of beginning teachers as dynamic, interactive, and agentive as opposed to static, passive and isolated.

Dewey asserts that experiences consist of two inseparable principles: continuity and interaction. Continuity for Dewey means every experience, regardless if it's educative or miseducative, affects or influences further experiences (Dewey, 1938). Experiences, whether "the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future...has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.2). Dewey argues that experiences are interactive because they do not take place inside of the individual, but instead occur as a transaction between an individual and their environment, which may include other people, ideas or objects (Dewey, 1938). The environment is "whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had" (p. 44). These notions of continuity and interaction provide a means for understanding how any given transaction draws from previous ones while also shaping and influencing possibilities for the future.

I draw from Dewey's conception of continuity and interaction in this dissertation project because it provides an analytic tool with which to open up the possibilities to explore the processes of learning to teach. A Deweyan notion of "experience" allows for a conceptual framework that positions the processes of learning to teach as Strom (2015) appeared to describe them, where they are "emergent productions arising from multiple, ongoing interactions" (p. 322). Throughout this dissertation study, I understand the experiences of beginning teachers as products of a complex, dynamic relationship between *learning* to teach and the learning that happens in the *practice* of teaching; I intend to "emphasise [sic] that these are not separate things, but rather intertwined processes that co-constitute, or co-make, each other" (Strom &

Viesca, 2020, p.2). This framework more accurately describes the nature of teacher learning experiences or "learning-practice…[as] dynamic, multiplicitous, [and] ever-shifting" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.2).

Beginning Teachers and Complex Systems

As explained in greater detail in the theoretical groundings of experience above, beginning teachers are shaped by a multitude of experiences, including educational experiences both as a student in a K-12 setting (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Lortie, 1975) and as a student in a pre-service program (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2012). Upon entering their professional context and the school environment, beginning teachers establish and interact with a host of relationships, both horizontal (simultaneous in the present) and vertical (past and future), all of which have varying degrees of influence on the individual teacher. For example, there are widespread structures or mechanisms in place to support beginning teachers in their professional induction: onboarding professional developments, scripted curricula, mentor relationships, to name a few. But these support activities are not the only place where "learning-practice" (Strom & Viesca, 2020) occurs. Beginning teachers do not simply, "*enact* what they learned about teaching in isolation- they negotiate those ideas with their students and other contextual/material elements (e.g. physical space, school culture, bell schedules)" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.9). These various interactions and encounters suggest a process of learning to teach that is co-created, co-constructed, and "a collective process of negotiation" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.7).

As Cochran-Smith and colleagues (2014) argue, much of teacher education research appears to be predicated on the assumption that the complicated phenomena of beginning teachers can be separated, parsed out, identified, studied, and improved when examining discrete dilemmas and lines of inquiry. This way of thinking frames the various components of the

induction processes of beginning teachers into a professional community as distinct, functional parts to an outcome of teacher learning that can be understood separately. The overemphasis on and devotion to "programs", "models" and "phases" muddles the complexities of what constitutes learning for beginning teachers and ultimately simplifies teacher learning into intervention programs that remain "relatively linear and 'process-product' driven" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.1). Despite the fact that reforms or induction initiatives often reflect a linear view of teacher learning, the process of learning to teach, "cannot be understood in terms of direct, causal, linear, and manipulable relationships among various components" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014, p.10), but in terms of several dynamic, multidimensional, and changing relationships. Yet, a majority of research studies still reflect, "a rationalist approach in which the teacher more or less controls their teaching, the human/non-human elements of the classroom are relatively stable and passive, and teacher learning and teacher practice have a one-to-one correspondence" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.2).

From a complexity theory perspective, however, tensions or difficulties frequently experienced by beginning teachers can be understood as consequences of an interplay of a myriad of factors, contextual influences, and conditions (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Strom & Martin, 2015; Strom & Viesca, 2020) as well as identity (Chen & Mensah, 2022; Mensah 2019). I utilize complexity theory to analyze the experiences of beginning teachers from a systems-level view (Strom & Viesca, 2020) to examine the dynamic, multidimensional, and changing "interactions within and between systems…[and] the emergent phenomena that are co-produced by these interactions" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.5). For example, beginning teachers "must negotiate and seek to overcome instructional, curricular, and institutional constraints" (Saka et al., 2009, p.997). Taken together, these factors create and

comprise “the problem”, which cannot be understood as a product of any single strand. Complexity theory becomes a useful framework for this dissertation study because it allows for learning to be understood as an ongoing, continuous, simultaneous and recursive process where the beginning teacher and the knowledge to be learned are redefined in relation to one another (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Therefore, learning to teach constitutes an ongoing, continuous series of interactions that spur or form understandings that are then thread into the next interaction, or possibly changed in the process of connecting to other learnings and experiences.

Beginning Teachers as Racialized and Cultural Beings

Teachers are embedded within systems that engage with race and culture in different, conflicting, and oppressive ways. The American educational system exists within a “history of racism, exclusion, and debilitating pedagogy… [where beginning teacher] practices may reflect their experiences, and they may unwittingly perpetuate policies and approaches that are harmful to many of their students” (Nieto, 1999, p.41). Even though the events of beginning teachers seem to be “individually experienced and hence may be viewed as individually determined, in actuality [the process of learning to teach] is socially negotiated” (Britzman, 2003, p.31). Race has a “real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experiences, and life chances” (Sealy-Ruiz, 2011, p.26). Given the current climate within America, “poverty, race, and other material conditions can no longer be dismissed as irrelevant to educational activity, but rather must be acknowledged as powerful influences” (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.3). The reality remains that “80% to 93% of all current teacher education students are White females and they are being instructed by a teacher education profession that is itself 88% White” (Picower, 2009, p.197). Within the United States, we are faced with a “large demographic divide, with almost half of enrollees in public schools being students of Color, and only 18% of the teaching force

being teachers of Color" (U.S. Department of Education, 2017 as cited in Pizarro & Kohli, 2020 p.971). The racial and cultural disconnect between the diverse population of students and the high degree of homogeneity in the population of beginning teachers entering into classrooms cannot be ignored in analysis of those teachers' experiences, negotiations, constructions of themselves as teachers. This disconnect will be taken into account in the analysis of beginning teachers' experiences and factors into my framing of the problem as well as my methodological choices.

Several critical race theorists in the field discuss the essential skills and knowledge necessary to effectively prepare teachers for a more diverse population of students (Delpit, 2013; Ford & Dillard, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2005). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) define the key tenets of critical race theory as, "acknowledging the centrality of race and racism in society, challenging the dominant perspective, having a commitment to social justice, valuing experiential knowledge, and being interdisciplinary" (as cited in Mensah, 2018, p.1417). These key tenets of critical race theory underpin this study's commitment to understanding the complexities of racial and cultural dynamics—in particular, valuing the lived experiences and perspectives of people of color. Drawing from the key tenet of critical race theory that acknowledges the role of race and racism in shaping social structures and individual experiences, this research study frames beginning teachers as racialized and cultural beings, where their identity is "not fixed but constantly evolves and changes as people interact in social contexts" (Ajayi, 2011, p. 656). This dynamic notion of identity suggests that class, economic status, and gender inform one's experiences, skills, and ways of understanding (Milner, 2005; Mensah, 2019). The surrounding contexts and forces that influence teachers, and that they in turn shape themselves as well, "are not neutral- they are connected up to specific political, cultural,

historical, institutional, and material power" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.11). Therefore, the exploration of teachers' abilities or capacities to navigate within these racialized and cultural systems are essential to exploring their experiences and understanding their processes of learning to teach.

Problem Statement

Increasing worry about teacher retention and concern with the "quality" and "effectiveness" and "readiness" of new teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), has led to growing emphasis on providing beginning teachers with tools, strategies, and techniques (i.e. curricular guides, instructional resources, best practices) to be successful and effective at surviving the induction period. These resources and alleged effective practices from teacher educators, experienced colleagues and mentors are attempts to be helpful and to address the challenges of beginning teachers (or those transitioning to a new school), yet shape the process of learning to teach as a linear and unidirectional transaction. This perception situates beginning teachers as solely consumers and actors "doing" teaching to students (Strom, 2015) and positions teachers as only learning to teach by taking from others, which does not value them as autonomous thinkers with their own experiences and desires. A more dynamic and multidimensional view creates possibilities to "rethink teacher learning and practice as emergent phenomena that are co-produced" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.5).

The fundamental problem is: beginning teachers are positioned as almost passive participants during their induction process. Research on beginning teachers suggests that they fall back on their own experiences and observations in school, often reproducing instruction that has historically dominated classrooms (Kumashiro, 2012; Lortie, 1975; Strom, 2015; Veenman, 1984; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). The misguided assumptions of some teacher educators,

experienced colleagues and mentors made about the perceptions, knowledge and experience of beginning teachers --namely, that they have little, and less of practical use-- deprives them, the field, and the beginners themselves of valuable insights into the processes (both challenges and affordances) of learning to teach in the practice-context. Teacher educators' and professional teachers' shortsighted assumptions about beginning teachers and overlooking significant contextual factors contributing to their experiences can result in missed opportunities. Teacher educators' and teachers' understanding of pedagogical decisions and curriculum construction are potentially constrained by situating beginning teachers as consumers. These constraints, through research and pedagogy, also impact beginning teachers' evolving capacities to make pedagogical decisions and construct curriculum, as well as the formation of their teacher practices. We don't know enough about what happens when beginning teachers are provided a space to share their experiences as they relate to pedagogical decisions, their understanding of school culture, and their relationships to their colleagues, students, content, and school community.

Rationale

Given the need to challenge the existing practices and assumptions within the field that places beginning teachers as passive participants in the induction period, this qualitative study adds to a growing body of research that explores how beginning teachers construct their teaching practices within and among a complex system with a multitude of interacting elements. There is a need for research into these problems that is informed by adequately nuanced, complex, and principled theorization of teaching and learning to teach. Much of the existing qualitative research on beginning teachers utilizes case study methodology (Saka et al. 2009; Strom, 2015). Research that utilizes complex methodologies for "studying and assessing how teacher learning materialises in practice" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.13) is critical. This research study utilizes

reflection mapping, teacher dialogues, observations, and a collection of artifacts to illuminate the importance of how beginning teachers interact with a dynamic, co-created network in order to construct their teaching practices.

A focus on beginning teachers- whether in their first year of teaching and new to the profession, entering into the field as a result of a career change, or transitioning to a new school environment- is important for several reasons. Similar to new employees in other fields, beginning teachers enter the field of education with hopes, desires, and visions for establishing themselves within a professional community. They are eager to learn and want to overcome the perceived barrier of inexperience. The focus on beginning teachers offers valuable insight into the experiences and understandings they highlight as part of their process in learning to teach. Teachers entering into the profession from a career change or transitioning to a new school environment offer unique perspectives as well. Even though they already have established a professional identity and might not have the same barrier of inexperience, these beginning teachers are entering into a new professional community where their visions and perspectives are reexamined and reestablished within their new environment. A focus on beginning teachers offers stakeholders such as teacher educators, policy makers, and school leaders a better approach for understanding beginning teachers as agentive and actively engaged in their process of learning to teach.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand beginning teachers' experiences and how they negotiate and construct their teaching practices. Using a post-intentional phenomenological research design, including data drawn from teacher reflections using reflection mapping, dialogues, observations, focus group interviews and a collection of artifacts, this research

explores how beginning teachers discuss their experiences, how they make decisions in their pedagogical practice and how, if at all, these understandings are drawn from their prior educational experiences, current teaching context, and/or as shaped by their experiences in their teacher preparation programs. This research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do beginning high school teachers construct their own pedagogical practice?
    a. How do they find their way through and make sense of the multiple elements comprising their school and professional context?
    b. In what ways do they draw upon or make use of any of these elements (or perhaps pass over or reject them) in the construction of their own practice?
2. How do these beginning high school teachers engage in pedagogical thinking?
    a. Do they understand themselves as pedagogical thinkers; if so, under what circumstances?
    b. What are some contents and features of such self-understandings?

Significance

This research study aims to contribute to the literature within the field of teacher education and teacher professional development by focusing on the interactions and encounters impacting beginning teachers as well as their roles, decisions, hopes and actions *in* these interactions during their induction. This study seeks to offer recommendations for multiple stakeholders (teacher educators, teachers, and schools, specifically administrators) to better understand and support the needs of beginning high school teachers entering into the classroom. By engaging beginning teachers as agentive subjects rather than objects of study, they have a space where their experiences and voices are empowered. This research study allows teachers to engage in an inquiry process that supports the transition from "important theoretical knowledge

on community and diversity into successful classroom practices" (Fraser & Levy, 2018, p.178), in order to better understand the complex systems that contribute to the construction of their teaching practices. Offering teachers the opportunity to engage in reflection mapping in order to critically examine the multiplicity of roles, images, meanings, and expectations during their "learning-practice" (Strom & Viesca, 2020) provides a space to uncover and challenge their internalizations and idealizations of teaching.

Adding to the existing research on beginning teachers, the use of complex methodologies, "has the power to improve how prospective teachers learn information about both teaching, as well as transform how they are mentored into the profession" (Christianakis, 2010, p.116). If teachers, particularly those in their first year, are positioned as creative, thoughtful, and co-creators of their learning then it allows for "a paradigm that decentres the teacher as the 'doer' and 'controller' of classroom instruction, and instead examines teaching as a collective process of negotiation" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.7). The notion of critically examining one's own practice as a part of a learning continuum suggests that the role of the teacher is to constantly consider their interactions with "chronically uncertain relations among subject, students, and teacher" (McDonald, 1992, p.101). The ability to embrace the process of learning to teach within a complex system of a multiplicity of contextually situated phenomena provides a liberating space that encourages growth within the profession and offers insights into the necessary supports for beginning teachers entering into the classroom.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

For decades, education researchers have directed attention to the challenges that new teachers face when entering the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The continued high levels of attrition among newcomers alongside the concern over the "quality" and "effectiveness" and "readiness" of new teachers remains a focus within the field. The perception of beginning teachers as passive participants in the induction period, discussed in Chapter I, exists in part because of the deficit characterizations of novice teachers within the literature. This deficit view extends to how school leaders and administrators perceive beginning teachers at the start of their professional careers. Although the experiences of beginning teachers have been examined in research for over fifty years, the focus is often on the formal induction period and the structures in place for support rather than the voices and perspectives of beginning teachers themselves. An encouraging development in recent years has been a limited number of research studies conducted by current beginning teachers, especially teachers of color in “hard to staff” fields in “high needs areas”, that provide insight into their experiences during the induction process.

The following chapter reviews the literature on beginning teacher experiences, encompassing the diversity of findings, ideas, and theories around the process of learning to teach and the various contexts in which that learning occurs. I draw on my conceptual framework described in Chapter I as a tool for examining the literature. I begin with the existing literature on conceptions of learning to teach because how teachers learn and develop is discussed in a number of influential, contrasting and conflicting ways. These different views manifest themselves in both the conclusions drawn by scholars, and sometimes, in the kinds of

structures and supports provided to new teachers. Then, I focus on how beginning teachers are characterized and positioned within the literature, specifically the framing and analyses of their 'experiences', and what are identified as recurring, influential contextual factors and how these are discussed. Next, I address the various learning contexts in which beginning teachers participate, what I am defining as the institutional context, the social context, and the autobiographical context. Within those sections, I address how each context is mapped and named within the literature, focusing on the affordances and challenges that each context appears to pose for beginning teachers in their process of learning to teach. Finally, in the last sections of this chapter, I discuss the traditions of practitioner research and how they inform my study, and I address the benefits of exploring beginning teacher experiences through a framework of complexity theory.

Conceptions of Learning to Teach

How teachers learn and develop has been conceptualized in a number of influential, contrasting and conflicting ways for many years. There are some scholars that conceptualize teaching as a craft, an art form or performative act (Goffman, 1959; Liew, 2013), while others view teaching as technical skills to be learned (Ball & Forzani, 2010; Lemov, 2010). Some theorize learning to teach as a continuum or life-long endeavor (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a) while others consider teaching as joining a community of practice characterized by a progression towards expertise or mastery of the occupation, trade, or profession (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). As Carter (1990) notes "how one frames the learning-to-teach question depends a great deal on how one conceives of what needs to be learned and how that learning might take place" (p. 307). For example, scholars who view teachers as *skilled technicians* might argue that "the work of teaching itself is standardized: rule bound and replete with procedures and guidelines to

follow in the classroom*"* (Evans, 2010, p.187). This notion of teaching suggests that teachers must learn how to execute standardized directives in curriculum where high test scores are measures of success. Others scholars who view teachers as *active negotiators* (Lampert, 1985) or *adaptive experts* (Hammerness et al., 2005), might argue that teachers must learn "how to think on their feet, size up situations, and decide what to do...and use what they learn to inform their planning and teaching" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p.27). This notion of teaching suggests what is to be *learned* includes skills in perceptiveness, adaptive expertise (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986), and flexibility as well as strategies for effective problem solving.

These different conceptualizations of the role of the teacher or what it means to *do* or *perform* the act of teaching thus influence what constitutes *learning to teach.* Although teacher learning is conceptualized in varied and substantial ways, many research studies reflect, "a rationalist approach in which the teacher more or less controls their teaching, the human/non-human elements of the classroom are relatively stable and passive, and teacher learning and teacher practice have a one-to-one correspondence" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.2). Several researchers in the field have discussed the "knowledge base" (e.g. Clandinin & Husu, 2017) that teachers should possess, whether pedagogical, methodological, and/or disciplinary, yet the conception of teachers as *creators* of knowledge about their practice is a valuable and under-recognized resource for understanding the act of teaching.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter I, this dissertation study makes central the complex, dynamic relationship between *learning* to teach and the learning that happens in the *practice* of teaching in order to "emphasise that these are not separate things, but rather intertwined processes that co-constitute, or co-make, each other" (Strom & Viesca, 2020, p.2). In other words, this means that the process of learning to teach does not only happen in preservice

contexts, but also in the real contexts that follow. Therefore, this research study most closely draws from the notion of *learning in practice* where teachers are "actively learning as they teach" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p.11). Ball and Cohen (1999) describe teaching as, "particular students interacting with particular teachers over particular ideas in particular circumstances" (p.10). Since teaching always occurs in unique situations, "the core knowledge teachers have of teaching comes from their practice" (Carter, 1993, p.7). Therefore, *learning to teach* should incorporate knowledge from teachers' practices and experiences (Borko & Mayfield, 1995).

Teachers as Pedagogical Thinkers

An essential aspect of understanding the process of learning to teach is exploring how teachers engage in thinking about their teaching. Clark and Peterson (1986), in the Third Handbook of Research on Teaching, broadened research avenues on teacher thinking to include a cognitive psychology approach, a seminal shift from studies grounded in behaviorism during previous decades. In their review of research, Clark and Peterson (1986) identified three major categories of teachers' thought processes, "(a) teacher planning (preactive and postactive thoughts), (b) teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions, (c) teachers' theories and beliefs" (p.10). As evidenced by many researchers in the field, there is an important distinction between the thinking that teachers do at various points in the teaching process. The type of thinking that teachers are doing is different when they are planning and preparing to teach, when they are engaging and interacting with students, or when they are reflecting after a given day or certain activity (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Additionally, teachers' prior knowledge, theories and beliefs have considerable effects on teachers' planning, thoughts and decisions (Clark & Peterson, 1986). These three categories of research established an initial framing to better understand the

conceptual nature of the process of teaching that informed the more visible and identifiable features of teachers' actions and observable classroom behaviors.

More recently, Kansanen (2000) extended the research on teacher thinking by exploring the phenomenon of *pedagogical thinking* as a way to understand the decisions teachers make. Kansanen (2000) notes, "when the teacher is working s/he cannot avoid thinking, reflecting, pondering or contemplating his/her decisions in some way." (p.18). He goes on to argue that teachers are continuously making decisions which means "taking stands…and choosing between alternatives in order to arrive at a certain result" (p.3). This research study uses Kansanen's (2000) notion of *pedagogical thinking* to understand the justifications and reasons teachers give for their actions.

Beginning Teachers' Experiences: Framings and Analyses

The early years of teaching have long been found to be challenging (e.g. Cochran-Smith et al., 2008). In recent decades, many researchers have focused on both the nature of the various challenges faced by beginning teachers and on conditions, structures and supports that may mitigate and make those challenges more manageable and less likely to be detrimental to teachers (and to teaching, schooling, and students). Researchers have examined beginning teachers' experiences in order to make recommendations for how to best support their transition into the teaching profession. For example, Moir (1999) categorized the challenging experiences of beginning teachers as a sequence of five developmental phases: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, and reflection (see Figure 1). According to Moir, the anticipation phase is characterized by the excitement and idealism during the pre-service preparation period prior to the start of the school year. The survival phase occurs during the first few months of the year when beginning teachers start to feel overwhelmed and "struggle to keep their heads above

water" (p.1). During the disillusionment phase, beginning teachers express, "self-doubt, have lower self-esteem, and question their professional commitment" (p.2). As the end of the year approaches, Moir indicates that beginning teachers experience the rejuvenation phase that includes increased confidence and an understanding of the realities of the profession. Lastly, the reflection phase is when beginning teachers "highlight events that were successful and those that were not" (p.2) and start to look toward their second year.

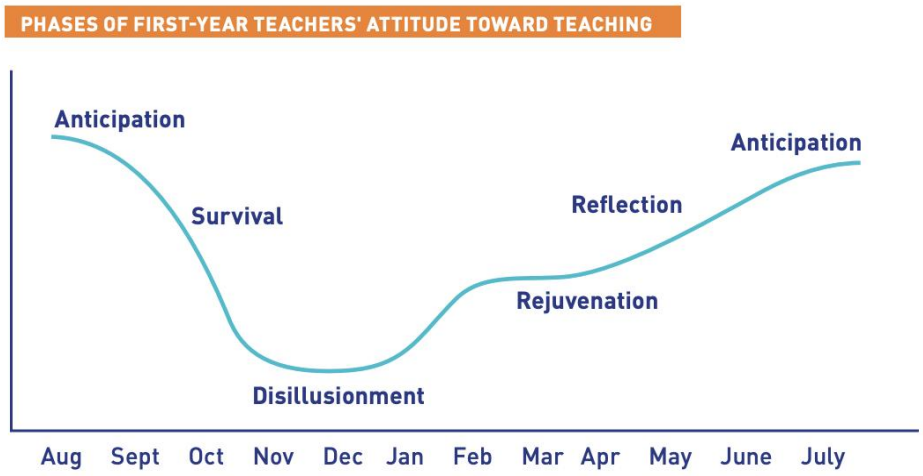

Figure 1: Phases of First-Year Teachers' Attitude Toward Teaching (Moir, 1999)

Moir (1999) notes that:

> While not every new teacher goes through this exact sequence, these phases are very useful in helping everyone involved—administrators, other support personnel, and teacher education faculty—in the process of supporting new teachers (p.1)

Since Moir's depiction, metaphors describing situations of peril have been frequently utilized within the literature to characterize beginning teachers' experiences as 'an emotional rollercoaster' (Mansfield et al., 2014), where they either 'sink or swim' (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) or learn through 'trial by error' (Howe, 2006). Many researchers describe the difficulties throughout the induction process, concluding that teachers face a loss of idealism (Feiman-

Nemser, 2003), disillusionment (Shoffner, 2011), and isolation and loneliness (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). For example, Shoffner (2011) extended the work of McCann et al. (2005) to explore the common, wide-ranging, and disparate causes of frustrations for beginning teachers, including difficulties forming relationships, managing the workload, knowledge of subject and developing curriculum, objectivity while grading, individual autonomy, and issues surrounding physical and personal characteristics.

The focus of existing research is on the individual person who is a teacher with little attention to the teacher's surrounding contexts and their encounters and interactions with them. Since the focus has remained on the individual person, the solution to address the challenges confronting beginning teachers is to "fix" them by "filling them up" with knowledge, skills, or innovative strategies to cope (Nieto, 2003; Johnson et al., 2014). This conventional framing operates from a deficit perspective and positions beginning teachers as lacking agency and competence, while failing to acknowledge the complex and dynamic interactions between individuals and their surrounding contexts (Johnson et al., 2014). As Feiman-Nemser (2003) asserts, "we misrepresent the process of learning to teach when we consider new teachers as finished products, when we assume they mostly need to refine existing skills, or when we treat their learning needs as signs of deficiency in their preparation" (p.26). Often, then, the beginning teacher is depicted as a quite isolated individual, more acted upon than acting, and among contexts that are at best thinly described and investigated.

Teacher Resilience

In contrast to the somewhat passive novice frequently depicted in the literature, some researchers have challenged the deficit view of beginning teachers through their contributions to a body of literature on teacher resilience (Beltman et al., 2011). Broadly speaking, the construct

of resilience comes from the field of psychology and has been used in research as a theoretical framework when studying 'at -risk' groups of individuals: children's development in challenging environments, women's career pathways or minoritized student experiences in K-12 and higher education settings (Yonezawa et al., 2011). To expand on this notion, Yonezawa and colleagues (2011) used the concept of resiliency to understand why teachers stay in urban school environments throughout their professional career. They defined teacher resilience as "a dynamic construct that emerges within the interplay between individuals' strengths and self-efficacy and social environments in which they live and work" (p.916). In recent years, many researchers are drawing on resiliency as a construct to examine "the adaptive processes through which resilient individuals emerge" (p.916).

Johnson et al. (2014) embarked on a study of early career teachers that used teacher resilience as a "lens through which to examine the complex issues associated with making the transition to the teaching profession" (p.532). In their study of sixty beginning teachers, the conception of teacher resilience disrupted the predominant narratives that focus on the individual teacher difficulties and challenges and allowed for the contextualization of their experiences within broader social, cultural, and political realms (Johnson et al., 2014). Similar to how Lampert (1985) depicted the teacher as an *adaptive expert* and *dilemma manager*, through the lens of resiliency, the beginning teacher "accepts conflict as a continuing condition with which persons can learn to cope" (Lampert, 1985, p.192). Lampert goes on to suggest that to "manage" these conflicts implies, "the capacity for invention or improvisation" (p.193). This framework of resilience becomes a useful tool to examine beginning teachers' experiences because it accounts for the social, cultural, and political contexts encountered during the induction process while

positioning teachers as agentive, adaptable, and capable of generating creative and spontaneous solutions.

Radical Acceptance

Drawing from Buddhist philosophy, psychologist Marsha Linehan (1993) coined the term "radical acceptance" to describe the practice of recognizing and accepting the reality of one's surrounding circumstances, even when faced with challenging situations, discomfort, and/or frustration. While the notion of teacher resilience provides a useful framework for understanding beginning teachers' capacity to adapt and persist in the face of adversity, the mindset of radical acceptance allows for the cultivation of resilience through acceptance rather than resistance.

Importing Linehan to an educational setting, the concept of radical acceptance has been translated as the practice of teacher self-acceptance that aids educators in reframing difficult behaviors or interactions with students or coping with moments outside of their control (Kohler et al., 2008). Practicing radical acceptance can significantly contribute to building resilience by allowing educators to accept difficult situations, which enables them the ability to move forward and cope with challenges more effectively. For example, a beginning teacher experimenting with a new instructional strategy might initially struggle to engage students or see the desired results. Instead of feeling discouraged or questioning their ability, radical acceptance provides an acknowledgement that the teaching method may not work perfectly the first time. By accepting the fact that challenges and setbacks are part of the learning process, beginning teachers might take the opportunity to reflect on what aspects of the strategy were effective and what might need adjustment. This mindset allows the teacher to stay open to feedback, tweak their approach, and continue refining their methods without self-judgment. Ultimately, the teacher is able to view the

experience not as failure, but as a valuable step in their ongoing development, leading to more thoughtful and effective pedagogical practices in the future.

A framework of radical acceptance empowers teachers to embrace challenges without becoming overwhelmed by them, fostering a mindset that promotes growth, emotional balance, and long-term well-being. Instead of seeing setbacks as insurmountable obstacles, radical acceptance encourages teachers to view them as opportunities for learning. This shift not only strengthens teachers' ability to handle future challenges but also enhances their overall teaching practice, making them more adaptable, reflective, and resilient. By accepting difficult circumstances as inherent to the teaching process, beginning teachers can reduce stress, enhance problem-solving skills, and sustain their motivation and enthusiasm over time.

Radical acceptance remains an underexplored concept within educational research, particularly in the context of teacher learning and development. While much has been written about teacher resilience, the specific practice of radical acceptance as a framework for understanding how teachers navigate challenges is still relatively under analyzed. The concept offers a unique lens through which to examine how beginning teachers respond to adversity throughout their first year—not just as a matter of resilience or coping, but as an active, mindful process of acknowledging and accepting the complexities of teaching.

Teacher Learning Contexts

Researchers have studied teacher learning within several salient learning contexts, which I categorize as institutional, social, and autobiographical spaces. In the institutional space I include the school's functioning as a "learning system", consisting of the collective practices, structures, and material elements within the school environment. In the social space, I locate the interactions and relationships that beginning teachers have with administrators, colleagues,

students and parents as part of their entrance into a professional community of practice. Lastly, what I am calling the autobiographical space includes teacher beliefs on teaching and learning, personal qualities, and background experiences. The following sections provide an overview of how researchers have examined these learning contexts and the implications of these spaces for beginning teachers.

Institutional Context

Many researchers analyze the school as a learning system because it consists of complex, multidimensional ecologies in which teachers learn (Daly et al., 2020; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Strom, 2015). On the institutional level this includes certain material provisions, temporal arrangements, and practices that have become institutionalized within the school environment, such as collective school-wide practices, school structures, and community partnerships. From this ecological perspective, the relational interactions, occurring both formally and informally within the school environment, "are constantly dynamic, with multiple and simultaneous interactions taking place" (Daly et al., 2020, p.652). It is from these interactions that each school develops a unique learning community that maintains its own cultures and norms (Pardo, 2006). Deal and Peterson (1993) define a school culture as the "norms, values, and attitudes, or the "inner reality" of a school" (as cited in Strom et al., 2018, p.18).

The concrete ways in which school cultures manifest themselves are very important and have the potential to influence how beginning teachers interact with the institutional learning context. As Ingersoll and Strong (2011) note, "there is a necessary role for schools in providing an environment where novices are able to learn the craft and survive and succeed as teachers" (p.203). The school environment can either support or undermine beginning teachers' transition during the induction period, through the presence or absence, and insofar as they do take place,

the nature and quality, of "orientation sessions, faculty collaborative periods, meetings with supervisors, developmental workshops, extra classroom assistance, reduced workloads, and, especially, mentoring" (p.203).

In their metasynthesis review of empirical research, Strom et al. (2018) found several studies that indicated the impact of the schools' values on first year teachers, citing that collaborative school cultures, "were supportive for new teachers and encouraged pedagogical growth and confidence building, while schools with cultures of individualism and isolation served as a barrier to professional growth or support" (p.18). Additionally, in the same review of research, Strom et al. (2018) found that "the degree of alignment of the school staff's collective vision of teaching with the particular vision of teaching the novice brought to the profession from her pre-service preparation affected the ease of transition to first-year teaching" (p.18). This suggests that a beginning teacher with values, beliefs, and pedagogical practices more closely aligned to the collective vision and practices of the school might feel more supported during their induction. Conversely, a teacher with divergent pedagogical practices or principles that counter the established culture might feel more isolated and discouraged. Other examples of institutional support or constraint for beginning teachers, depending on their role in the school culture, include teaching assignments, observations and evaluation measures, prescribed curriculum or curriculum focus, test preparation, grading policies, access to classroom resources and expectations around the use and integration of technology (Strom et al., 2018). The institutional context consists of a multiplicity of interactions and encounters, yet constitutes only one of the factors shaping beginning teachers' experiences.

Social Context

The opportunities within a professional community of practice to build relationships, collaborate, learn collectively, share perspectives and values, and receive feedback are all important components that form how beginning teachers interact with the social learning context. As Kardos et al. (2001) noted, "Since 1980, many researchers have studied professional culture—sometimes calling it teacher culture, adult culture, professional community, or teacher community—and have sought to identify the conditions that promote positive working relationships among teachers" (p.254). Applying lessons drawn from research in organizational psychology of non-profits to an educational context, it is evident that the best environment to support learning is one "in which learners feel socially differentiated and unique as well as socially integrated and authentically connected members of a community" (Hess, 2014, p.46). Increasing amounts of research evidence suggest that teachers learn best when they are immersed in a "learning community" that supports and enriches them as they develop as practitioners (Yonezawa et al., 2011, p.922). The social learning context can occur through structured and formalized routines (administrative support, mentor relationships, teaming, etc.) or informal encounters (ad-hoc co-teaching collaboration, colleague relationships, etc.). It is through these varied social interactions that the "ongoing processes and integrated systems that facilitate individuals'...ability to learn, grow, and change as a result of organizational experiences" (Gill, 2010, p.35). McDonald and Elias (1983) maintained, "the professional cultures into which new teachers are inducted are critically important because these early years not only confirm new teachers' "choice of an occupation in life" but also lay "a base for future professional development" (as cited in Kardos et al, 2001, p.255).

Various members within a school community, including school leadership, teachers, faculty, and staff "have the potential for shaping teaching practice in unpredictable ways" (Strom, 2015, p.323). Administrators, for example, can serve as powerful sources of support and advocacy, providing beginning teachers with guidance and resources that can instill confidence in their teaching practices (Strom et al., 2018). Unfortunately, more often than not, inconsistent administrative support or a disconnect between the teaching model preferred by administrators and those learned by new teachers in their pre-service programs "result[s] in negative impacts on beginning teachers, including self-isolation, fear, and constrained teaching practices" (Strom et al., 2018, p.16).

Many researchers have examined the variety of mentoring programs and their value as a part of supporting beginning teachers in their induction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Strom et al., 2018). Mentoring practices may include helping beginning teachers to become familiar with school structures and culture (Strom et al., 2018) or provide curricular and instructional support (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These mentoring arrangements, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggested, can also "help newcomers participate in dialogue with puzzling problems of practice" (p.270). The presence or absence of mentoring or coaching relationships has the potential to impact beginning teachers' entrance into the professional community. Beginning teachers who have positive mentoring experiences receive support to more effectively carry out aspects of teaching including maintaining a positive classroom environment, lesson planning to account for students' needs and interests, and constructive classroom management strategies (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Beyond interactions with the administration and mentors, beginning teachers' encounters with the social learning context will largely depend on the group of colleagues they work with

and how "they welcome novices in their professional exchanges and pay attention to their needs and concerns" (Kardos et al., 2001, p.256). These groups may include the entire faculty, a department or grade level team, a co-teaching partnership, an instructional cluster or other focused groups within the school (Kardos et al., 2001). The opportunity for beginning teachers to work collaboratively, engage in individual and group reflection, dialogue about supporting student achievement, or improve school-wide initiatives or instructional practices possibly, "reduces isolation, engenders innovation, builds capacity…[and] can promote collegial relationships" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p.73). On the other hand, many researchers have found that within these collaborative spaces, "a new teacher's views and contributions may be excluded, his or her concerns and needs ignored" (Kardos et al., 2001, p.256). Depending on the established professional culture of the school community, a beginning teacher's participation in these teams can either support or constrain their sense of belonging during the induction period.

The various elements of the social learning context make evident that "teachers need opportunities to share with each other what they are learning in the classroom" (Clandinin & Husu, 2017, p.116). The ways in which that sharing takes place given the contextual conditions, however, has significant and critical implications on entrants into the professional learning community. The range of encounters with administration, teachers, faculty and staff are just another complex level of the larger learning context that beginning teachers have to navigate.

Autobiographical Context

Another context in which teacher learning occurs extends into the autobiographical space of the individual teacher, including their beliefs, values, ideas about teaching, learning and students, their personal qualities and background experiences as well as their reflective practices. Many researchers have explored how personal and professional background experiences can

influence beginning teachers' practices (Clandinin & Husu, 2017; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Strom et al., 2018). As Opfer and Pedder (2011) note, "teachers bring to their teaching and learning attitudes, values, theories, and images in the guise of beliefs that affect their own decisions about learning" (p.387). In their metasynthesis review of empirical research, Strom et al. (2018) found several studies that indicated personal qualities that beginning teachers possessed attributed to their success, "including a strong sense of personal agency, resilience, enthusiasm, positivity, and assertiveness" (p.11). Vermunt et al. (2017) located the impact of teacher learning in personal factors such as "self-esteem, interest in the profession, tolerance of ambiguity, love of learning, professional agency and professional identity" (p.148). These personal attributes and characteristics play a significant role in shaping beginning teachers' sense of self-efficacy by providing "the autonomy, authority, dispositions, skills, and knowledge that allow them to make decisions" (Richardson & Roosevelt, nd, p.14).

Teachers have been conceptualized as reflective practitioners for many decades (Calderhead, 1992; Dewey, 1974; Schön, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). As Dewey writes, the development of "intellectual independence" (Dewey, 1974, p.317) affords teachers with the essential opportunity to view practical experiences as the beginning of a life-long learning process in order to become a "student of teaching" (Dewey, 1974, p.321). Schön (1983) adds, "when a practitioner becomes a researcher into his own practice, he engages in a continuing process of self-education" (p.299). It is through reflective practice that teachers may become able to "both pose and solve problems related to their educational practice" (Zeichner & Liston, 2013, p. 5). Providing beginning teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their learning process "requires acknowledging and building upon teachers' experiences, and promoting reflection on those experiences" (Richardson, 1990, p.12). By engaging in reflective practices, it

encourages, acknowledges and reinforces the notion that "teachers have ideas, beliefs, and theories, too, that can contribute to the betterment of teaching for all teachers" (Zeichner & Liston, 2013, p.5).

Implications for Teacher Learning

The interactions between beginning teachers and the institutional, social, and autobiographical learning contexts "tend to regulate or encourage certain practices" (Strom et al., 2018, p.23). In other words, the ways in which beginning teachers interact and encounter these various contexts has the potential for lasting impacts on their process of learning to teach. My analysis of the literature reviewed throughout the previous sections suggest that the dynamic and simultaneous interactions- taking place through both formal and informal systems- illuminate the need to better understand the relationship between these various learning contexts and the implications for teacher learning.

Traditions of Practitioner Research

The vast body of research known as practitioner research or practitioner inquiry encompasses a variety of different research methods and purposes, including action research, collaborative inquiry, teacher research, self-study and narrative inquiry. Although derived from different historical and epistemological traditions, each of these modes of practitioner research draw on a key assumption that "those who work in particular contexts have significant knowledge about what the problems and questions are and how to solve those problems" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p.19). The knowledge garnered from teachers' stories, narratives, experiences, and inquiries represent the multiplicity and complexity of problems existing within the field of education and should serve as a resource and perhaps framework for examining, critiquing, and analyzing teacher learning. As creative, thoughtful, and co-creators of their

learning, beginning teachers have the potential to offer "unusually insightful analyses of teaching and learning from the inside" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p.19).

Inquiry as Stance

One component within the traditions of practitioner research includes an *inquiry as stance* framework (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, Lytle et al., 2018). *Inquiry as stance* "refers to a long-term and consistent positioning or way of seeing rather than a single point in time or an activity…. [and] is intended to capture the lenses through which teachers see and how they generate knowledge that guides practice" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p.28). This concept provides a means to "foreground the role that practitioners can play, both individually and collectively, in generating local knowledge, re-envisioning and theorizing practice, as well as interpreting and interrogating the theory and research of others" (Lytle et al., 2018, p.4). *Inquiry as stance* allows for teachers to formulate questions or problems, utilize their own teaching practice as a resource to examine teaching and reflect on their observations to inform their craft. This dissertation study utilizes aspects from the traditions of practitioner research in order to engage participants as active subjects of study rather than objects of research. In doing so, beginning teachers were invited to share their experiences and voices as a source of knowledge.

Contributions of Complexity Theory to Teacher Learning Research

Many researchers have argued that teaching is complex and contextually situated (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Strom & Martin, 2015; Strom & Viesca, 2020). Complexity theory, having roots in social science research within the fields of economics, psychology, and sociology, "generally focuses on the nonlinear emergence of phenomena out of what appears to be chaos" (Strom et al., 2018, p.3). According to Davis and

Sumara (1997) "a complex system is a dynamic, alive, unpredictable, and constantly evolving network that is more than the sum of its parts" (as cited in Strom et al., 2018, p.3). In education research, complexity theory helps to conceptualize teacher learning as arising from teachers' interactions and encounters as they occur within a larger network. As such, there are multiple, interdependent paths and processes at play when examining teacher learning. This perspective provides an approach to examine the teaching phenomena as a whole and the mutually contributing and constraining relationships, rather than looking at each part in isolation. For example, in the case of beginning teachers, their teaching practices "are constructed from simultaneous interactions occurring within and among the teacher, classroom, school, and larger educational systems" (Strom et al., 2018, p.4). Similarly, beginning teachers have the potential to inform and impact these surrounding systems through these simultaneous and recursive interactions. To capture the complex, dynamic relationships and interactions shaping teacher learning, much of the existing research uses qualitative case study methodologies (Strom, 2015) to examine teacher experiences during the induction period. Although providing insights into beginning teacher experiences, there are minimal research studies that utilize practitioner research alongside the framework of teacher resilience to prioritize the teachers' perspectives and voices.

As mentioned above, there are studies that share some methodological commonalities (Johnson et al., 2014), however, this study intends to explore the experiences of beginning teachers through the lens of a complexity theory framework and the use of more flexible methodologies. Reflection mapping is not linear in the same way that text is, therefore provides a method that is well suited to capture and explore the simultaneity of the process of learning to teach. I conducted this post-intentional phenomenological research study to value and center

beginning teacher voices and their experiences within the induction period. Even though there is a growing body of research that utilizes the framework of complexity theory to understand beginning teachers' experiences, their voices and perspectives remain absent from the literature. The following chapter will go into more detail on the methodological design of this research study.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Instead of positioning the induction process as one of mere survival, in this project my interest is in what could happen if we fully take up some of the shifts in our modes of thought and in our practices that I have reviewed, in particular viewing the first year of teaching as a part of a continuum of teacher *learning*–and, further, when we understand that such learning entails teachers as taking risks and drawing from their own first hand experiences. I am guided by attributes of practitioner research that situates teachers to theorize their own work from their lived experiences (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Britzman, 2003; Christianakis, 2010). The notion of *inquiry as stance* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) provides first year teachers with a focus on inquiry and research potentially going well beyond "discussions and emotional support of the daily practice" (Christianakis, 2010, p.118). Teachers critically and actively interrogate their own practices with a focus on "problem-posing and seeking new understandings" (Lytle et al., 2018, p.5).

Methodological Framing

Phenomenological Foundations

Phenomenology is considered to be both a philosophical movement as well as an approach to research. Even though many present-day philosophers suggest phenomenological practices appeared as early as the 1700 and 1800s, Edmund Husserl's work at the turn of the 20th century is described as the historical origin of the phenomenological movement (Vagle, 2018). Husserl developed phenomenology as a critique of Cartesian ideas, in particular Descartes' notion that consciousness is separate from everything existing in the world outside of one's mind. Instead, Husserl diverged from this traditional Western, positivist philosophy to assert,

"that living and experience neither take place 'in' the subject (the human), nor 'in' the objects (everything outside of the human, including other humans)" (Vagle, 2018, p.8). In other words, Husserl aimed to understand human consciousness and its relationship to objects (phenomena) existing in the surrounding world. Husserlian phenomenology is concerned with an exploration of how phenomena appear in order to understand the essence of "the *thing itself*- not a generalization, an approximation, a representation, or a deduced outcome" (p.7). Rather than focusing only on subjective or objective meanings or theoretical explanations, Husserl's phenomenology draws attention to how humans "*find themselves in"* relation to the world (p.21). Husserl's use of "essence" suggests that by peeling back layers of our own subjective meanings or interpretations, each phenomenon possesses essential, unchanging qualities that can be described.

Several philosophers extended Husserl's work, including his student, Marin Heidegger, who took phenomenology in a different direction. Whereas much of Husserl's focus remained on the human consciousness, Heidegger "stressed that phenomena are lived out interpretively" (Vagle, 2018, p.9). This assertion suggests that phenomenon appear, manifest, or "*show themselves*…. in the day-to-day contextualized living in and through the world" (p.9). A Heideggerian approach to phenomena breaks away from the idea of an essence to focus on the interpretation of manifestations and appearances of phenomena within particular contexts (Vagle, 2018). This shift is significant because it takes the subjective relationships to objects out of the mind and places an emphasis on the nature of human experience in the world (Soule & Freeman, 2019).

Other noteworthy phenomenological philosophers, including Maurice Merleau-Ponty, have extended Husserl and Heidegger's work. Although more closely drawing from Husserl,

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is characterized by "his rejection of the Cartesian mind-body dualism- where the phenomena are conceived of as embodied in the world" (Vagle, 2018, p.10). Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodiment suggests that the physical body gives individuals access to the surrounding world and that often times "the body lives the world well before the mind can reason or make sense of what is being lived" (p.10). Therefore, a Merleau-Pontian approach focuses on the significance of "*being connected through intentional threads"* (p.128), that is, through the on-going processes of living in relation to the world, of living interpretatively in the world, and living in our physical and social surroundings.

As a school of philosophy and an approach to research, phenomenology is concerned with an individual's lived experiences within the world and begins from the assumption that "experience takes place in the intentional relationship between the subjective and the objective" (Vagle, 2018, p.8). The distinctions between the phenomenological approaches of each philosopher above are in the conceptualization and theorization of intentionality and how the phenomena take shape. Regardless of the approach (Husserlian, Heideggerian, or Merleau-Pontian), phenomenologists are interested in human experiences within the world, specifically the connectedness between individuals and "how things are being and becoming" (p.23). Critical to this discussion of the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and the critique of positivism, is the claim that "phenomena have a reality and truth that extends beyond our perceptions of them" (Soule & Freeman, 2019, p.861).

Post-Intentional Phenomenology

Intentionality is a key concept in phenomenology, and to English speakers it may cause some confusion. The root word, "intention" typically refers to an individual's plan, purpose or rationale behind their actions. The phenomenological use of intentionality refers to the

"inseparable connectedness between subjects (that is, human beings) and objects (that is, all other things, animate and inanimate, and ideas) in the world" (Vagle, 2018, p.28). Mark Vagle (2018), a key source for my methodology, has developed what he calls 'post-intentional phenomenology.' In this, he attempts to reimagine philosophical phenomenology by blending it together with post-structural ideas. As Vagle (2018) explains the use of *post* is not meant to indicate a "refusal or movement away, beyond, or in opposition to intentionality" (p.126), but instead has the potential to reshape future phenomenological contributions. An important aspect of Vagle's (2018) post-intentional phenomenology is the understanding of intentionality as well as how intentional relationships appear within the research process. The remainder of this section discusses the key features of post-intentional phenomenology and how this methodological frame helps to shape this research study.

A fundamental conceptual shift from Husserl's phenomenology to Vagle's post-intentional phenomenology is the reframing of intentionality. Intentionality is used to describe the ways in which "humans are connected *meaningfully* to the world" (Vagle, 2018, p.188). Unlike Husserl's phenomenology, which presumes a degree of stability to these connections and relationships, Vagle's post-intentional framing presumes flux and aims to open up the possibilities of where "individuals *find-themselves-intentionally in* relations with others in the world" (Vagle, 2018, p.189). In other words, relationships, interactions, and encounters are contextually situated, constantly shifting, and therefore unstable.

Post-intentional phenomenological studies typically draw on three key assumptions. First, there is a focus on "*how things connect* rather than *what things are"* (Vagle, 2018, p.191). This central feature builds on the understanding of intentionality mentioned above to allow for the possibility of conceptualizing phenomena as "fluid, shape-shifting assemblages continually on

the move in interacting with the world, rather than perceiving them as stable essences" (Vagle and Hofsess (2014) as cited in Vagle, 2018, p.199). Vagle's emphasis on connection helps to underscore the need to understand teacher learning as emergent--arising out of interactions, continually shaped and reshaped as further interactions occur--and gives me a powerful entry for thinking about the practices teachers develop over the course of these multitudinous interactions.

For example, beginning teachers' practices "are constructed from simultaneous interactions occurring within and among the teacher, classroom, school, and larger educational systems" (Strom et al., 2018, p.4). As such, there are multiple, interdependent paths and processes at play that must be examined both in their interactions and as mobile, fluid processes rather than fixed events or occurrences. The post-intentional focus on the multiplicities and simultaneity provides an approach to examine the *construction of pedagogical practices* as a whole and the mutually contributing and constraining relationships, rather than an accumulation of discrete practices.

The second key feature of post-intentional phenomenology is the assumption that the subject is "both agent and acted upon" (Vagle, 2018, p.193). Post-intentionality conceives of the body as "cultured, gendered, socially classed, and so on" (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016, p.336), suggesting that interactions typically [or, if you will, "necessarily"] manifest of these social elements and are also made possible and brought into being by the individual. Vagle (2018) extends Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of embodied intentionality where bodies provide access to meaningful connections in the world. With attentiveness to the subject as unstable, the emphasis becomes the situated meanings of lived experiences, as they are "constructed and constructing" (Vagle, 2018, p.193). This assumption is useful in framing the experiences of beginning teachers because they are not only influenced by their interactions and

encounters within their environments, they have the potential to inform and impact these surrounding systems through these simultaneous and recursive interactions. Operating from this assumption opens possibilities for exploring significant elements, factors, or relationships contributing to beginning teachers' formation of their pedagogical practices.

The third key feature of post-intentional phenomenology is a focus on the connections constituting the phenomenon as "always in a contested and moving relationship[s]" (Vagle, 2018, p.193). A post-intentional approach is interested in exploring the connection between objects, ideas, theories, or experiences, and also in conceptualizing the aspects, qualities, and variety of such relationships. With the post-intentional shift to the focus on relations as multiplicities, "then the connections are seen less in terms of 'what is the essence of the connection' and more in terms of Deleuzeoguattarian distances, intensities, and movements within and among things, relations, ideas, theories, and experiences" (Vagle, 2018, p.193). In other words, the emphasis is on the constant shaping and shifting *of* the phenomenon as opposed to the phenomenon itself.

When considering beginning teachers' *constructions of pedagogical practices*, post-intentionality invites us to move beyond the linear relationship between a teachers' assemblage of values, predispositions, and inclinations about teaching and learning to understand the web of meanings that is created and recreated and with each new interaction and encounter. For example, upon entering their professional context and the school environment, new teachers begin to establish and participate in a multitude of relationships, all of which have varying qualities and degrees of influence on the novice, not singly, but as they are colored by each other. Therefore, the beginning teachers' *construction of their pedagogical practices* consists of ongoing, continuous series of interactions that spur or form understandings that are then thread

into the next interaction, or possibly changed in the process of connecting to other learnings and experiences.

The use of a post-intentional phenomenological design is deliberate and takes into consideration the problem motivating this study as well the hopes to adopt a more flexible methodology. The three key assumptions of post-intentional phenomenology described above are deeply appropriate for this study because they are harmonious with how I conceptualize the process of learning to teach. This methodological approach aids me in framing beginning teachers' experiences as dynamic interactions and encounters in flux rather than a distilling of the complex phenomena of the first year of teaching into an *essence*, as would be the case with traditional phenomenology. Part of what draws me to Vagle's post-intentionality in crafting this research design is that I am able to examine the construction of pedagogy as a complex phenomenon, including how it is shaped, and the texture of its multidimensionality, multiplicity, and differences (Vagle, 2018).

A post-intentional phenomenological approach (Vagle, 2018) is utilized for this research because it is a methodology well suited to study a complex phenomenon, the *construction of pedagogical practices* in the process of learning to teach as it manifests during the induction period. In this study, the phenomenon is the beginning teacher's *construction of pedagogical practices* in their process of learning to teach. By drawing on a post-intentional phenomenological design, I explore how beginning teachers make pedagogical decisions and construct curriculum and teaching practices within and among a multitude of interacting elements in a complex system.

It is important to note that I applied post-intentional phenomenology heuristically. The primary affordance of drawing on post-intentional phenomenology was the encouragement and

invitation to examine the complex relationships and interactions surrounding beginning teachers. I used the key features of Vagle's methodological approach outlined in this section to better understand the lived experiences of beginning teachers as they navigated the challenges and opportunities of the induction period. Utilizing a post-intentional framing further supported my research stance and allowed for me to focus on the dynamic interplay between individual agency, institutional structures, and contextual factors to illuminate a more nuanced understanding of the early stages of teaching and how beginning teachers negotiated their evolving pedagogical identities and practices.

Overview of Research Design

This post-intentional phenomenological research study explores the ways in which beginning teachers understand their experiences. This study uses teacher dialogues, reflection mapping, note-worthy moments, observations, and the collection of several artifacts (including instructional materials, school wide expectations and goals, and student work) in order to understand how beginning teachers make sense of their contextual realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This research seeks to understand the experiences of two high school teachers in their first year of teaching in the History department. In this study, beginning teachers are given the space to "question normative assumptions and practices" (Lytle et al, 2018, p.3) in order to make sense of their encounters with the school environment and understand their teaching practices. I aim to further understand the simultaneous and dynamic relationships at play as they relate to the *decisions* beginning teachers make around their classroom practices and the curriculum. Beginning teachers encounter social, intellectual, institutional, material, and ideological elements. They bring prior educational experiences from their K-12 and pre-service teacher education program, as well as their own hopes, values, and beliefs about teaching and

learning. As a result, this research study is guided by the following questions, restated from Chapter I:

1. How do beginning high school teachers construct their own pedagogical practice?
    a. How do they find their way through and make sense of the multiple elements comprising their school and professional context?
    b. In what ways do they draw upon or make use of any of these elements (or perhaps pass over or reject them) in the construction of their own practice?
2. How do these beginning high school teachers engage in pedagogical thinking?
    a. Do they understand themselves as pedagogical thinkers; if so, under what circumstances?
    b. What are some contents and features of such self-understandings?

The literature reviewed in the previous chapter indicates there is a need to better understand the relationship between the dynamic and simultaneous interactions- taking place through both formal and informal systems- and the implications for beginning teacher learning. In order to study the phenomenon of beginning teacher experiences, one method this study employs is teacher dialogues, drawing on Rubin and Rubin's (1995) notion of *guided conversations*. These provided insight into how the participant's see, think, and feel during the course of their first year. Since I am interested in how beginning teachers find their way through and make sense of the multiple contextual elements, I needed insight into the simultaneous relationships, support structures or critical interactions that the participants deem relevant. To gain such insight, I invited participants to engage in reflection mapping. These visual representations highlighted the significant elements or factors contributing to beginning teachers' formation of their pedagogical practices. Furthermore, I needed to learn about how the

beginning teachers are situated within the larger school environment. For this reason, I conducted observations of the beginning teachers' interactions in various contexts, including faculty meetings, the staff lounge, as well as within their classrooms. Lastly, the collection of various artifacts, including instructional materials, class assignments, and student work samples, to name a few, allowed for a broader scope of the classroom practices, curriculum development and pedagogical thinking of beginning teachers. Given the desire to understand beginning teacher experiences throughout the induction process, the data collection took place over a six-month period.

The remaining sections of this chapter discusses this study's design, including the research context, recruitment and selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, limitations of the study and presentation of the findings.

Context

Research Amid a Pandemic

The uncertainty and upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic altered educational experiences across the country and has drastically transformed teaching and learning practices for both students and teachers in K-12 and higher education settings. The abrupt transition to online learning platforms and virtual classroom spaces has required teachers to be adaptive and innovative in response to the rapidly changing demands of the current climate (Hargreaves, 2021; DeCoito & Estaiteyeh, 2022). For many teachers, the course of the last few years has signaled the return to a learning curve similar to that of early career teachers with the need for "strengthening teacher learning across the professional continuum" (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020, p.461). All teachers, regardless of experience, have learned new digital tools to engage learners, collaborated with colleagues to brainstorm and strategize effective instructional

practices and experimented with ways to build a welcoming virtual community. COVID-19 created an opportunity to reflect on teacher education practices and reshape the possibilities for teacher learning in the future (Wieselmann & Crotty, 2022).

The trajectory of teaching and learning processes in the post-COVID era remains in flux. Consequently, the long-term effects of the pandemic have impacted this research study. Beginning teachers whose student teaching was altered by COVID-19 because of limited or interrupted access to a school placement "may need additional support as they begin their careers" (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020, p.461). The participants in this research study entered into classroom spaces that still reflect a combination of online, hybrid, and in-person instruction. School communities continue to focus on social-emotional learning and trauma and healing-informed practices (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020) as students and teachers become reacquainted with sharing the physical space within school buildings. The pandemic added several complicated layers to the existing complexities of entering into the teaching profession. For example, as student teachers, the participants in this study were required to quickly adapt to virtual or hybrid learning environments while attempting to maintain a sense of community in a remote setting, often with limited training or resources. They were also faced with managing the heightened emotional and social challenges that came with a disrupted education system. Yet, the implications of the pandemic situate beginning teachers in a unique position because "they may also bring new perspectives and practices informed by their experiences" (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020, p.461). Not only were beginning teachers affected by the unusualness of the circumstances and their own recent journeys through them, the nature of the situation may open more accessible avenues for the novices to contribute valuable perspectives to the field.

Research Site

Community Scholars Prep[3] is a public, urban high school with a population of approximately 500 students located in New York City. The student population is comprised of 2% Asian, 35% Black or African American, 61% Hispanic or Latinx, and 1% White, where fewer than 20% are English Language Learners and a quarter of the student population receives special education services. The school draws students from a high poverty area as evidenced by 92% eligibility for free or reduced lunch as well as its location within the poorest Congressional District, out of the 453 across the United States. Incoming students typically score below grade level and perform considerably lower than the citywide proficiency average in both English and Math. The administration comprises one principal and three assistant principals, each of whom has a designated area of responsibility: instruction, operations, and student relations. Of the 51 faculty members (including teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators), 43% identify as White, 41% identify as Black and 25 % identify as Hispanic/Latinx. Of the 35 academic teachers at Community Scholars Prep, it is typically the case that only about half have three or more years teaching experience and most enter into the teaching profession through alternative certification routes (e.g. Teach for America, New York City Teaching Fellows, AmeriCorps Blue Engine, Relay Graduate School of Education). It is typical that at the start of each academic year at least one-third of the teachers are new to the school community. The frequent turnover of staff is cyclically compounded by the hiring of early career teachers, underscoring the importance of this dissertation study because the school community is characterized by the impermanence of its faculty. This constitutes particular affordances because exploring the experiences of beginning

[3] Pseudonym used to protect confidentiality.

teachers within this school community might help to counteract the high attrition rate experienced by urban schools in high needs areas (Yonezawa et al., 2011).

School-Wide Instructional Initiatives

In 2017, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) designated Community Scholars Prep as a "Focus School" given the low performing graduation rate and lack of progress on the ELA and Math standardized testing in prior academic years. The school's selected *instructional drivers* were first introduced during the 2017-2018 academic year as the administration's answer to the heightened accountability measures placed on our school from NYSED. Teachers are expected to incorporate five instructional drivers into their lesson plans: (1) higher order thinking questions, (2) student-to-student discussion protocols, (3) differentiated learning strategies, (4) tasks around text, and (5) formative assessment practices. The administration's goal at that time was to use the instructional drivers as a key component of our Continuous Improvement Plan in order to support teachers' efforts in providing high quality instruction across all classrooms. The hope was that this instructional initiative would then have positive results on students' credit accumulation and increase standardized test scores.

As a teacher at Community Scholars Prep, I was aware of our school's NYSED status so when the instructional drivers were rolled out, I felt they were just another iteration of educational jargon driven by accountability measures to repackage identical practices with new terminology. I participated in collaborative discussions with colleagues about the instructional drivers and indicated moments in my lesson that met the school's explicit pedagogical directive; however, it felt perfunctory.

In 2020, the instructional drivers fell by the wayside when the administration decided to use Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework* as a grounding text to

frame the school's approach to teaching and learning. As a staff, over the course of the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years, we focused on incorporating Dr. Muhammad's "five pursuits" of culturally and historically responsive teaching into our instruction. Dr. Muhammed (2020) defines the five pursuits as follows:

(1) Identity – teaching students to know themselves and others;

(2) Skills – teaching students the proficiencies needed across content areas;

(3) Intellectualism – teaching students new knowledge;

(4) Criticality – teaching students to understand and disrupt oppression; and

(5) Joy – teaching students about the beauty and truth in humanity.

Most of our professional development was devoted to exploring each pursuit in depth in order to identify aspects of lessons or unit plans best suited for successful implementation. The meeting structure changed from its traditional grade team and department team format to *teacher self-selected pursuit groups* where we would establish best practices for our school's community around a specific pursuit. This school-wide focus resonated with me and I found that my teaching practice was enriched when I had the opportunity to explore these tenets further. I found the five pursuits elicited provocative pedagogical discussions that demanded a level of attentiveness and forethought to instructional planning and design I had not previously experienced at Community Scholars Prep.

In 2022-2023, the conversations and focus on Dr. Muhammad's five pursuits faded to the background and the instructional drivers were amplified again in response to the perceived learning gap amidst the return to school following the COVID-19 pandemic. This time, even though we did not have NYSED's "Focus School" designation, given our District, there was heightened accountability from the Superintendent's Office, specifically a concern about literacy

levels and literacy instruction. Therefore, our professional development meetings were again devoted to revisiting the instructional drivers, through the lens of literacy. School leadership believed that the implementation of these strategies and routines would help students transfer skills, and ultimately experience success, across all subjects. Even though the instructional drivers were intended to provide a uniform language among teachers and a toolkit of strategies to employ in the classroom, the capacity for creativity, innovation, and risk-taking within the institutional narrative became limited. It is understandable that school leaders feel a need to set up school-wide structures and systems in an effort to ensure staff and students are meeting accountability measures; however, the instructional drivers felt like they narrowed and confined the ways in which teachers were talking and thinking about teaching and learning, particularly when compared to the conversations surrounding Dr. Muhammad's five pursuits.

The multi-year timeline of the school-wide instructional initiatives offers an important framing of the school environment. The participants in this study entered the profession during the 2022-2023 academic school year and joined Community Scholars Prep when the instructional drivers were prominently positioned by the administration as a school-wide focus, thus shaping many facets of the professional learning community.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

The participants for this study are beginning high school teachers. I am defining beginning teachers as entering into their first year of teaching and new to the profession, entering into the field as a result of a career change, or transitioning to Community Scholars Prep as a new school environment. I selected beginning teachers who represent different backgrounds and identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational backgrounds. During the last several hiring cycles at Community Scholars Prep, the hiring

committee has prioritized interviewing from a more diverse pool of candidates with the hopes of hiring more teachers of color. The participants for this study meet the established criterion of diverse representation and licensing in one of the high-need subject areas as indicated by a citywide shortage of teachers in that field. Given the high turnover rate each year at Community Scholars Prep mentioned above, there was access to a sufficient number of first year teachers within the school community.

For the recruitment of participants, the principal sent out an IRB approved email to all of the first-year teachers to gauge their interest in participating in the research study. The email consisted of a brief description of the purpose of the study. Once individuals expressed interest in learning more about study or expressed a willingness to participate, I set up an individual meeting with each of the positive respondents in order to address any questions they may have about the research study and to cover meanings, purposes, and procedures of informed consent. With the research design and the depth of the data collection and analysis processes, the number of desired participants for the study was five teachers; however, I was only able to recruit two interested participants. The first participant, Cole Greer, is a 25-year-old White male, who teaches 11th grade U.S. History and 12th grade Economics. The second participant, Anya Sha, is a 23-year-old who identifies as a woman with an "Indian-Spanish" background. She teaches 11th grade U.S. History and Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. History. Both participants were beginning teachers entering their first year of teaching when they were hired to fill vacancies within the History Department at Community Scholars Prep.

Researcher Position and Positionality

As a member of the school's community, I am not an impartial observer; thus, I embody an "insider/outsider perspective" (Villenas, 1996, p.722) throughout all aspects of the research

process. My experiences as a White educator teaching in a diverse urban context and my interest in the development and implementation of curricular practices of teachers, influences the lens through which I engage in research. I have my own perspectives and biases around how I choose to engage in and reject aspects of the existing institutional narrative of my school, which frame each part of the research process, specifically data collection and analysis. Even though I am working alongside teachers outside of my own department with whom I do not have frequent direct contact, I realize that my years of teaching experience and my role as a teacher leader within the school community could potentially impact my relationship to the inquiry and shape my perspective in trying to understand beginning teachers' experiences. I must understand that my subjectivities impact how I choose to focus on the teacher's words and actions within the classroom, thus impacting how I analyze the data (Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, an acknowledgement of the complex relationship between my role as a researcher in relationship to my participants and a member within the school community requires an understanding that my positionality is "multiple and continually remade, reconstructed, reconstituted, and renewed in each new context and situation" (Villenas, 1996, p.726) as I move between my role as a researcher and as a member within the community.

The decision to conduct research within my own school context was a deliberate one. After my fifteen years of experience across two school contexts, I have come to understand how "[my] *lack* of distance [can enhance] ...research" (Brayboy et al., 2000, p.165). Even with my constantly shifting identifiers as an insider to the school community, yet an outsider with distanced experiences as a first-year teacher, being a member of the community and having established relationships with key stakeholders in the building (teachers, guidance counselors, administration, students, school safety personnel, and faculty) provides insights and affordances

when working alongside first year teachers as new members to the community. Additionally, my positionality has the potential to offer insights generally not available to outsiders. I maintain that with an acknowledgement of these subjectivities and predispositions, as with any positionality, the research methods employed provide opportunities for self-reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process.

My stance as a researcher is informed by ideas, understandings, values and beliefs, and informed how I conducted interviews, collected data, and engaged with participants. I acknowledged the importance of how I listen to and understand Cole and Anya's perspectives and that the research comes with "significant responsibilities, including attentiveness to the ways experience is often viewed 'as a problem to be solved' instead of as a 'situation to be experienced and interacted with'" (Lorde, 1984 as cited in Huber & Yeom, 2017, p.303). As a qualitative researcher I understand, every time I pose a question in an interview, I have already imposed an intervention in their thinking. I understand that Cole and Anya are beginning teachers coping with challenges and are my colleagues in the school community.

Prior Work

Several of the mini-inquiries I've investigated in prior work have aimed to explore isolated strands of beginning teacher experiences, including their curriculum planning processes or instructional implementation. This work helped to lay the groundwork for the current study. One specific line of inquiry sought to understand beginning teachers' conceptions of classroom management and disciplinary practices. In that mini-inquiry, I was interested in the ways in which beginning teachers interacted with students in the classroom space and what factors contributed to informing their decisions (i.e. the school context, conversations and interactions

with colleagues, their prior educational experiences, their teacher education program, their own beliefs and values about teaching and learning).

For the mini-inquiry, I adopted Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlison-Clarke's (2003) conception of culturally responsive classroom management to explore the ways in which beginning teachers "promote or obstruct equal access to learning" (p.269). I was initially interested in how White educators in a diverse, urban context establish expectations for behavior and communicate those expectations with students in culturally consistent ways (Weinstein, Curran & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003).

During a three-month period, I conducted one forty-five-minute individual semi-structured interview (Spradley, 1979) with three first year high school mathematics teachers. All three identified as White and entered into teaching through alternative certification routes. Following each of the interviews, I scheduled a thirty-minute observation with each participant during a class period they selected after expressly experiencing difficulties or "behavior issues". From both the interviews and the observations, two predominant themes emerged, (1) the tendency for beginning teachers to revert to punitive practices and (2) the tension between beginning teachers' graduate programs and the realities of the classroom in selecting culturally responsive classroom management strategies.

At several points during the observations, each of the beginning teachers used direct commands to communicate expectations to individual students or the class as a whole. When these strategies did not seem to be effective or produce the desired results, it was evident that the beginning teachers "subscribe[d] to the dominant culture [and viewed] these behavioral patterns as examples of rudeness and disruptiveness, [and] respond[ed] with anger, and invoke[d] punitive measures" (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003, p.274). Each of the

beginning teachers made reference to deducting points from students' grades, a signal of reverting to punitive measures for compliance and control.

The interviews illuminated the tension between the participants' graduate program and the realities of their classrooms when making decisions around the selection and implementation of disciplinary practices. Instead of relying on their graduate school program for classroom management strategies and practices, each of the participants expressed that the school community and conversations with more experienced teachers were beneficial in shaping their understanding of disciplinary practices as they relate to the implementation of their content specific curriculum. At some point, all three participants suggested that graduate school provided useful practices that were worthwhile to try within their classrooms, however, when specifically establishing approaches to address student behaviors, insight and feedback from other colleagues was more helpful and effective in guiding their thinking about their own disciplinary practices and approaches.

My prior work reaffirmed my desire to respect, support, and value the tensions that beginning teachers face. Although I was able to get a glimpse of the ways in which beginning teachers interact with students and what factors contributed to informing their decisions, I was left with more questions and noticed that my research interests were in need of a broader scope. With close attention to the complicated nature of teaching, in this dissertation study I account for the multiplicity of contextually situated phenomena to draw out the various elements at work when beginning teachers make *decisions* and *choices* in constructing their teaching practices.

Data Sources

This study draws on six main data sources: (1) teacher dialogues in the spirit of ethnographic interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Spradley, 1979), (2) reflection mapping, (3)

classroom observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), (4) focus group interviews, (5) noteworthy moments, and (6) artifact collection. For all data types, names were replaced with pseudonyms and identifying material was de-identified or rendered generic on all interview transcripts, teacher reflections, or artifacts. The following sections discuss in more detail each data source and how they were used in this study.

Teacher Dialogues

A series of three audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted with Cole and Anya in order to understand how they see, think, and feel about their classroom practices. Sources of those practices were informed by their previous schooling experiences, their teacher preparation program, the school environment, and/or interactions with teachers, administrators, colleagues, and students. I am referring to these interviews as teacher dialogues drawing on Rubin and Rubin's (1995) notion of *guided conversations* where the participants play a stronger role in the direction and topics of interests explored. Rather than conducting conventional interviews, the purpose and nature of teacher dialogues was more informal and guided by the participants themselves to let the important questions as well as the answers emerge from the context (Smith, 2002). The dialogues aimed to not just produce "factual knowledge, but also interpersonal and critical knowledge, which defines humans as autonomous social beings…not just so [teachers] can reveal private facts that are hidden from others but really so they may know themselves better as individuals and as a community" (Park, 1993, p.12). The shape of these teacher dialogues was largely guided by Cole and Anya; however, I developed protocols that reflect general lines of inquiry based on Spradley's (1979) notion of descriptive questions (see Appendices A through C). The series of teacher dialogues provided insights towards each of the research questions. Furthermore, the teacher dialogues were generative in nature and allowed for

teachers to learn through questioning, rethinking, interrogating, challenging and even reflecting on their teaching practices.

Reflection Mapping

Another main source of data includes what I am referring to as participant reflection mapping, inspired by Johnson et al.'s (2014) use of mind mapping and line drawings as a way to capture and summarize teacher experiences. Beginning teachers were invited to visually represent their experiences by mapping influential moments, interactions, or encounters within the school environment. Participants were invited to write, draw, and/or record as much as possible, with a focus on what they are interested in documenting. The participants were given guiding prompts and questions (see Appendix C), but ultimately the documentation of their drawings, diagrams, or representations was up to each individual participant. For example, one participant, Anya, chose to focus on critical incidents (dilemmas, tensions, successes, or challenges) over the course of her first year, while the other participant, Cole, chose to document key shifts in his feelings over the course of the year (stress, comfort, curiosity, enjoyment, etc.) as a response to the supports or constraints (resources, activities, or systems) he experienced.

Participants were asked to engage in reflection mapping toward the end of the data collection process, after the third individual interview. These reflections provided an opportunity for participants to determine what elements or factors are most significant to them in their own formation of their pedagogical practices.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were conducted following the initial teacher dialogue and again towards the end of the study prior to the final teacher dialogue. The collection of these observations provided insight into how the values, beliefs, and various aspects of the beginning

teacher experiences play out in the activities of daily life (Smith, 2002). During these observations, I was looking for evidence of Cole and Anya's pedagogical decisions. My observations and impressions of that context and their actions within it constitute essential referent points, both for my interviews and other communications with participants, and for my analysis. During the observations, I remained an observer, I did not engage with the participants nor the students in the classroom. Neither student names nor other identifying information was used. I observed the participant's teaching and interactions with students. However, after the class session concluded, if time permitted and the participant was interested, I asked brief clarifying questions, sought additional information, or captured participant's thinking and reactions in the moment based on emerging events.

Raw observation data and jottings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) were used to capture the various interactions occurring within the classroom space. I paid close attention to the exchange of words and phrases between the participant and their students, the participant and other colleagues, or any other germane moments or encounters that indicated *decisions* or *choices* the beginning teacher was making in relation to the social, intellectual, institutional, material, and ideological elements of their surrounding environment. Additionally, the jottings took note of the nonverbal communications, like body language, facial expressions, movement and gestures of the teacher in relationship to the students and other colleagues.

Following the observations, the data and jottings were turned from raw field notes into detailed field note narratives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) by separating out the teacher observations from the surrounding contexts and any comments, questions, and interpretations before categorizing the data and beginning the data analysis process. Recurring issues, topics, or

themes that were present within the observations or arise within the teacher reflection mapping were used as a means for conversation during individual dialogues.

Focus Group Interviews

Cole and Anya were asked to engage in a series of three focus group session to discuss their experiences within the school community, their teaching experiences within their classrooms, ideas around pedagogy and curriculum development, decision making processes, and reflecting on networks of support (colleagues, co-teachers, mentors, teacher teams, graduate school professors, etc.). Similar to the individual teacher dialogues, the direction of these focus group interviews was largely guided by Cole and Anya, however, I developed protocols that reflect general lines of inquiry based on Spradley's (1979) notion of descriptive questions (see Appendices D through F).

Noteworthy Moments

For the weekly documentation of "noteworthy moments," Cole and Anya were asked to capture moments large or small that caught their attention, including critical incidents, puzzling moments, surprises, humorous or painful moments, significant decisions as well as memorable interactions with other members of the school community (colleagues, administrators, faculty, students, parents, etc.) that transpired during the prior week. The noteworthy moment prompts (see Appendix G) asked about both professional and socio-emotional dimensions of the experiences. There were various options for capturing these "moments" including: recorded voice notes, artifact collection with jottings, brief journaling, or the completion of a Google form survey. The variety is important because the aim of these noteworthy moments was to capture the textured experiences of the beginning teacher throughout the course of the study in formats that were easy for them to record and share.

Artifact Collection

I also gathered a modest number of documents and other artifacts that provided insight into Cole and Anya's classroom practices, curriculum development and pedagogical thinking. These artifacts included instructional materials, class assignments, as well as documents that indicate classroom expectations, department or school wide curriculum mandates, or instructional focus and goals. By collecting these documents, I was able to see how Cole and Anya were managing, navigating, and making sense of interactions with colleagues and administrators. They were also invited to share student work samples or any additional documents or materials related to their classroom practices. These artifacts proved useful in providing clarity in how Cole and Anya were understanding their educational responsibilities and the students they were teaching. At later moments in the study, the artifacts collected were used as prompts to elicit recollections or thoughts from participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis does not only occur once the data collection has ended, but instead is an on-going, iterative process that takes place throughout the duration of the study. In order to capture emergent issues and ideas, I used a form of memo writing, called post-reflexion (Vagle, 2018), throughout the data collection process as a means for making connections across data sources and participant experiences. These memos provided a chance to make sense of what I was learning and to document my own reflexivity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The following sections detail post-intentional phenomenological analytic tools that I employed throughout my research.

A Commitment to Post-Reflexion

Post-intentional phenomenology, and qualitative research more generally, requires the researcher to be attentive to the relationship with their participants as well as the studied

phenomenon. This research study upholds a commitment to post-reflexion (Vagle, 2018) by recognizing the interconnected intentional relationship between the researcher and the research. Rather than setting aside presuppositions (i.e. Husserl's *bracketing* or Dahlberg's *bridling*) post-reflexing is about exploring how "prior knowledge, assumptions, and belief-s about the phenomenon…play a part in producing the phenomenon" (Vagle, 2018, p.223). Vagle (2018) provides a useful framework for post-reflexing as a means to "document, wonder about, and question our connections/discussions, assumptions of what we take to be normal, bottom lines, and moments we are shocked" (p.224). Engaging in post-reflexion helped me remain open to my pre-understandings of the phenomenon and the developing and evolving understandings as the phenomenon took shape. The work of "post-reflection" requires me to not only be *aware of* but to *engage with* my own experiences, perspectives and underlying beliefs about teaching and learning. Thus, continuously documenting and chronicling these self-understandings throughout the entire research process was necessary.

Analysis of Phenomenological Material

Once all the data was collected, the audio-recordings of the teacher dialogues were transcribed and positioned alongside the field note narratives, the teacher reflections, the collected artifacts, and the memos. The data collected was then placed into categories based on the research questions, which were used as a lens of analysis (Horvat, 2013).

While there are different variations and approaches to the analysis of phenomenological material depending on the philosophical underpinnings, most phenomenological research maintains a commitment to the whole-part-whole analysis process. As Vagle (2018) describes:

> In short, whole-part-whole analysis methods stem from the idea that we must always think about focal meanings (e.g., moments) in relation to the whole (e.g. broader context)

> from which they are situated-and once we begin to remove parts from one context and put them in dialogue with other parts, we end up creating new analytic wholes that have particular meanings in relation to the phenomenon. (p.108)

The whole-part-whole analysis steps to engaging with the phenomenological material looks similar to constant-comparative analysis, with a movement between rounds of careful line-by-line readings of the text and the continual crafting of follow-up questions for clarification (Vagle, 2018). The post-intentional analysis of phenomenological materials offers more possibilities for exploration beyond the whole-part-whole process. Vagle (2018) suggests completing only one round of line-by-line reading of texts, then deconstruct the wholes of the phenomenological material by thinking with theory and analyzing post-reflexions. The core of post-intentional phenomenological analysis is bringing the materials "in dynamic and playful dialogue with the theories and one has chosen to think with and the post-reflexing one has engaged" (Vagle, 2018, p.157). The analysis process will "become iterative and entangled" (Vagle, 2018, p.159) in the movement between materials, theories, and post-reflexions.

The use of complexity theory as a conceptual framework provided a lens through which to analyze my data. For example, when the beginning teacher mentioned a conversation with their mentor or more broadly discussed the mentoring structure in place at Community Scholars Prep, the complexity theory frame ensured that I consider the perspectives, concerns, and values from the teachers' histories that inform their present actions. Neither their own assemblage of values, predispositions, and inclinations, nor the mentoring structure can be considered as linear, causal lines, but instead a web of meanings that is created and recreated with each new interaction and encounter.

Another tool that I used to frame my data analysis is the notion of agency. Beginning teachers may not be expressly concerned with their own agency during the induction period; however, opportunities exist among the various learning contexts in which beginning teachers may be agentive. When analyzing the data, I operationalized 'agency' as a construct implicating making choices, decisions, charting plans of action, or acting to produce a result. For example, in the interview data, I looked for places where the beginning teacher talked about their desired results (within their classroom, in relationship to their students, in regards to their position within the school, etc.). I also looked for places where the beginning teacher talked about feeling responsible for an action or drawn to an action but not capable of producing a desired outcome (decisions around curricular resources, determining student grades, feedback from an administrator or educational coach, etc.).

Processing multiple data sources provided a means for a "cyclical analytic reflective process…[that] shifts back and forth between the 'stages' of the research process, spiraling out for a wide-angle view…of the interpretations, and then zooming up close to understand how an interpretation may, or may not, resonate with one's own personal experience" (Cahill, 2007, p.184). By approaching data analysis as an ongoing, recursive process, I was provided with opportunities for frequent check-ins with participants, not only to ensure their experiences are accurately represented, but also to provide a space for participants to possibly share their interpretations and analysis of their own experiences.

Exploring Tentative Manifestations

Post-intentional phenomenology positions analytical interpretations as the creation of *tentative manifestations* (Vagle, 2018) rather than the presentation of themes or definitive findings. Post-intentional phenomenology explores *tentative manifestations* to *suggest* how "the

phenomenon might take shape, how it is produced in time and space, and how it is entangled and provoked" (Vagle, 2018, p.219). These tentative manifestations illustrate the contingency, temporality, and multiplicity of the human experience by providing "glimpses of how the phenomenon is tentatively and momentarily lived" (Vagle, 2018, p.160). Additionally, the deliberate phrasing of the term *tentative manifestations* emphasizes the "efforts to lessen the researcher's authoritative voice and situate phenomenological work as contextual, partial, and incomplete" (Soule & Freeman, 2019, p.870).

This research is interested in presenting findings about beginning teachers' construction of their own pedagogy by suggesting *ways of looking at and thinking about* beginning teachers' process of learning to teach. By focusing on the experiences of beginning teachers, this study aims to understand how particular teachers in a particular context negotiate as well as transform their lived reality (Foley, 2002); it does not aim to produce authoritative generalizations about the induction period. Therefore, the goal of this research is to "see what the phenomenon might become" (Vagle, 2018, p.200). To accomplish this goal, I have crafted *tentative manifestations* in hopes of engaging in what Vagle and Hofsess (2016) describe as "entangling entanglements" (p.342). Instead of attempting to interpret and describe the two beginning teachers' experiences, this approach, and the recognition of findings as *tentative,* places the emphasis on findings as they *manifest* within the situational context of the participants' lives.

Trustworthiness

Given the small number of participants as previously mentioned (and in keeping with the post-phenomenological orientations just discussed), this study is not intended to make generalizations about the induction period nor the experiences of beginning teachers. The intention of this study is to focus on how particular beginning teachers in a particular context,

"negotiate, assimilate, and transform their lived reality" (Foley, 2002, p.147). I aim to ensure trustworthiness by being highly reflexive and "engaging in a long, disciplined, systematic, process of experiencing, recording and critically reflecting upon lived reality" (Foley, 2002, p.147). With this in mind, trustworthiness is another criterion in the selection of multiple data sources (teacher dialogues, reflection mapping, classroom observations, and artifact collection) because of the imperative to capture the lived experiences of the participants as accurately as possible.

Additionally, I must be aware of my own experiences, perspectives and beliefs about teaching and learning. With my own journey in the teaching profession, exposure to theories and findings from other scholars, and perspectives and biases of the research site, the use of post-reflexion memo writing and frequent check-ins with participants allowed for me to keep my subjectivities in check in order to attend to my orientation as a researcher (Peshkin, 1988). I recognize that I am unable to fully separate myself from the research and will continue to "make a serious effort to convey how [my] subjectivity may be affecting [my] interpretation" (Foley, 2002, p.145). I maintain that with an acknowledgement of these subjectivities and predispositions, as with any positionality, the research methods employed provide opportunities for self-reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study should be noted. Beginning teachers are preoccupied with the significant personal challenges of entering into a new profession (whether beginning a career or transitioning from a first career) as they develop and maintain professional relationships with colleagues, manage their time, and attempt to craft the elusive work-life balance. These seemingly tangential logistics related directly to their job, yet indirectly to their classroom

instruction, ultimately impact their well-being and efficacy as an educator. Asking beginning teachers to participate in a research study where they critically examine their teaching practices adds another layer to their preoccupations and experiences throughout their first year. This potentially creates a "culture gap that puts teachers at a disadvantage as research partners and often leads to tensions within [the] research relationships" (Goldstein, 2002, p.158). Therefore, limitations exist in the possibility of placing additional burdens on participants in the following ways: tensions while establishing research relationships, lack of time, energy, and varying commitments impacting participation in research activities as well as external factors including the timing of the research amidst schools adjusting to the assorted post-Covid impacts on educators and students.

Another limitation of this study is regarding the number of participants and their demographic background. When I designed this research study, my intention was to recruit the most diverse group of beginning teachers possible to elicit a wide range of experiences shaped by their unique backgrounds, identities and cultural perspectives. Though the two participants in this study do offer different and valuable perspectives based on their lived experiences, they may not fully capture the diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints if there had been a greater number of beginning teachers interested in participating.

Presentation of Findings

The remaining chapters of this dissertation study are structured based on the *tentative manifestations* gathered across the beginning teachers' experiences over a six-month period during their first year. The remaining subsequent chapters will move to broader emerging issues in hopes of illuminating the complex system of contextually situated phenomena surrounding the

process of learning to teach in order to gain insights into the necessary supports for beginning teachers entering into the profession.

Chapter IV

CONSTRUCTING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Post-intentional phenomenology positions analytical interpretations or findings as contextual, partial, and variable. As discussed in Chapter III, this research is interested in presenting findings about beginning teachers' construction of their own pedagogy by suggesting *ways of looking at and thinking about* beginning teachers' processes of learning to teach. This chapter, along with Chapter V, is devoted to the uncovering of the *tentative manifestations* (Vagle, 2018) of beginning teachers' construction of their pedagogy. In this chapter, I describe the participants' interactions with various contextual elements, including the autobiographical, social, and institutional spaces, in order to situate those interactions within the larger school environment and begin to examine the implications of these interactions on their pedagogical thinking. When engaging in the whole-part-whole data analysis process, particular attention was paid to indications of the contextual elements just mentioned as well as references to them across each of the data sources. Subsequent sections of this chapter aim to examine how the participants make sense of the multiple elements comprising their professional context and how they make use of these elements in the construction of their own practice. Unless otherwise noted, all participant quotations in the chapters that follow are drawn from the interviews with the participants. Additionally, it is important to note that the structure of this chapter may inadvertently suggest that these various contexts are mutually exclusive; however, in the spirit of post-intentional phenomenology grounding this study, the aim is to illuminate how the participants simultaneously navigate a multitude of interacting elements in a complex system.

Autobiographical Context as Frame

As beginning teachers are negotiating the external complexities encapsulated in the school environment, they are simultaneously carrying their own internal autobiographical context which serves as a frame of reference shaping their experiences. The autobiographical context includes beginning teachers' values and ideas about teaching, learning and students; their personal qualities and background experiences; as well as their motivations, desires, and sense of purpose as they enter the profession. The following sections provide an initial introduction to the two participants, Anya Sha and Cole Greer, while also capturing distinctive aspects of their lives that frame their fundamental beliefs about teaching.

Drawing from Background Experiences

Anya Sha is a 23-year-old who identifies as a woman with an "Indian-Spanish" background. Born in Venezuela, at the age of four Anya moved with her parents and older brother to Queens, New York. Anya proudly spoke of spending her formative years in Queens where she relished the opportunity to grow up in "one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the world". Upon arriving in New York, Anya's mother decided to homeschool her and her brother for a year prior to enrolling them into the New York City Public School system to ensure they entered at appropriate grade levels. As early as first grade, Anya remembered feeling her relationship to education was very different from her peers as a result of that year of homeschooling. She recalled "It was shocking. In terms of the pace of learning, in my head I'm like, Oh! I learned that already, why are we doing that again? I just learned this in a book somewhere, or I remember what my mom taught me." She found herself making personal connections from home and relating to what she was learning in school as a result of her family's value of education. She further described the influence of her family of educators as:

> I come from an educational background, like a really, really strict educational background. My great grandfather was a superintendent. My grandpa was a headmaster, we call it a headmaster, or a principal. And then my mom was a teacher herself. So, then myself and my brother becoming teachers is like a lineage kinda thing.

Despite the background of educators in her family, Anya indicated that she adamantly resisted the idea of becoming a teacher until she concluded that it was something she would be good at. She remarked, "I realized [in high school] after getting my Regents score in history…I guess I'll be good as a history teacher, I'll do history. So I signed up for as many history classes [in college] as possible. Let me just do something that I know." Anya went on to provide more clarity about the "strict" emphasis her family placed on education by elaborating that her family "strongly values education because it is a stepping stone into any career that you want as long as you apply yourself. That is something that I kept on remembering, if you apply yourself to the material then it's possible." This belief cultivated from her family's values directly transferred to her approach toward teaching and learning. She urged her students to reach high academic standards and wanted to instill the importance of education in their lives. When asked about her teaching standards and expectations, she expressed, "[Students] could do so much more, [they] could engage with the text more or apply more." These foundational beliefs were also observable in Anya's classroom interactions with students. She expected them to give their best effort and would not accept assignments unless they were carefully revised. She pushed students to go beyond the bare minimum by encouraging them to write more and expand on their ideas. Anya wanted her students to join her in believing that their hard work and dedication to their studies would result in successful outcomes.

In addition to the influence of her upbringing and family values, Anya feels her cultural

background is an asset that contributes to her teaching and relationships to predominantly Black and Latinx students. She articulated:

> I come from an Indian-Spanish background, which is pretty unique, especially in this [particular school environment], but I feel like it does help me relate to my students a little bit more in terms of helping them and understanding their home life and how they operate outside of these four walls of school.

Anya feels that her racial and cultural identities allow her to build strong connections with her students and support them both in the classroom and beyond. She feels she can identify with the difficulties of meeting high academic expectations when faced with cultural and social pressures or stress from family responsibilities. During class sessions, Anya uses relatable and relevant anecdotes to share her own experiences and connect with students. She prioritizes creating welcoming and supportive spaces and makes herself available to foster relationships with students, whether during advisory sessions, lunch or afterschool tutoring.

Cole Greer is a 25-year-old who identifies as a White male. Originally from Yonkers, New York, Cole spent most of his childhood and adolescence in a rural town outside of Peekskill, New York. When his family moved upstate, Cole mentioned that his parents "picked a district that at the time they thought was a good school. They regretted that later because the school fell off." Cole provided additional clarification and mentioned that the school's safety and discipline measures declined and the overall academic performance of the school deteriorated. The quality of the school and the possible impact on Cole's experience did not faze him because he maintained "I was always really invested [in school]." At various points throughout our conversations, Cole expressed his love of learning and his general enjoyment of school. He relayed, "I always liked going to school. It was pretty rewarding. I liked it more than

just talking to friends. I liked learning stuff every day." Additionally, he claimed to always have a particular affinity for history, in part because of fond memories during snow days. He recounted:

> It snows all the time upstate and you get stuck in a room. And the room I always got stuck in was my social studies room. So I would read through events in history and I got fascinated by it. I would play games and stuff like that…that were all about history.

When starting his undergraduate education, Cole decided, "I knew I wanted to study history because I was good at it. So, just like everybody in college, I wanted to study what I enjoyed." He did not initially consider teaching as a career pathway, until he neared the end of his undergraduate studies when he started to ask himself, "What am I going to do to survive?" He started to reflect on his own schooling experiences and the positive interactions with some of his teachers and came to the conclusion that, "[teaching] seems alright." He briefly mentioned having a few troubling experiences with teachers and professors during his formal K-12 and post-secondary education that he didn't like because he felt "they weren't as really invested in me or my peers." Pursuing education and ultimately a teaching career became a viable option for Cole, especially once he discovered his desire to become a better version of his own teachers.

After having teachers that did not seem to devote their time and energy to building relationships with individual students, Cole wanted to chart a different course for himself. He commented, "I am proud that I've been able to be…really positive with the kids. [Showing them] I am here to teach you, I am here to give you everything I can, I am giving you every opportunity I can." By the end of his first year, Cole was pleased with the rapport he was able to establish with most of his students. He noted in one of his Noteworthy Moments, "I've been able to find comfort in having a positive relationship with the students." As a result of his formative

experiences in school, Cole prioritized building classroom community and demonstrating he was invested in his students and their success. The importance of this aspect of teaching for Cole was also observable in his daily classroom interactions with students. He made every effort possible to individually check in with each student over the course of a class session to ensure they were receiving the necessary support and attention.

Personal Motivations and Desires

During our initial conversation, when asked about their personal motivations and desires for their first year of teaching, both Cole and Anya were quick to respond that they did not have any. Cole recalled, "My first day I was told I was teaching Economics…a subject that I have no deep understanding of. I had absolutely zero expectations." In a similar fashion, Anya stated:

> I will be very honest, I didn't have any hopes or expectations in the year. I was more so focused on getting adjusted and figuring out the schedule for commuting. It was more so a day-to-day thing. Oh, today's done, let me go on tomorrow. I know, it was a vicious, monotonous cycle.

Anya's reference to her early experience as a "vicious, monotonous cycle" echoes Moir's (1999) developmental phase of survival and beginning teachers' attempts to "keep their heads above water" (p.1). In these moments, Cole and Anya are expressing customary feelings and attitudes of many beginning teachers: the uncertainty of teaching unfamiliar content or the tension between getting acclimated and adjusted to the professional environment while managing daily responsibilities.

Yet, during these same conversations, as Anya and Cole continued to talk through their classroom experiences, interactions with students, and knowledge they wanted to impart, the previous denial of the existence of hopes, expectations, and desires shifted to reveal discernible

features of their aspirations. Anya appeared to desire an understanding of her students' capabilities with the aim of pushing them toward higher levels of academic achievement:

> Learning my students and building this classroom management system. I guess you could say my hopes and dreams was a classroom management system and figuring out the levels of my learners, in terms of what would they be able to grasp and what is their takeaway from the lesson.

Anya's focus on maintaining a learning environment where students understand daily routines and classroom expectations seemed to recapitulate her background and upbringing.

Cole's desires and expectations of his first year primarily focused on his hope of creating a welcoming classroom environment and cultivating pleasant student interactions. Cole remarked:

> Making positive interactions happen in the room, that's what I hoped my first year would be. Giving kids a good memory in the classroom. Letting everybody have a good laugh and a smile. Avoiding people getting red and mad in the face. For the most part, I can't think of any instances where I've had kids get upset to that point. For me that's where I would call my first year successful.

For Cole, his focus on creating a positive classroom environment in hopes of leaving a lasting impression on his students may be rooted in the frustrations of his own schooling experiences. Cole described his desire to impart practical knowledge to his students in the following anecdote:

> I told [my students] very early in the year, my goal is that when you are signing up for a credit card one day, you think that, Oh, Mr. Greer told me about APR [Annual Percentage Rate]. I should probably watch out, that's not going to be good for me. If that's all that my name ever comes up for them after they leave this building, I'm fine

with that. That's totally fine.

In these particular instances, the conversation during the individual teacher dialogues provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their implicit motivations and desires. My prompting and questioning served as an intervention to their thinking, generating further self-inquiry. I noticed that in addition to sharing their hopes, Cole and Anya were, in some ways, defining and creating what they deemed as their own measures of a successful first year of teaching.

Developing a Teacher Persona

By the end of the year, Anya referred to her classroom as a "one woman show." Occasionally, Anya could be spotted with a pink wireless toy microphone in hand, as she proceeded to conduct her lesson as a performer for her audience of students. While the evident practical function of the microphone was to amplify Anya's voice and reconvene students at various points throughout the lesson, such as upon completion of a group activity or following independent work time, it is in keeping with her "show" and stage presence that she incorporated a number of the microphone's sound effects and short jingles for comedic relief. With her spunk, vivacity and sense of humor, her description of her classroom as a "one woman show" encapsulates how she views herself as a teacher. At the same time, it was notable, and certainly congruent with her thought that her 'Indian-Spanish background' could help her "relate to [her] students a little bit more in terms of helping them", she would frequently switch between speaking English and Spanish seamlessly mid-sentence to communicate with all students in her classroom.

Anya mentioned the development of what she referred to as her "teaching persona" and how that manifests in the classroom. She defined an aspect of her teaching persona as her ability to create and implement her own classroom catch phrases. As an example, she shared:

> Now I don't have to explicitly say, "speak louder." It's like a nuance, instead I say, "loud and proud," so [students] can really enunciate, and so the rest of [the class] can hear them. I feel like I've developed my teacher persona.

This is just one example of a routine catch phrase "loud and proud" that Anya utilized to communicate clear expectations of her students while also emboldening their voices within the classroom community. Upon observing her teaching, other phrases were routinely used to quickly communicate expectations and norms, including "Say it with your chest" (indicating students should have confidence and pride in their ideas) and "One mic" (implying that only one student should be speaking and the rest of the class needs to tune in). Even though these phrases, or similar ones, may be widely used by other teachers, Anya's identification, acceptance, and incorporation of them as a key component of her own pedagogical practice suggests an attentiveness to her individual manner as a part of her process of learning to teach.

Cole is a self-proclaimed optimist and that outlook remained pervasive as he shared many of his experiences, including his perspectives on his own teaching. Toward the end of the year, I asked him about how he sees himself as a teacher and what he was proud of, he responded:

> I am really impressed [with myself]. I don't like being self-centered. I don't like gloating about myself very much. But if I have to gloat, which I won't, the thing I am most proud of is getting [to school] early consistently. I used to have teachers, I watched them run into the building after I got there. I like getting up early. I like being able to take my time, catch my breath in the morning, and get to work comfortably. I am really proud of that.

As Cole described, he seems to value punctuality and preparedness, since he was frequently one of the first few teachers to arrive in the morning as soon as the building opened. He would spend the time getting ready for the day ahead. Cole also mentioned:

> Every day during lunch, I have kids that come in [my classroom]. Kids ask if they can stay in [my classroom], I assume they are having honest interactions with me. I am proud of myself that I am not much of a different person. I am the same kind of person that I walked in here with. I am proud that I've been able to be that person through the whole year.

Cole also seems to emphasize the importance of establishing connections with students and maintaining his authenticity as essential features of his teaching persona. He wanted to make sure his students knew that his classroom was a shared space and welcomed their presence during lunch and afterschool. He extended this offer to students he did not directly teach and commented that during his tutoring sessions he routinely, "hosted anybody who was willing to come" (Noteworthy Moment #2). Cole mentioned that he has friends who are teachers, and he shared that one friend in particular, "tried scaring me saying [the students] would eat me alive." Though Cole laughed as he relayed this anecdote, the story appeared to surface a concern that he would need to change aspects of himself to be a teacher or that teaching was going to change him and he was not going to be able to preserve his genuine and earnest demeanor.

The dynamic and multifaceted layers of the autobiographical context, including Cole and Anya's background experiences, personal motivations and desires, and development of their teaching personas, illuminate the ways beginning teachers are making sense of how they fit *within* their surrounding environment while simultaneously figuring out how they can bring themselves *into* the school community. Their experiences throughout the course of their first year suggest a continuous shaping and re-shaping of their understandings of themselves as teachers in relation to the school community. As Cole and Anya provided insight into various aspects of their experiences, values, and beliefs about the teaching and learning process, there

were moments of uncertainty, reconciliation, and introspection. The autobiographical context is just one of the elements comprising their professional context that shapes the construction of their pedagogical practice.

Social Context as Mediator

The range of encounters with administration, teachers, faculty and staff are another complex level of the larger learning context that beginning teachers have to navigate. Beginning teachers interact with the social context through the opportunity to establish professional relationships where there are moments to collaborate, learn collectively, share perspectives and values, and receive feedback. Social learning occurs through structured and formalized routines (administrative support, mentor relationships, teaming, etc.) or informal encounters (co-teaching collaboration, colleague relationships, etc.). At Community Scholars Prep, both Cole and Anya discuss the formal and informal avenues to connect professionally.

Engaging in Professional Conversations

In their interviews, Cole and Anya name several individuals over the course of their first year who supported and enriched the development of their teaching practices. These individuals mainly served as their mentors, co-teachers, department team colleagues and educational coaches. The formal role that these individuals played was not as significant as the collegial connections they offered, especially in creating a space to discuss their curricular choices and their instructional practices. In line with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) findings, professional learning communities can "help newcomers participate in dialogue with puzzling problems of practice" (p.270). It is not surprising that both Cole and Anya reference their mentors when asked about supportive professional relationships.

Cole formed a strong relationship with his mentor since his co-teacher was removed a few months into the school year. He spoke candidly about his disappointment and frustration with the institutional reorganization and what he perceived as a missed opportunity to learn and collaborate with his co-teacher. Cole seemingly initiated and requested more frequent meetings with his mentor because he found that space fruitful for the growth and development of his teaching practices. At various points in our conversations, he reflected on the relationship with his mentor and their weekly meetings, which exceeds the established NYC DOE expectations of mentorship. When asked to share specific ways his mentor offered support, Cole indicated, "he gives me feedback on my lesson plans…telling me very honestly what worked, what could have been more effective." Within this mentoring relationship, Cole was able to explore problems of practice and receive specific feedback on ways to make continual improvements. Later in the interview, Cole expressed the significant impact his mentor had on the development of his teaching practices:

> [My mentor] saved me. If I didn't have his insight, his help, I would be roughly at the same point. In terms of the quality of my lessons, how confident I am or am not for the upcoming U.S. Regents, is directly proportional to the help I've gotten from him. I am much more confident than I would have been otherwise.

Although Cole supposes that he might have arrived at "the same place" in his ability to construct lessons and deliver content to his students, Cole's mentor was an essential part in emboldening a belief in himself and his effectiveness. It is clear that Cole found this professional relationship a useful and productive space to refine his teaching practices in order to be intentional in his pedagogical approaches.

Similar to Cole, Anya also designated her assigned mentor as a collaborative partner and found their routine intervisitations and debrief meetings as a space to share her experimentation with instructional strategies. The example Anya used to illuminate this relationship was when they collaborated around an annotation strategy suggested by her mentor. Anya described the strategy as a technique for students when they are reading digital texts on Google Classroom using a system of color coding. For example, as students read and interacted with a given text, they would highlight any text that indicates the big ideas or key takeaways 'green', vocabulary words or key terms 'yellow', and pieces of evidence that supports the main idea, 'blue'. She confessed, "At first to me, it was a little bit trivial. Ok, color coding. But then, after I implemented it, when I walked around, I also saw students color coding their work." The collaboration with her mentor allowed for Anya to experiment with a new instructional routine resulting in the instant gratification of her successful implementation. Anya observed students utilizing the same annotation strategy months later during their U.S. History exam, sharing that, "I felt like, wow, like I actually taught! I essentially taught something."

It was not only Anya's mentor that provided a space for her to discuss her pedagogical practice. When initially asked about her network of support, Anya spoke about her gratitude for the relationship she fostered with a Multilingual Learner (MLL) instructional coach from the Superintendent's office. The instructional coach typically observed her for one class period a week followed by a short meeting to debrief or plan for an upcoming lesson. Anya remarked that his weekly visits provided her with a space to consider "classroom strategies, discussion protocols, activities, jigsaws...pretty much ways to create engaging lessons and ways students can work with tasks around text." Like the collaborative nature of Anya's relationship with her

mentor, Anya benefited from the opportunity to consistently reflect and refine her pedagogical approaches alongside this instructional coach.

Additionally, Anya recognized an established rapport with her co-teacher as a way of understanding the development of her own teaching practices. Anya's assigned co-teacher previously taught the U.S. History curriculum and she appreciated the wealth of resources to draw from as a basis for constructing her own instructional materials. She was thankful for the curricular foundation to operate from, but was excited to talk at length about her own improvements and modernizations to the curriculum. Anya described her enjoyment in adding her own touch by "creating new digital materials, contributing to slides, like [adding] newer images." She felt that the incorporation of popular memes and current images made the content more relevant and relatable for students. In Chapter V I will go into more depth on Anya's pedagogical thinking, at this moment, however, I want to highlight Anya's experience of the social context as it relates to her professional connection and collaboration with her co-teacher. Anya recounted a brief exchange with her co-teacher as follows:

> I taught the lesson for Period 2. I saw [my co-teacher] Period 3 coincidentally because I was doing a coverage and he asked, "Did [the students] get through the entire [lesson activity]?" And I was just like, "Not really, no." We went on to talk about what we should cut out for next period, what we should keep, and what were the previous student responses. That is one of the ways that I give support.

Since Anya had previously taught the lesson to an earlier class, she was able to impart her observations, insights, and reflections with her co-teacher in order to make adjustments and modifications for the upcoming section. This was a moment that Anya vocalized as an

opportunity for her to "give support" by contributing her perspective on ways to improve the lesson implementation instantaneously.

Cole was not afforded the same opportunities and advantages of a consistent, long-term co-teaching partnership. Prior to the reorganization of teaching assignments, during the first few weeks of the year, Cole was able to recognize the value of sharing a classroom with another teacher and the impact on his process of learning to teach. He mentioned that his co-teacher at the time, "modeled what it should look like…walking around the room, asking the questions in a specific manner." Cole provided a little more clarity on the specific qualities he noticed in his co-teacher that shaped his teaching as follows:

> [My co-teacher] helped me to adjust to the speed of the school. I wasn't sure how to interact with the kids in a manner of speaking. But watching him go around the room and tease and joke around with the kids in a specific way that really gave me a lot more confidence to be comfortable in the room and wanting to get to know the kids a lot more specifically.

Cole's teaching mannerisms and persona seemed to have been constructed not only out of his self-understanding and his own preferences and values, but also derived from what he perceived admirable qualities of his co-teacher that he wished to exude: personable, attentive, and genial. Cole's reference to his co-teacher's help in adjusting to "the speed of the school" suggests that Cole was given a model for how to slow down and loosen up within the classroom, and to adopt or conform to school norms. By observing his co-teacher Cole seemed to be able to determine for himself a balance between effective lesson pacing and finding moments to build rapport with students. In many ways, Cole's co-teacher offered him a degree of "permission" to be the amiable teacher he seemed to wish to be. Given the apparent profound impact of this

professional relationship, Cole candidly verbalized his general frustrations with being deprived of this asset to his teaching expressing:

> I was pissed because I was the only new teacher [without a co-teacher]. The new Science teacher has a co-teacher, the new English teacher has a co-teacher, the other new History teacher has a co-teacher, the other new Science teacher has a co-teacher. I got jack diddly. That frustrated me. Either how much do you trust me, or how much do you not like me. I realize that's not what it is. But that is what I was mad at.

Cole felt isolated and disenfranchised as he witnessed all the other beginning teachers build positive co-teaching relationships and receive support through that professional dynamic. Even though Cole was not able to foster a close relationship within the shared space of a classroom environment, he valued the opportunity to connect with other colleagues around his pedagogy within other spaces in the school environment. He commented that "being around other adults…asking questions on my grade team and department [team], [about] how you can go about doing things. And it worked. My lessons were more fun and a bit more engaging." He considered the required weekly team meetings as "the actual on the job training with you know people in my department and grade teams is really what's gotten me adjusted to the culture of the school and like the expectations of the staff." In summary, Cole expressed that, "Learning how to become a teacher came from several of the teachers here at [Community Scholars Prep] more than anything else."

Social interactions play a crucial role in fostering a network of professional relationships that facilitate both one-way and, at times, two-way learning and collaboration. These relationships are especially vital in navigating the uncertainties inherent in the process of learning to teach. The entanglement of these multiple social interactions constitutes a web of

professional relationships that both Anya and Cole acknowledged as supportive in their professional learning. Even as beginning teachers get settled into the profession, they continue to "face uncertainties about instructional content, ranging from difficult choices about what to teach, to imperfect understandings of difficult concepts, to the fragile foundations of the academic disciplines themselves" (Floden & Clark, 1988, p.2). This social context not only helps teachers manage the complexities of their evolving practice but also provides ongoing opportunities for continued learning and pedagogical development.

Institutional Context as Arbiter

As previously mentioned in Chapter II, my understanding of the institutional context includes the organizational and material elements within the school environment that beginning teachers interact with. Elements of the institutional context include school-wide expectations and practices (i.e. instructional norms and routines, disciplinary ladder of referral), school systems and structures (i.e. bell schedule, mandatory professional development), as well as established community partnerships (i.e. educational coaching, collaboration with non-profit organizations). The manifestation of these institutional elements within Community Scholars Prep, allows for the creation of a unique learning community that maintains its own cultures and norms (Pardo, 2006). Consequently, the ways in which school cultures manifest themselves play an important role in shaping how beginning teachers interact with the institutional learning context.

Discerning Expectations

As with any professional organization, expectations are the guidelines, objectives, and behavioral standards that define an organization's culture. These organizational expectations can be explicitly or tacitly communicated. Within schools, one-way expectations are established and

perpetuated is through the communication of school wide instructional routines and practices. At Community Scholars Prep, teachers are expected to incorporate five *instructional drivers* into their lesson plans: (1) higher order thinking questions, (2) student-to-student discussion protocols, (3) differentiated learning strategies, (4) tasks around text, and (5) formative assessment practices. The underlying goal of these focused instructional drivers selected by the administration is said to be to support teachers in their lesson delivery and to increase student participation and engagement. Many of the professional development sessions and designated team meetings at Community Scholars Prep are devoted to working with these drivers in order to design or revise lessons, share successful implementation, or examine their effectiveness through an analysis of student work products. Thus, these instructional drivers are an embedded feature of the teaching and learning process at Community Scholars Prep. For the two participants in this study, discerning expectations emerged as a common thread when these instructional drivers surfaced at various points throughout the data. Even though neither of them was explicitly asked about the impact of the instructional drivers on their teaching, it was clear from our conversations that both participants identified these instructional drivers as established expectations and proceeded to evaluate themselves in their ability to effectively incorporate them into their practice.

In one of our interview sessions, Cole recounted a typical lesson debrief with his mentor and the general flow of their time together. Cole shared that his mentor offers feedback on his lessons and provides insights based on his classroom observations. In terms of Cole's process of learning to teach, Cole's experience of the institutional context underscores his internalization of the implicit expectations created by the instructional drivers. Cole described his mentor as the person who "showed me how to implement the instructional drivers that the school values here."

Cole was able to discern the importance of these teaching methods and understood them as the qualities that define a teacher's effectiveness at Community Scholars Prep. While the choice to make teachers' satisfactory implementation of the instructional drivers a criterion for success in the school is an administrative one, as part of the initiative to establish instructional norms and routines across all classrooms, it is the reinforcement and emphasis from Cole's mentor that most directly shapes his experiences. Later in the interview, Cole shared that a common refrain in examining the quality and success of his lessons alongside his mentor came in the form of these "reflection" questions, "Does [this part of my lesson] meet this [course] requirement? How does this [part of my lesson] meet our *drivers*?" Furthermore, Cole goes on to emphasize that he asks questions of his mentor "to make sure I am on the right path." The incorporation of the instructional drivers into his daily planning and lesson implementation became a criterion for Cole to measure his effectiveness in meeting established expectations.

Toa perhaps illuminate Cole's definition of success as framed by the instructional drivers, in response to a question about a moment in his classroom that has left a lasting impression he shared the following:

> We were speaking about Western Expansion and what happened to Native Americans. One girl was arguing that [Western Expansion] was wrong. One boy was actually taking up the case that it wasn't wrong. He wasn't saying it was right, he was just saying it wasn't wrong. That got a whole discussion going. That was a sign of a really successful lesson. I am out of the conversation, they are having the conversation and they are having it all maturely.

Student initiated discussions are often times characterized as signs of higher levels of student engagement or students taking ownership over their learning and "student-to-student discussion"

is one of the instructional drivers. Cole's description of this lesson highlights his effective implementation of the instructional driver of student-to-student discussion and represents an important moment of successful teaching for him. Additionally, it also shows his ability to succeed by the school's standards and his acceptance of those standards as communicated by his own pedagogical judgments.

Anya also discerned the instructional drivers as an important aspect of the school's norms. Similar to Cole, it was a colleague who helped Anya acclimate within the institutional context and incorporate the instructional drivers into her teaching practice. When generally asked about the support she received over the course of her first year, she highlighted her relationship with an educational coach from the Superintendent's office. It was through their conversations, Anya was able to have space to reflect on her instructional design and her utilization of the school-wide instructional drivers. She mentioned that as they debriefed her lessons and he shared his classroom observations, they discussed, "how [I] can take [my] lesson and use the drivers of our school." The instructional drivers became a normative language for Anya to vocalize what she was doing in her lessons and a measurement for enhancing her teaching practice. For example, when asked about how her instructional practice had changed, if at all, over the course of her first year, she said, "it has [become] a lot more chunked and scaffolded in terms of reading comprehension and 'tiered leveled questions'… [building towards] higher order thinking questions." In describing modifications to her teaching practices, Anya is using the language of the instructional drivers to indicate her incorporation of *differentiated learning strategies* to approach *tasks around texts* in her lessons. She goes on to describe her process to continually ensure she is meeting the school's instructional expectations by sharing, "I am a little bit type A. I took all my [formal] observation notes and I put them in my lesson plans. I kept making my

lesson plans with my observation notes [beside me]. To keep on improving." Anya uses the formal feedback she receives from her evaluative observations as a measure of her effectiveness and refines each lesson plan with the instructional drivers as her guide.

Both Cole and Anya identified the importance of the instructional drivers as a criterion for implementing quality lessons within the context of Community Scholars Prep and wanted to ensure they were consistently meeting those expectations.

Considering my predispositions and reservations about the instructional drivers, throughout the process of data collection and data analysis, they were not in the forefront of my attention. It was only after a few iterations of data analysis that I noticed the instructional drivers seemed to carry a different level of substance for the participants as they navigated the institutional context. Thus, I noticed a tension in my desire to give the instructional drivers relevance. In terms of beginning teachers' access to overt, contextually situated expectations, I recognize the utility in having a criterion like the instructional drivers. Even so, I imagine that Anya and Cole's conceptions of teaching were also shaped by more tacit expectations and other embedded factors within the complex school environment. For example, they may have been influenced by prevailing teaching methods of their colleagues or they may have internalized a priority to focus on particular skills in preparation for standardized tests in order to fit in with the school's expectations. These factors might not have been overt or clearly communicated, but certainly played a role in guiding Anya and Cole's choices in the construction of their pedagogical practices.

Building Institutional Schema

The transition to a new work environment in any profession requires individuals to adjust to their new surroundings. It is common for individuals to draw from previous experiences in

order to adapt to the new culture and learn the norms of an organization. For beginning teachers, that process might include referencing previous work environments, student teaching experiences, or knowledge gained throughout their pre-service education program. Both Cole and Anya speak to their understanding of their current context as it relates to others they have encountered. In learning to navigate the expectations of Community Scholars Prep, particularly in making sense of their role as a beginning teacher, both Cole and Anya juxtapose their experiences in other institutional contexts with their new environment.

For example, Anya referenced her student teaching, her substitute teaching experiences in a middle school context, as well as the broader differences she's observed across boroughs in the New York City area. Anya's student teaching experiences were directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which she briefly recounted as follows:

> 'Good morning! Welcome Period 4! Open the link to the NearPod, thank you, bye!' I did my student teaching experience during COVID. The first part of it was with my peers, essentially us teaching each other, doing a lesson and then critiquing. Then you would meet the professor in the breakout room. And then the next one was with students on Zoom during COVID. It was, I'd like to say, practically non-existent. But I did build up a little teaching stamina and understanding student responses. This is what I would say, 'But what would a student with this material say?' A lot of perspective shifting.

Obviously teaching in a virtual setting is drastically different from teaching in a physical classroom and there are discrete skills required for each space. Since Anya did not have a conventional student teaching experience, it is understandable she would categorize it as "practically non-existent" when compared to what she anticipated as an introduction into the profession. Yet, Anya evidently draws on those experiences as she builds her schema for

anticipating student responses and preparing her instructional materials and lesson delivery to best support the learners in front of her. She connected previously acquired skills from a different environment and applied them to her current position.

Anya's frame of reference from her substitute teaching positions provided her a chance to reflect on the ways she fosters relationships with students in the classroom. She was able to build a strong rapport with her middle school students and appreciated the ability to "to see them essentially have this coming of age." Her time working with middle schoolers provided her with another shift in perspective, specifically how those relationships further support her instruction. As she described, "Middle school, it was brutal, those kids are built different. Definitely a different experience than teaching in high school. High school allows for you to tie more of themselves into the class and rely on their own experiences." Anya takes every chance she can get to draw on her students' lived experiences by prioritizing a relevant and current method in her practice.

Additionally, in reflecting on her substitute teaching experiences compared to her teacher preparation program, Anya also observed a distinct difference in educational styles across boroughs in the New York City area. She noticed that the borough, neighborhood, and community play a significant role in shaping a school's culture, norms, and educational expectations of teachers and students.

> [My undergraduate program] prepared me for Queens school because I felt like my professors mainly operated in Queens as well. So they are bringing that background into their lessons. And now looking back, ok, great, but we are not preparing for students who do not really know how to read or write, construct sentences, or how to infer, or contextualize. So that is something that I just felt like they thought like that was already

> given to students or already there. I wasn't prepared enough to take it back to very fundamentals.

Early in the school year, Anya made note of her students' levels and capabilities in contrast with her prior students' abilities, taking into consideration the broader milieu framing her assumptions. She described her prior school as "a model school. In terms of academic rigor, they really pushed their students every day to meet their criteria, these standards." Anya recognized that her current students needed more scaffolding and support around foundational skills that she had presumed would be well-established at this point in their schooling. In Chapter V, I will go into more detail about how this understanding impacted her instructional decisions and pedagogical thinking.

Lastly, on an institutional level, Anya reflected on the impact of the bell schedule and class programming on her time with students in the classroom. She shares:

> The hour is really beneficial. You can really stretch the material, go into these engaging texts. I was prepared for 45-minute lessons, usually, so now we are adding on that. I do love the hour, I think it's really beneficial for learning, especially when you take away the 10-15 minutes of idle time. The hour is really good for learning.

Like many teachers, Anya noticed the ways in which the duration of a class period structures her approach to what is possible with students in a given timeframe. Within a lesson, Anya prioritizes providing students with scaffolded learning experiences and leaving ample time to complete what she referred to as "the challenge question." She provides students with "small givens", such as recalling previously learned information, citing evidence from a text, or describing their observations from an image. Anya feels this method allows her the opportunity to continue "building up [my students'] motivation to complete an assignment. Because now

they are like, ‘Let me do the challenge question’, which is essentially the top tier of Bloom’s Taxonomy.” She quickly realized the advantage of longer class sessions in maximizing students’ learning opportunities and planned instructional activities accordingly.

Cole references his own secondary and post-secondary educational experiences in order to build his institutional schema as a member of Community Scholars Prep. He spoke at length about his graduate studies both in terms of its benefits and limitations in preparing him to become a teacher. He revealed that, “My program was not really for high schoolers. Looking back on it, I know that it is, but it feels like they very much built it for people who were going to teach preschool and up to maybe like 2nd grade.” He goes on to provide the following specific example:

> We would look at learning disabilities from the perspective of a kid who doesn’t know they have a learning disability. We never looked…like how do we push forward more like when we know when we have all the information, when we have everything built up. Never looked at the past like how do we take a kid who's like going towards transitioning out of a system never talked about that. I didn't realize what kind of planning that took until I got here.

Cole’s understanding of how schools support students with disabilities was one-dimensional prior to entering into the profession. Even though he was able to draw on his graduate preparation to understand students' perspectives, he realized that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) was much more intricate, especially when supporting students in their post-secondary planning and life after high school.

Building institutional schemas emphasizes the mental connections beginning teachers make between previous events, circumstances, or acquired knowledge that helps them process

their new environment. Previously acquired knowledge and skills "do not transfer wholesale into professional practice, but rather morph in relation to contextual elements" (Strom & Martin, 2022, p.3). For Cole and Anya, these mental organizational structures were valuable in building off of pre-existing schemas in order to interpret their new experiences and helped them make sense of the institutional complexities surrounding them.

Developing a Sense of Professional Belonging

The successful navigation of the contextual elements detailed throughout this chapter suggests the *tentative manifestation* of beginning teachers' sense of professional belonging. As Feirsen and Weitzman (2023) noted, "new teachers establish a sense of place in a group when they engage deeply in the school culture and embrace their work with colleagues" (p.3). This sense of place comes from the dynamic interactions and exchanges across the multiple contexts within a school's environment, including an understanding of institutional expectations, establishing collegial relationships, and exploring one's own values and beliefs about teaching. Anya and Cole's processes for orienting themselves within the school community as they navigated these varied interactions and experiences created opportunities for them to feel welcomed and accepted within the school community.

In one of our earliest interactions toward the beginning of the school year, Cole declared, "I just want to prove that I belong here." After getting to know Cole, I realized there is so much about him packed into that brief declaration. It was clear that *belonging* was important to Cole and he desired to find a sense of place. A key component of *belonging* to Cole was the ability to foster meaningful relationships and leave a positive lasting impression with everyone he encountered, including the school staff, the administration, his colleagues, and most importantly his students. Regardless of who he was with, Cole made an intentional effort to build rapport

with those around him as he engaged in frequent informal conversations that provided opportunities for the development of interpersonal bonds and deeper connections. These relationships and bonds were essential to Cole. All of these actions and efforts, characteristic of Cole over the course of his first year, can readily be understood as efforts to or gestures of belonging, of 'proving' that, yes, he belonged at Community Scholars Prep.

Furthermore, when Cole references belonging *here,* he was indicating his position as a member of Community Scholars Prep and his role as a teacher in an urban environment. When talking about the school's location, Cole mentioned, "I've come here [to the Bronx] for my whole life, so for me there's nothing wrong with coming and trying to give back to a community that needs it". Given his long-standing relationship with the broader environment, Cole positioned himself as a member of the community and felt his teaching is an act of service. In one of our conversations later in the school year, he expressed, "I've found where I am supposed to be and the adventure starts from there." His understanding of belonging was rooted in feeling a sense of place in the context of the Bronx, specifically at Community Scholars Prep.

Lastly, the word *prove* in Cole's initial sentiment, "I just want to prove that I belong here", carried weight for Cole in terms of how he views himself as a teacher. As a beginning teacher and a new member of a community, he understood the need to demonstrate his abilities and garner success, both of which he recognized takes effort on his part. He was reflective in his teaching practice and knew there was always more to learn and continual improvements to be made. By constantly putting forth his best effort and being open to feedback, he attempted to *prove* his *belonging* to the students, to his colleagues, and, it seems reasonable to infer, to a certain extent, to himself.

For Cole and Anya, a sense of belonging was fostered through the building of relationships with "individuals and groups" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p.7) in the school where they felt connected and supported by their colleagues. Towards the end of the school year, Cole described the school's culture and environment by saying, "it's a very open staff culture…a very positive community." While describing the members of the community, he shared that, "all the teachers and staff here have been very helpful…[and] kind helping me adjust to my first year, giving me as many pointers as I need." As one of the many newly hired teachers, he mentioned that, "from [all the new teachers] I've spoken to, for the most part, everyone has been pretty welcomed in their department and grade teams." Cole's experiences confirm that part of beginning teachers' construction of their pedagogical practices is engaging in meaningful ways with colleagues in order to establish a sense of place within the community.

Anya expressed her sense of belonging by highlighting her experience of the school environment and interactions with colleagues. When asked about the school's culture and environment, Anya described her overall interactions with other staff members as "a pleasant one, [everyone is] very communitive, and understanding." Anya shared, "I am very grateful to be here. I genuinely like working here." She went on in more detail by stating:

> People were very nice and friendly, so that's a plus. Willing to interact with other teachers. We don't get a chance to all meet as one often. You can definitely tell that we are all doing our best to support our learners no matter their academic background.

For Anya, belonging occurred through her process of becoming acclimated to the community and building relationships with other teachers through a common purpose, especially her co-teacher and other beginning teachers. It is through these "shared understandings, values, and

feelings of similarity" (Bjorklund Jr., 2023, p.7) that Anya felt more deeply connected to, and thus a part of, the school community.

In addition to simply establishing collegial relationships, Cole and Anya deepened their sense of belonging through their efforts to make contributions to their colleagues and the surrounding community. As Bjorklund Jr.'s (2023) research notes, "It is important to find opportunities for new teachers to contribute to their departments or grade teams. These opportunities may help them feel valued by colleagues and feel like they are part of the team" (p.9). Cole felt a strong bond with the teacher teams he was a part of, the History department and the 12th grade team; however, he felt more comfortable asserting himself within his grade team, whether vocalizing his ideas or quickly taking action. For example, as Cole spoke about his role on the 12th grade team, he made the comparison:

> I grew up [in] upstate [New York], most of the time if it's bad weather, my friends come over to shovel my driveway, I gotta go help them do theirs. I owe it to [my grade team] to do the things, without being asked, I need to be able to contribute and help.

Most of the grade team's work focused on discussing student progress, examining student data, planning, coordinating and implementing grade level assemblies and student celebrations. When reflecting on his early experiences as a part of the grade team, Cole shared, "The first-grade team meeting I felt like an ass. I was looking around thinking I could make a Dunce hat right now and I don't think anybody would notice much because I have nothing to add here." Cole's comment suggests initial feelings of exclusion, inadequacy, and embarrassment, I presumed largely because of his position as a beginning teacher. Yet, by the end of the year, Cole's feelings of belonging as a member of the 12th grade team shifted and his initiative and contributions were evident as he described:

> I take technical [responsibilities] up for the assemblies, I am totally fine being a team player. Oh, we are having [a student celebration], I'll make sure that [the students] are going to grab food. I like being a team player.

Feelings of comfort and professional belonging certainly develop with time, but Cole's effort in finding opportunities to contribute made him feel like a valuable member of the team and broader community.

On the other hand, Cole's perception of his contributions to his department team were more complicated because they seem to be entangled with expressions of self-doubt related to his pedagogical content knowledge. Most of the department team's work at Community Scholars Prep focused on collaborative curriculum design through the use of inquiry cycles structured around the implementation of instructional routines and refining pedagogical practices based on the examination of student data. When asked about the contributions he's made to the History department he responded:

> In terms of what I've contributed to my department team, unfortunately, I can honestly say, not much. The best thing I can say I've done is I ran the U.S. History Mock Regents exam scantrons, collected and sent the data out to [the rest of the team]. The most part, the commentary I've had…when we are in department team meetings, and I am speaking with the other U.S. History teachers...I am trying to [make an observation] that isn't always obvious...I try to find things that are a little above my ability to find, taking information from tests or student work.

Even though Cole felt very connected and bonded with individual colleagues in the History department, primarily his mentor and his co-teacher (albeit briefly), Cole did not vocally express the same feelings of belonging in the space of the History department as compared to the 12th

grade team. I would imagine he was equally present, engaged, and made thoughtful contributions to both meeting spaces and probably added more value than he is giving himself credit for. In Cole's concluding sentiments regarding his experiences on teams, Cole reflected, "I wish I could contribute more, particularly to my department team. Which is something that I'll be able to do a lot easier with time." I could sense that Cole had an established rapport with his History colleagues and considered himself a welcomed member of the team. His comment about wanting to contribute more highlights Cole's desire to continue to find ways to assert himself and seek out opportunities to be more of an asset to his department team colleagues. Cole's varied experiences of belonging underscore the influx nature of belonging as it relates to a confluence of contextual factors. Moreover, Cole's experiences of belonging highlight how the sense of belonging is not a fixed or static state, rather evolves based on factors such as peer relationships, interpersonal dynamics, personal values, and external pressures. In other words, Cole's sense of belonging isn't determined by one singular aspect of his environment, but is shaped by multiple interconnected elements that can change over time.

Anya, as I previously mentioned, spoke generally about her positive feelings towards colleagues and made vague mentions of her contributions to the teams she was a part of, the History department and the 11th grade team. During one of our conversations, she called specific attention to the advantages of connecting with grade level colleagues around how to approach a student exhibiting challenging behaviors by describing:

> I discussed with another [grade team] teacher, about ways that we can interact with a particular student and that was very helpful and supportive. I didn't have to do too much debriefing of the student since we've shared similar sentiments. But just ways that we can properly address their [needs]…just ways to interact with them that would be more

beneficial and can take out bias.

It is clear from Anya's comment that these types of conversations were frequent occurrences. I also got the sense that Anya initiated some of these interactions, but that her grade team colleagues also sought after her perspectives, approaches, and insights. As Bjorklund Jr.'s (2023) research found, "fostering a sense of belonging in new teachers offers a buffer against difficulties associated with learning to teach" (p.9). In Anya's case, experiencing camaraderie while adding value to her grade team colleagues, specifically in discussing different supports and strategies for particular students, may have been a salve for potentially challenging moments during her first year.

The recounting of their experiences indicates that when interacting with colleagues, both informally and formally within the collaborative spaces of teacher teams, Cole and Anya each made concerted efforts (in their own unique ways) to proactively engage and share their perspectives, insights, and observations. A sense of professional belonging, "enables new teachers to build the sense of competence essential for full participation in the life of the school community while also allowing them to share their expertise and insights and collaborate with colleagues" (Feirsen & Weitzman, 2024, p.2). In many ways, Cole and Anya illuminate that developing a sense of belonging is an active pursuit, rather than a passive one, requiring beginning teachers to take initiative as they find their way through and make sense of the multiple elements comprising their professional context.

Radical Acceptance

Another *tentative manifestation* that emerged from examining the multitude of contextual elements surrounding the beginning teacher is their regard for their first-year experiences and the process of learning to teach with *radical acceptance*. As discussed in Chapter II, "radical

acceptance" (Linehan, 1993) describes the practice of recognizing and accepting the reality of one's surrounding circumstances, even when faced with challenging situations, discomfort, and/or frustration. Across the data collected in this study, indications of radical acceptance emerged when Anya and Cole shared challenging moments or discussed pressure points in the unfolding process of constructing their teaching practices. It was striking how often radical acceptance was central to Anya and Cole's default stances as they negotiated their individual paths as beginning teachers.

For instance, Cole appeared to exhibit radical acceptance while recalling his experiences of the first weeks in the classroom. During the first few weeks of the school year beginning teachers are customarily overwhelmed, often spending the majority of their time preoccupied with the daily routines of teaching (Moir, 1999). When asked about how he felt during that time at the start of the school year, Cole reflected, "In September, I was a nervous, new teacher. I could count on my hands, this is day seven that I've been here, I've been doing this profession now." Without any hesitation, Cole continued:

> It is tough being the new guy. Being the new fish in the pond is a tough challenge, a hard hurdle to get over. You have to go into every situation with an open mindset. Obviously I am going to be one of the newest people here, but there are- I recognized at the time- there are six other new teachers, there's a new teacher that is teaching the same subject as me. I know that whatever I am going through I am probably not the only one who is alone in this. If I asked the oldest teacher in this building to think back [to his first weeks of teaching] he's probably going to say, I felt the same, I felt sick to my stomach about it.

Cole's sentiments expressed above imply common difficulties faced by beginning teachers, particularly feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and nervousness associated with "being the new

guy" and entering a new profession. Cole's recognition that he is not alone- since there are other new teachers in similar positions and even the most experienced teachers at one point may have felt similarly- suggests that the experience of feeling "alone" or overwhelmed as a beginning teacher is not unique, but shared by others. By acknowledging the challenge of being the "new guy" and the sense of isolation that comes with it, Cole exhibited elements of radical acceptance when he took the inevitable moments of discomfort and vulnerability inherent in being a beginning teacher in stride. Rather than resisting or deflecting these difficult realities, Cole chose to approach his first year with an open mindset, allowing himself to experience the uncertainty and discomfort without letting it overwhelm him. By accepting his own challenges entering the profession and the collective nature of the beginning teacher experience, Cole was better able to engage with moments of doubt constructively, rather than fighting against them - and himself.

While he reflected back on the school year more generally in the spring, Cole reiterated similar expressions that exhibited that radical acceptance had been part of his approach from the outset, writing "I don't want to say [it's been] a challenging one because I expected a challenge coming into teaching." (Noteworthy Moment #2). Cole's word choice of describing teaching as "challenging" in this reflection shows an inclination to characterize his first year as difficult, but he also rejects that as the *summation* of his experiences when he says "I expected a challenge coming into teaching." From Cole's submission, what became apparent to me about Cole's outlook more broadly, was his readily apparent willfulness and determination to create his own experience and not accept stereotypical characterizations of the first year of teaching that his reflections appeared to eschew as reductive or simplistic. In contrast, Cole shared a perspective of resilience. This display of radical acceptance was evident in how he regarded many aspects of

his teaching practice, particularly his approach to lesson planning, content delivery, or the implementation of instructional routines. He expressed a general attitude that "the first approach is never going to be the one that actually is really successful." This statement implies Cole's embrace of resilience from the outset - an understanding that the process of learning to teach requires experimentation and adaptation. Cole's outlook emphasizes a commitment to flexibility, a willingness to adapt, and an understanding that teaching is a journey of continuous learning, all of which were crucial elements as he continued to construct his teaching practices.

Cole's depictions of his first year as "challenging" or that being a beginning teacher is a "hard hurdle to get over" suggests an acknowledgement of the realities of his situation and a resolve to persevere. These sentiments reappeared at the end of the school year in Cole's completion of his reflection mapping (See Figure 2) along with his accompanying explanations. This reflection map, entitled "Start vs. End of Year 1", represents key shifts in his feelings over the course of the year in categories he defined as, "Stress, Curiosity, Comfort, Skill, and Enjoyment." Above each category on the graph, Cole has depicted his experience of each feeling at the start of the year (the bars on the left) compared to the end of the year (the bars on the right) on a scale of 0 to 100. In terms of categorizing his stress levels, Cole explained, "I was more stressed at the end of the year, but I was stressed as a result of understanding what my job really entailed. It came from myself, primarily, as a result of what I aspire to reach as a professional." He was referring, in part, to his preoccupation with the approaching U.S. History Regents exam and his feelings of professional responsibility to prepare students to perform well on that standardized test. Cole talked about how the increase in his comfort level (from 10 to 75, as he quantified it), was related to "becoming more confident in the school, as a member of the staff and community" reiterating similar feelings of belonging previously mentioned in this chapter.

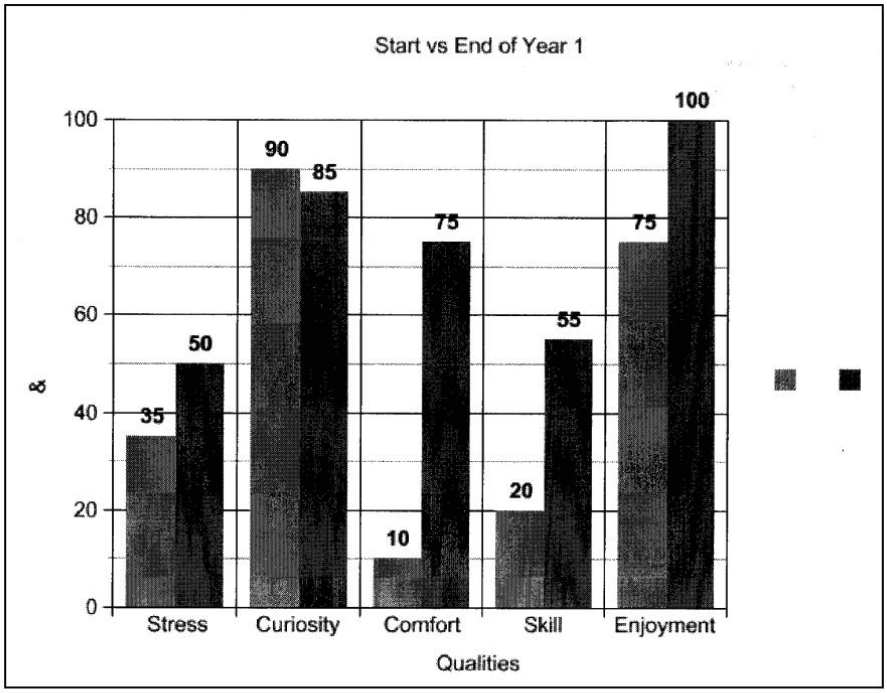

Figure 2: Cole's Reflection Mapping, "Start vs. End of Year 1" (2023)

For the categorization of his skill levels, Cole explained, "I know for certain my lesson plans developed and improved as a result of the feedback provided to me from staff, principals and teachers who helped me figure out what effective and engaging lessons should look like." The fact that Cole quantified his perceived skill level at 55 by the end of the year points to his desire to continue learning and growing as a teacher. When providing some insight into his ratings on the category of enjoyment, Cole mentioned, "I was far more excited at the end of the year than the start, having finally started understanding and appreciating how far I had come pursuing my goal, to become a teacher, and how excited I was that I had actually done it." Although his level of curiosity remained high from the beginning of the year to the end, he shared that "I was somewhat less curious about many things, only as a result of learning and growing throughout the year." In describing his reflection map as a whole, Cole concluded:

> The first-year teaching provides many opportunities for excitement and learning, and while it can be stressful, it is far and away the most rewarding experience I could have

asked for. The strengths I built in my first year will continue to help me grow next year and beyond.

In summary, his foundational stance of radical acceptance helped to frame the difficulties or "stressors" of being a new teacher not as something to be critical of, but as necessary learning experiences in becoming a teacher.

Similar to Cole, Anya accepted the challenging realities of the first year of teaching. As shown below, her language choices reflect her own personal perspective, nevertheless, Anya also clearly exhibited radical acceptance. As Moir (1999) notes, "it is not uncommon for new teachers to spend up to 70 hours on school work" (p.1). When Anya described her lesson planning process during the first few months of the school year, she shared, "I used to spend five to six hours on a lesson plan every day, but now we are down to three hours, so making progress! It's ok, the first year is always a lot." Anya's acknowledgement that it used to take her much longer to prepare lessons and now it takes less time, shows the demonstration of her acceptance of the learning curve inherent in the teaching profession. She has accepted that the workload is heavy, but she is also celebrating the progress she's made, which illustrates a reframing of her experience of lesson planning and preparation as a necessary feature in her process of learning to teach. Similar to Cole, Anya recognized the familiar characterizations of the first year as overwhelming and laborious, yet rather than resenting the time and effort she is expending on her craft, Anya's expression indicates an acceptance of her difficulties as a part of the process, without feeling guilty or defeated. My impression of her phrasing of "it's ok" was not directed at me, but instead intended as a sense of self-compassion and patience with her own development, giving herself permission to experience struggle without it defining her success or worth. The fact that she mentioned she is "making progress" before concluding simply that "the

first year is always a lot" suggests a determination to be the narrative agent in her own teacher journey and, to what extent she was aware of it, to write that narrative with radical acceptance as a foundational piece. Ultimately, Anya's perspective allowed her to view her efforts as worthwhile, even during those periods when she felt overwhelmed or fatigued, and to recognize that the challenges she faced were a part of the process in her learning to teach.

Indications of Anya's radical acceptance reemerged at the end of the school year as well, as seen in her reflection mapping (See Figure 3) along with the corresponding written reflection. Anya chose to map pivotal moments (defined in the prompt as dilemmas, tensions, successes, or challenges) over the course of her first year. Anya's drawing, entitled "Year '22: Reflection Mapping", represents key shifts in her feelings associated with each month of the year as measured by her scale labeled "Emotions", at the lowest point a small fire symbol and at the highest point the symbol of a smiley face. Above each month on the graph, Anya has indicated key moments as markers of time and the level of her emotion. For example, in September, labeled as "beginning of the year", it is clear from her drawing that she experienced positive emotions. However, during March, labeled as "long March, no days off", she described her emotions as being "at a low overall".

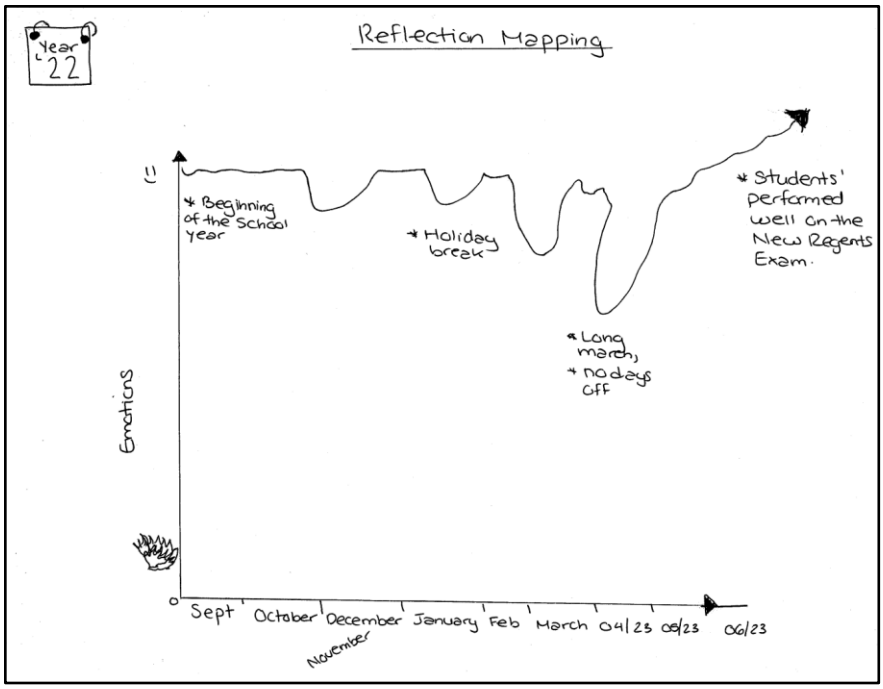

Figure 3: Anya's Reflection Mapping, "Year '22: Reflection Mapping" (2023)

At the end of the year, Anya has labeled June as "Students' performed well on the New Regents exam" with her positive emotions exceeding those in September. In describing her reflection map of the year as a whole, Anya concluded:

> My first year in teaching was where my idea of perfection met reality. My map reflection shows how I've adapted throughout the year, as this profession teaches you. I've learned to roll with the needs of students and encourage them as lifelong learners. As much as I'm a teacher, I will always be a lifelong learner.

In the act of summarizing her reflection map and capturing the essence of her first-year experiences as a whole, Anya has expanded her radical acceptance of the burdens of planning to include her outlook on teaching more broadly. Anya's use of the phrase "I've learned to roll with the needs of the students" demonstrates that radical acceptance has been fully integrated into her professional ethos. Rather than clinging to rigid expectations or plans, Anya was responsive to the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of the teaching and learning process.

The undulating movement of her reflection map represents her flexibility, resiliency, and ultimate embrace of the challenges associated with the first year of teaching. As indicated by her comment "I will always be a lifelong learner" Anya recognized that this growth will be ongoing as she continues on her path of learning her craft.

Summary

This chapter explored the various interactions and influences that shaped Anya and Cole's pedagogical practices as they navigated their experiences entering the teaching profession. The construction of their pedagogical practice was influenced by a variety of voices and perspectives, the administrative expectations they faced, and the constant calculations required to meet the dynamic needs of their classrooms. Anya and Cole's teaching practices were not predetermined or fixed; rather, they were shaped and reshaped as they drew on different contextual elements. These included aspects of their personal histories, the navigation of social dynamics, and engagement with the institutional learning context—often at the intersection of all these factors simultaneously.

One key concept that underpinned Cole and Anya's first year journey was radical acceptance—the idea that they are not expected to master teaching automatically, but rather to accept the gradual unfolding of their learning process. Even during challenging moments, where they faced difficulties in their growth, they held onto the belief that their experiences were simply part of the ongoing construction and creation of their teaching selves. This acceptance seemed fundamental to Cole and Anya's development as educators, allowing them to embrace the messy, incremental nature of learning to teach and to navigate the complexities of the classroom and profession with patience and resilience.

My analysis of their process of learning to teach reveals that beginning teachers, like Anya and Cole, engage in a constant cycle of decision-making that informs the development of their pedagogy. This decision-making framework is a coalescence of their values, priorities, observations, and interpretations of what it means to be an effective teacher. For example, Cole and Anya were able to interpret and internalize institutional expectations and align them with their own understanding of what constitutes good teaching. For Anya and Cole, the process of choosing what to focus on amidst the many options available was a significant feature of their professional learning. Each choice they made reflected their values and acted as both a statement of who they are as individuals in the profession and a compass for their ongoing growth as educators. Their decisions reflected not only their previous knowledge and experiences, but also what they deemed to be important in order to continue to learn to teach. In Chapter V, I explore moments where Cole and Anya explain their choices, decisions, and actions that help to further illustrate them as pedagogical agents.

Chapter V

ENGAGING IN PEDAGOGICAL THINKING

As discussed in Chapter II, this research study positions beginning teachers as agentive, adaptable, and capable of generating creative and spontaneous solutions, even as they exhibit radical acceptance (Linehan, 1993). Operating from this perspective, I thus presume that beginning teachers engage in pedagogical thinking at various points throughout the teaching process, meaning that they are acting on their choices (as a result of intentional, deliberate plans or perhaps necessitated by in the moment circumstances) and make decisions about future courses of actions. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how Cole and Anya explain their choices, decisions, and actions as pedagogical agents. The indicators of beginning teachers' engagement in pedagogical thinking are categorized as the following *tentative manifestations* in the remaining sections of this chapter: awareness of mutual effects, the pursuit of resources, learning to pivot, and self-efficacy.

Awareness of Mutual Effects

As Cole and Anya gained experiences and the perception of their teaching shifted, indications of their pedagogical thinking emerged. Their respective awareness gradually transitioned from a focus on delivering information and transferring knowledge to their students to a more comprehensive approach that considered student needs, classroom dynamics, the importance of building relationships, adapting to diverse learning styles, and reflecting on their own teaching practices. Rodriguez and Solis (2013) defined an aspect of this shifting awareness as an understanding of *mutual effects,* which they described as when teachers "changed an approach, responded to, or were affected by the behaviors or feedback of a student; and that in

turn, their response caused the student to change or shift their behavior or approach to learning" (p.166). Anya demonstrated an understanding of this reciprocal relationship when she reflected on the transition between her lesson planning process as compared to putting her plan into practice. Her awareness also shifted when she had an unexpected impact on a particular student that affirmed features of her teaching practice. Cole too showed similar shifts in his awareness, particularly when he communicated being surprised by the impact of his actions and approaches on his students.

In the spring, Anya was asked to reflect on recent lessons and the decisions she made while delivering instruction, she articulated, "Instead of going from questions on my lesson plan, I can gear my questions in real time. Real time feedback and questions to guide [students'] thinking." It became clear even in observing her classroom, Anya was no longer just delivering pre-planned content, but was attuned to students' immediate responses, reactions, and thought processes. By adapting questions "in real time," Anya became more responsive to students' evolving understanding, indicating a deeper awareness of the teaching and learning process as it unfolded. Her use of the words *gear* and *guide* also reflect a growing awareness of her role in shaping the learning environment. Rather than following a rigid plan she spent hours designing, Anya became empowered to make decisions on the fly and adjust her approach as necessary, largely in response to her engagement with students.

This self-understanding as a pedagogical agent in turn influenced Anya's future decisions and courses of action. For instance, once Anya had a clearer grasp of her students' writing abilities, she found herself spending more time providing students with individual feedback during class, using a mix of individual conferencing sessions and explicit written comments on their work. As she detailed, her intent was to provide "more feedback, like one-on-one feedback.

Which is definitely tiring, but it's worth it." Even though the feedback process may be time-consuming and exhausting, Anya quickly recognized that the depth and quality of the feedback she provided directly contributed to the students' learning and development. She recounted examples of some of the feedback she provided various students in rapid fire form: "You need to write in complete sentences. Your evidence needs to answer the question. You need to use quotes. You need to put your thoughts and opinions." Anya noticed that once she began providing students with more individualized feedback that was concrete and responsive to their individual needs, there were changes and improvements in their written responses and that she was actively facilitating student learning through her feedback. This shift in Anya's pedagogical thinking reflects an awareness that the teaching and learning process is interactive and continuously evolving.

Another indication of Anya's shift in awareness was when she had an unexpected impact on a particular student that affirmed features of her teaching practice, specifically her attention to incorporating skill instruction alongside content. In one of her Noteworthy Moments, titled "A Rewarding Moment", Anya wrote:

> Upon giving a trimester final exam, one student who has an IEP, was apprehensive because the exam content seemed daunting and lengthy. After the exam, said student approached me saying "I used the skills you taught me to find the answer in the question, and it worked". He goes on to explain that after he used the skills, he felt as if he had a better grasp of the Regents exam. He then proceeded to use those skills within our class time together. This was so rewarding to hear: skills I've shown them being used in practice, and the effects of that resulting in a good grade.

The “skills” referenced in this anecdote were the annotation strategies Anya instructed students to use to help them decode and approach the exam confidently. The student's statement, "I used the skills you taught me," shows that Anya’s impact is not only about providing information but about cultivating students’ ability to think critically and apply knowledge independently. Anya’s expressed sense of satisfaction upon hearing the student’s success signals an active reflection on how her teaching methods are influencing students’ progress and success. From this shift in awareness of the mutual effect of Anya’s teaching practices, Anya became focused on equipping students with tools and habits that they could continue to use in the future.

Cole’s shift in awareness was apparent in one of his Noteworthy Moments as well. In his writing, titled “Moment of Pride”, Cole noted, “So something occurred the other day I had not expected and it hit me in a funny way.” He went on to describe in detail a tutoring session in which he was preparing students for the upcoming U.S. History Regents exam. In this tutoring session he indicated he “hosted anybody who was willing to come,” including a few of his current students, one of whom brought a friend from another teacher’s class. In his description, he reported that he circulated the room, approached the student and her friend and offered them a strategy for tackling the multiple-choice questions on the exam. In his recounting of the interaction with this new student, he wrote:

> She was beaming that she found [the strategy] really helpful. Before I left, my student told her, “Mr. [Greer] tries to help make it easy, break it down.” to which she replied “It’s very different from what we were doing yesterday [in my class] .... This is trying to be different and fun.” My students agreed. They all said thank you at the end of the session and left for the day. As I walked out of the building, it hit me that I was doing the right thing, that my self-doubt is misplaced.

This anecdote offers compelling insight into Cole's growing awareness of his impact on students, as well as how his evolving approaches to instruction were influencing both his students' experiences and his own perspectives. As Cole expressed he felt he was "doing the right thing" as it related to his experience of effectiveness, the students' positive feedback not only affirmed his methods but also served as a reminder of the reciprocal nature of teaching. Particularly Cole's final thought, "that my self-doubt is misplaced," illustrates a shift from uncertainty to a warranted self-confidence. The immediate feedback from this new student interaction and the positive reactions from the others seemed to serve as affirmations, which helped Cole realize the effectiveness of his pedagogical decisions.

As Strom and Martin (2022) point out, "instruction in the first year of teaching practice is not something the teacher does by [theirself], but is actively negotiated. Further, as those negotiations happen, teacher learning morphs" (p. 7). The examples above illustrate Cole and Anya's shift in awareness that prompted thinking and reflection on their teaching practices. These realizations mark important moments of their pedagogical thinking as they learned to integrate feedback, both from students and their own observations, to continue to refine their practice. The awareness of this mutual effect prompted Cole and Anya to become more accustomed to *paying attention* to their effect on students' learning and thinking which contributed to the design of their pedagogy. As Cole and Anya continue to negotiate their teaching practices, these moments of paying attention have great potential to deepen their sense of agency in the classroom, allowing them to become more intentional and strategic in their approach. Over time, they may begin to internalize these feedback loops, moving from reactive adjustments to proactive, student-centered planning that anticipates challenges before they arise. This progression reflects the development of their pedagogical thinking and their ability to

navigate the complexities of teaching while staying aligned with their values and the evolving needs of their students.

The Pursuit of Resources

One thing the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted was the inherent resourcefulness of teachers in the face of challenging and uncertain times. Teachers in the current study were able to showcase their problem-solving abilities, whether it was modifying curriculum to meet the demand of the virtual setting, creatively adapting lessons to maintain student engagement, or incorporating new technology to construct interactive learning opportunities. Perspectives on the teaching and learning process were directly impacted, including, in some circumstances, a heightened focus on the academic capabilities and skill levels of students. The tension between the perceived learning gap and the desire to create an engaging classroom that meets students' needs resulted in a continual pursuit of resources, whether physical instructional materials, web-based educational applications, or individuals to collaborate with. Cole and Anya experienced their teacher preparation programs during the pandemic and its aftermath, which ultimately left a lasting impact on their pedagogy. Even though the current educational climate can be characterized by more stability for both students and teachers in K-12 and higher education settings, the necessity for a resourceful approach to instructional practices remains. It is a customary practice in the 21st century to utilize technology and online material to acquire additional information, to spark one's imagination, to gather resources more efficiently, and especially in the teaching profession, to see the approaches, opinions and pedagogical consensus of other educators. Beginning teachers, especially the two participants in this study, are no exception. My aim in detailing the following examples of Cole and Anya's pursuit of resources is not to suggest that it is novel for beginning teachers to seek help (though it does not appear to

be a universal habit), but to demonstrate their pedagogical decision-making processes, at which moments they decided to pursue additional information or materials and to whom or what they turned.

As previously mentioned, Anya felt very supported and encouraged in the teaching of her co-taught and stand-alone U.S. History courses, however, she did not feel the same about her assigned Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. History course. She expressed that, "In terms of the AP course, I would have ideally wished for a little bit more support." From this identified need, she turned to other materials and resources at her disposal. Anya explained her perspective on the AP course as follows:

> It was essentially, trial by fire. Essentially for this year, reading up and educating myself for one of the hardest history exams. And figuring out how can I take this AP material, this College Board material, and SAT every day and bring it to my students and my learners. It was ok, because I went online and found a lot of group chats on Facebook. I was in there combing through and was like, I would use this.

She was able to locate a graphic organizer that walked students through an interpretation and analysis of primary source documents using the acronym HIPP. Anya described the elements of the graphic organizer as, "Historical circumstance, Intended audience, Purpose and Point of View and a summary at the end." Anya identified this resource as a clear, methodical tool students could repeatedly use to approach unfamiliar primary source documents in order to elucidate their thinking. After discerning its usefulness to students, she continued to accompany the graphic organizer with any primary source document throughout the remainder of the year to prepare students for an essential skill needed on their AP Exam.

Cole's pursuit of resources started by connecting and collaborating with his colleagues. In shaping his pedagogical practices, he leaned into the veteran teachers around him, especially his mentor, the brief time he spent with a co-teacher, and occasionally other teachers in his department or an administrator. He valued any opportunity to learn from their expertise and solicit their feedback. As a result, Cole utilized several colleagues' perspectives and insights as a resource in establishing instructional routines as well as the construction of teaching materials. Cole was actively implementing what he gathered from these individuals as he made choices and decisions on how to act on the advice he received and how he would apply it within his own classroom. He distinguished the ways in which he was able to use the insights he received as follows:

> [My co-teacher] also helped me go over how to break down the very quick parts of a chunking down a lesson and looking at a unit plan. [My mentor] helped me go through it in a lot more of a fine detail. [My co-teacher] is the big motions, [my mentor] is the fine bits of what is going on.

When Cole needed support identifying broader concepts to meet key curricular standards he would seek out his co-teacher. For example, he would approach his co-teacher to discuss how to parse out a unit's essential questions into manageable weekly topics or daily lessons. When Cole wanted help with the instructional drivers or methods to implement a particular component of his lesson plan, such as when to use a turn and talk protocol, he would make sure to have a conversation with his mentor. This distinction illuminates Cole's process of viewing his colleagues' expertise as assets to shape his pedagogical thinking. It also suggests that he makes discernible judgments about the type of advice or support each of his more experienced colleagues is most likely to offer.

Another example that elucidates Cole's solicitation of colleagues' expertise as a resource came during the planning phases of delivering new content. When embarking on preparing to teach a new Civics unit he was designing, he indicated that his process was as follows:

> Looking through my options, I spoke with my mentor and assistant principal about going through Civics coursework through the end of the year. They gave me some insight in how to approach organizing lesson plans.

Cole frequently initiated pedagogical conversations. Likely because he had not been afforded the customary support of a steady co-teaching dynamic, he made the effort to gather as many curricular insights as possible from as many people as possible. He seemed, as I have suggested above, to especially feel the lack of, to try to create for himself some semblance of, an ongoing dialogue about *planning*. Time and again, it struck me that he relished any opportunity to gather information and perspectives prior to forming a course of action.

Economics is a New York City Public School requirement for graduation and at Community Scholars Prep this course is typically offered to seniors. For this stand-alone Economics class, Cole took a different tactic to locating resources. Cole had some flexibility over the design of his curriculum as long as it met the standards. Since it was a course that he was not expecting to teach, he viewed the course as a challenge and used the space to take risks and experiment with different instructional methods.

Cole discussed his success in covering topics like investing, budgeting, financial college planning, filling out employment forms, and selecting healthcare options. He acknowledged that the school has structures in place to support students in their transition to college, but was proud of the classroom experience he was able to offer his students. While he was reflecting on his approach he commented, "I know they go over this stuff with other teachers in the school, but I

liked having fun with it." Cole was determined to "give kids a good memory in the classroom." His way of providing students with that memorable experience, particularly in his Economics course, was by locating resources and applications that gamified the learning process. Cole wanted to "show them something different…gamified learning, that's the stuff right there." He described in detail one of his favorite educational games for teaching budgeting:

> There are a bunch of apps you can look up for the kids. The best one is living paycheck to paycheck. The situation is your house got foreclosed, you have $1000 to your name and you have to make it through a month and you have a kid. There are all these expenses and [the students] have choices they have to be able to make.

Cole went on to share that a week after incorporating the budgeting game into one of his lessons, students were continuing to play it and he made sure to mention, "I was very happy with that." Cole's decision to incorporate technology, specifically online applications and games, created another avenue to build relationships and connect with students through engaging content.

Even though Anya and Cole use a variety of means to pursue additional resources, both of them actively seek out perspectives and materials from multiple people and various spaces, even virtually, to support and offer feedback on their instruction. Their process of accessing what they regard as helpful in the construction of their teaching practices expands on the conventional notion of supporting beginning teachers during the induction period. Rather than solely depending on a designated mentor, drawing from the school's professional development opportunities, or relying on the prescribed, status quo curriculum, both Anya and Cole eagerly explore an assortment of resources to strengthen their pedagogy. Their process of pursuing resources indicates a desire to fill in gaps in their instructional practices, whether out of necessity to support the learners in front of them or in an interest to incorporate creative approaches to

teaching. These decisions suggest an agentic outlook toward the construction of their pedagogical practices.

Learning to Pivot

When faced with challenges or presented with new information, the ability to pivot requires a willingness to alter a course of action, remain open to unknown possibilities, or embrace the inevitability of change. Ries (2011) proposes "a pivot requires that we keep one foot rooted in what we've learned so far, while making a fundamental change in strategy in order to seek even greater [results]" (p. 154). For teachers, the decision to pivot might emerge at any point during the planning and preparation phases of a lesson or unit, amidst real-time instruction based on in the moment classroom observations, or in the course of a reflection after a lesson concludes. The choice to change a course of action or select an alternative path requires the ability to trust one's intuition, embrace a willingness to take a risk, and accept the possibility of instructional failure.

Learning to pivot was another readily apparent feature of Cole and Anya's pedagogical thinking. As shown in the examples below, Anya felt several conditions dictated a pivot. These included a post-pandemic student body in various degrees of inconsistencies (attendance, academic stamina, etc.), classes of students with significantly lower levels than she anticipated, and specific instructional goals that the New York State Regents exams necessitated and she came to embrace. Similarly, Cole developed his own ability to pivot as he faced challenges associated with a downsize in the roster size of his classes and increasing inconsistencies in student attendance.

Anya felt compelled to pivot as she quickly became aware of the variegated needs of her student population. When confronted with the very real challenges of a student population

emerging from the pandemic, many of whom were transitory, she reverted to her teacher training to guide her. While speaking about the adjustments she felt she needed to make to her teaching, she shared:

> Teaching [at Community Scholars Prep] …will really make you dig deep into your teaching education…and go back to the books and say how do I address this problem of…and constantly updating your instruction. It definitely prepares you for different learners and even though the school is a transitory school for some students, we are still able to instill this practice of…. the importance of education.

This was not the first time that Anya referenced revisiting theory and skills learned from her teacher education to problem solve or navigate unexpected challenges of practice. For example, Anya relayed the moment she realized her students were not at the skill level she anticipated as follows:

> When I came [to Community Scholars Prep], I was very much like…let's do this! We can all do it together! And then I'm like seeing the student work, and no shade to them, but they are very much [lower]. So I am just now [considering]…how do I bring my approach to meet their level without lowering my expectations of them. That is something that I was really struggling with…That was why I was trying to change my instruction.

Anya quickly discerned that at the start of the school year her instruction included "a lot of heavy text and higher order thinking questions. Essentially on the paper, the material was there, but the material didn't apply to the classes." Anya felt that her planning and materials were thoughtfully and intentionally designed, but she needed to find ways to make the content more accessible and engaging for students. As a result, Anya leaned into what she remembered about principles of

cognitive science from her preservice education and pivoted her instructional design with a focus on her questioning techniques. She decided to, "create thought-provoking questions that [transferred] information to [students'] long-term memory or create a do now for an information recall to bring it back into their short-term memory." These types of adjustments were routine features of Anya's pedagogical thinking. She identified that her instructional practices were not effectively meeting the students' needs and actively adapted and refined her teaching accordingly.

Anya articulated another specific example that brought together her pedagogical approach to the students and her evolving understanding of their academic levels. As a History teacher, Anya was particularly focused on getting students in the habit of supporting their claims with evidence from primary and secondary sources, whether during a class discussion or in support of their arguments in writing. The practice of citing evidence is in part necessitated by the writing requirements of the U.S. History Regents exam. However, developing the ability to find and implement citations became a skill of great importance to Anya to foster in her students. As a result, Anya would pivot during her planning process in order to be sure she was both modeling and intentionally including this focus on selecting the strongest evidence. When she described her lesson planning process and explained the thinking behind her selection of a primary or secondary source, Anya shared, "As I am doing my lesson plan, as I am looking through, I am like this sounds too vague, this information doesn't answer the question, or they wouldn't be able to use this evidence, let me change out the evidence." This illustrates Anya's active engagement in a process of self-reflection and critical evaluation of her lesson plan and materials to ensure that there is clarity for her students and an alignment to her learning goals.

Anya's choice to "change out the evidence" indicates a desire to seek out greater instructional results in anticipation of her students' needs.

Cole experienced frustration with unanticipated changes to the students enrolled in his Economics course. After they earned their required credit for graduation, many seniors' class schedules switched in order to reflect courses they needed for graduation or to accommodate their preferences among the limited available electives offered at Community Scholars Prep. Cole was under the impression his enrollment would remain relatively the same and was shocked that "at least half of the seniors who were in the class dropped it and over time more did as well." Even though he had successfully covered many aspects of financial literacy and personal finance, he noticed the need to modify his original plans to engage his senior students in the waning days of the school year. He admitted, "for a couple of days, I genuinely didn't know what to do, I was trying to come up with lesson plans, trying to come up with something." As he wrote in one of his Noteworthy Moments, he felt, "I was at a crossroads." Ultimately, he considered his students' perspective as they eagerly anticipated graduation. He decided to pivot from financial literacy to civics coursework to finish the year. He shared:

> I have been working with the seniors on what it means to be a citizen of their wider community as they become eligible to vote. Some students have already done so, others unsure about their future in regards to voting and an understanding of politics on the state and federal level. In doing so I built some shorter investigation and exploratory civics focused lesson plans.

Cole's decision to focus on Civics, a relevant and timely topic for seniors, reflects a flexible and solution-oriented approach to his pedagogical thinking. His choice to incorporate content that would captivate their interest while also equipping them with useful knowledge shows a

willingness to adapt and respond to the changing needs of his students. Cole's ability to pivot is demonstrated in his capacity to respond to a frustrating circumstance with a desire to create new and relevant content.

In summary, Anya adopted the ability to pivot almost immediately in her practice, illustrating that this feature of her pedagogical thinking was an integral part of her approach as an educator. Whereas Cole's decision to pivot was in response to unexpected challenges he faced that necessitated an alternative approach. In both instances, Cole and Anya trusted their intuition and assessment of student needs and demonstrated the capability to make changes and pivot to other courses of action.

Self-Efficacy

Over the last several decades, many researchers have explored teachers' experiences of self-efficacy. Bray-Clark & Bates (2003) offer an important distinction of self-efficacy as compared to universal concepts of self-esteem and confidence by indicating that, "[self-efficacy] is a task-specific belief that regulates choice, effort, and persistence in the face of obstacles and in concert with the emotional state of the individual" (p.14). People with a strong sense of self-efficacy believe that they can accomplish difficult tasks and see them as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided (Bandura, 1994). There is a correlation between instances when teachers experience high levels of self-efficacy and higher job satisfaction, positive emotions like pride and happiness, lower levels of burnout, increased motivation, and feelings of belonging (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Cole and Anya exhibited moments of self-efficacy, specifically as they discussed how they were *thinking* about their teaching, from the perspective of their students, the content, and their intended outcome of their instruction.

Anya radiated immense pride when she discussed her unique customizations to the U.S.

History curriculum and lesson plans. In addition to the time she took to create and modify thoughtful and deliberate activities and materials, Anya relished her incorporation of relevant examples and relatable cultural references into her content delivery. Anya added trendy memes or relatable animated images her students would recognize from their interactions with social media platforms. Depending on what she thought would engage her students, she added these images to help students to make connections, build context, or synthesize information. After showcasing a few examples, Anya reflected on how she wanted to use her experiences in conversation with colleagues to shape the curriculum or teaching practices of the History department. She expressed that as a beginning teacher, however, she felt she was not seen by her colleagues or administrators as a potentially strong contributor to curriculum design or capable of perceiving, analyzing, understanding, and responding to how the students are thinking and relating to the materials. From her perspective, Anya expressed:

> I really want to utilize the experience I have in this classroom because I feel like [beginning teachers] are not really seen the same [as veteran teachers]. Especially in terms of curriculum and how students are actually thinking, how they are relating to the material. I want to go a step up and help bring relevant classroom information, from 2020 and above. What we are basing the curriculum off of is a little outdated.

Anya's comment acknowledges a common challenge for beginning teachers: not being viewed or treated as equal to more experienced educators, particularly regarding curriculum development. For Anya, this recognition revealed an awareness of the implicit bias and structural barriers that possibly limited her professional autonomy and influence, yet it did not deter her. Instead, Anya framed this challenge as something she was excited to confront. Despite a perceived disregard for her contributions as a beginning teacher, Anya felt empowered by the challenge to change the

status quo. Her decision and motivation to update and modernize the curriculum indicated a belief in her ability to make a difference and improve the curriculum by making it more relevant to students' lived experiences. As a result, Anya exhibited a high degree of self-efficacy in her desire to influence other teachers, specifically those in the History department, despite being a beginning teacher, and believed her contributions offered important curricular changes to better serve the current student population.

Cole's moments of self-efficacy were indicated by a shift in how he perceived himself and his teaching practices. Cole remembered feeling a change in October that contributed to him feeling more confident and comfortable in the classroom. He recalled:

> Having practiced my slides, the first couple of weeks, I made my stuff. I knew what it said, oh wait, I misspelled that. But little things getting in the way, that stopped bothering me after a while.

Although a misspelled word on a slide presentation could be seen as a minor imperfection or mistake, as Cole relayed this detail, I could tell from his tone that this moment was an important development in Cole's self-efficacy. His diminished frustration with minor mistakes represented a growing belief in his ability to succeed despite the obstacles, challenges, or mishaps presented by the first year of teaching. Cole continued on to express:

> I am hard on myself… I always have room to improve and while there are things I am happy with such as my co-planning and my lesson plan, I still need to improve more of my classroom practices.

Cole's acknowledgement of his strengths as well as his perceived areas for improvement suggests a realistic self-assessment without feelings of discouragement, frustration or inability.

Instead, the nature of his reflective comment points to a desire to continue to learn and grow as an educator.

Summary

As described in this chapter, Anya and Cole's articulation of their shifting perspectives, choices, decisions, and actions throughout their first year serve to highlight the existence and evolution of their pedagogical thinking. Their evolving thought processes were captured in key areas: their awareness of mutual effects (how their actions impact students and vice versa), their active pursuit of resources, their ability to pivot in response to challenges and adapt their strategies to meet students' needs, and their developing sense of self-efficacy. The reflections and experiences Cole and Anya shared demonstrate that beginning teachers are actively engaging in the process of learning to teach as they refine and adapt their pedagogy, ultimately continuing to develop a deeper understanding of their own teaching practices over time. For instance, they may continue to reflect on the values they aim to express through their teaching, how certain practices reveal their strengths, and how their evolving methods are shaped by their attention to students' experiences.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how beginning teachers discuss their experiences and how they negotiate and construct their teaching practices. In this final chapter, I offer a discussion of the study, as well as possible implications of this study for school leadership, teacher education practices and future research. The discussion expands upon my findings using the conceptual framework grounding this study and the research questions guiding this work. Following a discussion of these implications for practice and research I also share a closing statement.

School Culture as a Context for Learning

The current educational and political climate impacting the school's culture at Community Scholars Prep was a fundamental component that framed Cole and Anya's experiences as beginning teachers. For example, the broader educational discourse on the post-pandemic learning gap which sparked the perception of a skills-based crisis added additional pressures to their process of learning to teach. These external forces, accompanied by the continual emphasis on high-stakes testing, ultimately had shaping and constraining effects on Cole and Anya's understanding of their role within the profession and the construction of their teaching practices. The underlying emphasis on addressing the perceived gaps in student learning, coupled with the school's standardized instructional goals, led Cole and Anya to a narrowed focus on measurable outcomes, (i.e. Regents exam scores), rather than fostering more holistic teaching approaches.

The prescriptive nature of a school's culture extended to professional development, where structured mandates had the potential to limit flexibility and creativity in Cole and Anya's

teaching. Since Cole and Anya entered the profession when Community Scholars Prep was focused on the implementation of the instructional drivers, their experiences were inevitably shaped by this emphasis. This mandated instructional focus displaced the opportunity for richer, more transformative discussions around Dr. Gholdy Mohammed's "five pursuits" (2020), which could have fostered more inclusive, culturally responsive teaching practices. Instead, Cole and Anya were often constrained by a professional development framework that prioritized compliance and standardization over innovation and responsive teaching strategies.

Despite these constraints, there were moments where Cole and Anya made reference to the excitement in having the opportunity and liberty to be creative with their curriculum design and lesson planning to incorporate innovative approaches in their teaching practices. Cole's freedom of curriculum design occurred primarily when he discussed planning for his 12th grade Economics course, which does not require a state standardized exam. There was a lightness that transpired in Anya's discussion of planning once students had successfully taken their U.S. History Regents exam. It became evident that the curricular autonomy they experienced was often limited by the overarching pressures to meet standardized expectations, which restricted the scope of their curriculum design and implementation. The tension between adhering to mandated frameworks and the desire for agency in teaching creates a delicate balance for beginning teachers like Cole and Anya, who must navigate these competing demands as they seek to develop their own pedagogical identities.

As a result, school culture serves as a significant context for learning, influencing both the shaping and constraining effects on educational practices and has the potential to create miseducative experiences, even amidst well-intentioned efforts to construct supportive frameworks and nurturing environments for beginning teachers. Ultimately, the complexities of

Cole and Anya's experiences were embedded within the larger school context which, because of the external pressures given the particulars of the American educational system, placed them within potentially reductive parameters to learn to teach. The dynamics of a school's culture not only influence how beginning teachers approach curriculum and pedagogy, but also shape their sense of agency, professional identity, and growth within the field. The complexities of the school culture as a context for learning highlight the need for experiences that transcend a narrow focus on skills and high stakes testing that actively challenge and reject the reductive educational frameworks surrounding beginning teachers.

Reframing Beginning Teacher Learning as Continuous and Dynamic

Cole and Anya's experiences underscore the necessity of viewing the journey of learning to teach not as a simple, linear progression, but as an ongoing, dynamic process shaped by a variety of factors that interact in complex ways. Anya and Cole's teaching practices were not predetermined or fixed; rather, they were shaped and reshaped as they drew on different contextual elements. For example, throughout their first year they leaned into aspects of their personal histories or referred back to their own educational experiences to guide their learning process and decision-making around their teaching practices. At various moments, they turned to co-teachers, colleagues and administrators for guidance, support, and feedback on their curriculum design and implementation of school-wide norms and instructional routines. Cole and Anya were also able to negotiate institutional expectations, particularly with school and district level directives, and align them with their own understanding of what constitutes good teaching. All of Anya and Cole's simultaneous exchanges and encounters suggested that teacher learning is an interconnected web of continuous and dynamic interactions that informed, and reformed, Cole and Anya's teaching practices.

The framing of the teaching and learning process as linear and straightforward has contributed to an educational climate that focuses on teacher accountability measures and heightened attention on standardized testing. As a result, this emphasis often oversimplifies the complexities of education, disregarding the dynamic, interactive nature of learning to teach. This reductive understanding of teacher learning, which informs many teacher preparation programs, professional development initiatives, and teacher assessment models, "ignores the confluence of variables that shape teaching practice… and thus fails to account for the complexity of the numerous processes occurring as teachers transition into their first-year of teaching" (Strom & Martin, 2022, p.2). Instead, the endeavor of learning to teach needs to be reframed as a dynamic and continuous process that involves the negotiation of a complex system with a multitude of interacting elements as beginning teachers develop their pedagogical practices.

Construction of Pedagogical Practices as Iterative

Anya and Cole's discussion of their first year, particularly in the construction of their pedagogical practices, reflected Dewey's conception of experience. For both of them, whether a moment was educative or miseducative, it affected or influenced future experiences (Dewey, 1938), including their choices, decisions, and courses of actions. The construction of Cole and Anya's pedagogical practices were shaped by a series of multifaceted interactions and encounters that collectively influenced their development as educators. These interactions encompassed a wide range of influences, both internal and external, that intersected and evolved over time. From the outset, Anya and Cole were not only confronted with the practical demands of managing a classroom and delivering content, but also with the need to reconcile their personal teaching beliefs with the expectations dictated by the school environment, curriculum guidelines, and larger educational policies. Each encounter, whether with students, peers, mentors, or

institutional expectations, contributed to a new layer of understanding that shaped and reshaped their pedagogical decisions. For example, Anya leveraged interactions with colleagues, including her co-teacher, mentor and instructional coach to incorporate skill instruction into her teaching methods or build more structured approaches and routines to student learning. On the other hand, the absence of a co-teaching relationship for Cole motivated him to seek out other professional relationships within the school, specifically connecting with his mentor more frequently, in an effort to attempt to replicate the often inherent collaborative support from a co-teacher. In this sense, Anya and Cole were not passive recipients of pedagogical knowledge, but active agents in the ongoing construction of their professional identities. This complex interplay of influences indicates the need for a recognition of the multifaceted and iterative nature of beginning teachers' construction of their pedagogical practices.

Agentive Pedagogical Thinkers

Anya and Cole, as pedagogical agents, engaged in pedagogical thinking as they navigated the complex process of learning to teach. Unlike experienced educators, whose pedagogical practices may seem more instinctual or refined, Anya and Cole actively constructed their teaching personas and practices through ongoing reflection, decision-making, and adaptation. Anya and Cole were not simply executing prescribed methods or following routines; they were making thoughtful, deliberate choices based on their evolving understanding of their students, their content, and their broader school context.

As Anya and Cole worked through the complexities of a classroom, lesson planning, student engagement, and other professional demands, they learned to pivot when things did not go as planned. Their adaptability reflects a critical part of their pedagogical thinking, recognizing that teaching is not a static process but one that requires constant re-evaluation and

responsiveness. Anya and Cole's ability to learn from mistakes, revise approaches, and continue to improve was a fundamental component of their development as pedagogical agents. By actively engaging in pedagogical thinking, Anya and Cole were not simply following a set path; they were shaping their own practices, learning from their experiences, and contributing to the ongoing evolution of their teaching selves.

Implications

Cole and Anya are currently in their third year of teaching at Community Scholars Prep. At the start of the 2024-2025 academic year, Anya began the pursuit of a Master's degree in Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). When our paths cross, they continue to eagerly share noteworthy moments with me, most notably highlights from their teaching practices or their students' successes, and on occasion a frustration or challenge they are working through. The fact that not only have they remained in the profession, but have decided to continue at Community Scholars Prep for the foreseeable future, indicates there is much to learn from their experiences about the complex, dynamic, and multifaceted interactions constituting the experiences of beginning teachers.

Implications for School Leadership

Anya's and Cole's experiences suggest that, while well-intentioned, standardized professional development programs may not address the unique challenges beginning teachers face in their classrooms. School leadership has the potential to play a significant role in shaping the interactions and encounters beginning teachers are exposed to as they enter the profession, particularly through the design and implementation of school-based professional development (PD) initiatives and how beginning teachers are integrated into the school community. In many schools, professional development opportunities act as a mechanism of conformity and overlook

the possibility of beginning teachers seeking out learning opportunities that support their own desires and needs. School leadership design PD opportunities with the aim of ensuring all staff align with school-wide expectations or district level mandates, but this approach can inadvertently ignore the diverse needs of beginning teachers. Beginning teachers may feel that standardized PD programs, while well-intentioned, do not address the unique challenges they face in the classroom. Instead of fostering a sense of professional growth, these initiatives can hinder teachers from addressing their own problems of practice or engaging in learning that aligns with their own professional goals. A more supportive approach would involve offering differentiated learning opportunities, such as choice-based workshops or collaborative professional learning communities focused on a particular topic or issue, where beginning teachers have the autonomy to select or shape their development according to their needs.

Beginning teachers often bring creative ideas, diverse perspectives, and innovative approaches to teaching, yet their voices can go unnoticed or underutilized if school leadership does not actively engage them. Instead of viewing them solely as novices to be trained, school administration should create spaces where beginning teachers can share their insights and contribute to school-wide initiatives. As a result, school leaders are potentially failing to notice the contributions and unique perspectives beginning teachers have to offer the school's learning community. In some cases, school systems and leaders either cultivate the needs of beginning teachers, fostering an environment of support and growth, or ignore those needs, creating an environment where they feel isolated and unsupported. When school leaders ignore the needs of new teachers, it can lead to high turnover rates and contribute to teacher burnout. To prevent this, leaders must actively listen to beginning teachers, offer mentorship and feedback, and create a culture where new educators feel included, valued, and empowered to contribute their ideas. By

investing in beginning teachers' growth and recognizing their contributions, school leaders can foster an environment that supports collaborative learning and teacher retention.

Implications for Teacher Education

Pre-service teacher education programs should continue to frame the process of learning to teach as inherently non-linear and offer learning opportunities that reflect this complexity. The process of learning to teach is rarely a straightforward, step-by-step process; rather, it involves constant adaptation, reflection, and growth as beginning teachers encounter new challenges, successes, and setbacks upon entering the profession. The transition from student teacher to beginning teacher involves a continuous process of adjusting, reflecting, and refining one's teaching practices. The induction period should be considered a part of the continuum of teacher learning that allows for further growth and development for beginning teachers in response to the dynamic demands of their professional context. In this regard, Hammerness et al. (2005) argue that:

> The vision for future teachers must involve efforts to help them see that being a professional involves not simply 'knowing the answers' but also having the skills and will to work with others in evaluating their own performances and searching for new answers when needed, both at the classroom level and the school level (p. 365).

Embracing this non-linearity in teacher preparation programs encourages new educators to develop a sense of radical acceptance, resilience, flexibility, and a deeper understanding of their practice. The opportunity for teachers entering into the profession to connect their learning to actual contextual settings, "can help teachers develop critical consciousness toward their teaching and student interactions" (Strom & Martin, 2022, p. 9).

As Anya and Cole's experiences revealed, beginning teacher experiences involved fluctuating levels of confidence, moments of self-doubt, and continuous adjustment rather than a predictable or linear progression. Revisiting Moir's (1999) depiction of the first-year teacher experience provides another layer of analysis by highlighting the complexity and non-linearity of Anya and Cole's transition into the profession. While Moir presents a helpful framework for understanding the stages of early career teaching, it can be useful to complicate or expand on her model by acknowledging that the first year of teaching is not a simple progression from "survival" to "mastery." Instead, beginning teachers may oscillate between periods of confidence and self-doubt, encountering setbacks and breakthroughs in unpredictable ways. By recognizing this non-linearity, teacher preparation programs and induction structures can better support beginning teachers, recognizing that their development as educators will involve multiple cycles and iterations. By framing teaching as a process of continuous learning rather than a linear path, future educators can be better equipped to handle the challenges they face, both in the classroom and in their broader professional journeys.

Implications for Research

The findings of this study highlight the need for additional research related to beginning teacher experiences in several key areas. First, future research could explore the types of resources teachers are increasingly relying on to enhance classroom practices or address evolving educational challenges. Social media platforms, like Facebook, which became especially vital during the pandemic, may provide valuable insights into how teachers collaborate, share strategies, and support one another. As Friedrich and Shanahan (2024) concluded, teachers "work within online communities to locate resources, offer advice, and share expertise" (p. 18). Their findings underscored how "practicing teachers are already decentering traditional sources

of knowledge as the sole site of expertise and valid perspectives, by engaging in practices of collective knowledge production and solidarity to face problems that cross geographic locations, identity categories, and seniority" (p.19). These insights reveal a shift in how teachers are accessing professional knowledge and support, highlighting the need for further exploration into the evolving role of digital platforms on teacher learning. As a result, future research could examine the impact of digital communities on beginning teacher professional development and could deepen our understanding of how teachers utilize a wide range of forums to inform and construct their teaching practices to adapt to their teaching contexts.

Another promising area for future research is examining the longitudinal progression of teacher learning, from preservice to inservice teaching. While many researchers and teacher educators have long emphasized the need for studies tracking this developmental trajectory (Mensah, 2019), additional research is still needed. Exploring how beginning teachers draw upon their initial preparation over the course of their careers could shed light on the lasting impact of teacher education programs and the evolving nature of teaching expertise.

This research study draws attention to the need for further research on the concept of radical acceptance and its practical applications within diverse educational settings. For example, future studies that investigate the incorporation of radical acceptance within the context of teacher education and professional development practices could suggest the need for a transformative shift in how teachers are prepared, supported, and understood within the educational system. Research could also explore the long-term impacts of asset-based models that validate teachers' existing skills and experiences while supporting their continuous growth. Future research could explore how radical acceptance might be woven into the development of teachers' reflective and critical pedagogical practices.

Lastly, it should be noted that throughout all of these lines of future research, there remains a need to prioritize and amplify diverse voices of beginning teachers. Particularly, to better understand how their process of learning to teach is shaped by race and culture and the ways teachers of color navigate their professional contexts. By centering these voices, future research can contribute to more equitable and inclusive approaches where the knowledge and experiences of teachers of color can inform the practices and policies of teacher preparation programs, systems of induction, and professional development.

A Final Note

The concept of a "novice" teacher should be reframed to recognize the unique contributions that beginning teachers bring to the field of education. Rather than viewing beginning teachers solely through the lens of inexperience, they should be acknowledged for their fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and enthusiasm they offer to their school communities and the broader educational landscape. As seen in this study, Cole and Anya *were thinking* all along which further proves that schools should treasure and respect beginning teachers as *thinkers*. They have the capacity to approach challenges with creativity and openness, and it is evident that their ability to adapt and think critically can enhance the teaching profession. By valuing their insights and fostering their growth, opportunities can be created for them to actively shape and improve educational practices, transforming their role into one of dynamic collaboration and meaningful contribution.

Moreover, by embracing the idea that beginning teachers can be agents of change, the narrative of beginning teachers can be shifted from one of deficit to one of potential. Beginning teachers are often seen as lacking experience, knowledge, and skill, which leads to an emphasis on filling in the gaps. This perspective tends to focus on what new teachers *don't* know, rather

than on what they *bring* to the profession. Rather than focusing on what needs to be "fixed", an asset-based approach builds on the existing strengths of new teachers, allowing them to flourish professionally and become active participants in shaping educational practices. Supporting beginning teachers during the induction period through the promotion of a collaborative culture of professional development creates an environment where their unique voices are not just heard but are integral to their school community. This approach also challenges the traditional, hierarchical model of education, recognizing that experienced educators and beginning teachers alike can learn from each other in reciprocal, mutually enriching ways. In doing so, the next generation of teachers is not only prepared to face the challenges of the classroom but is inspired to shape the future of education.

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APPENDIX A:
TEACHER DIALOGUE PROTOCOL #1

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to understand beginning teacher experiences during the induction period, specifically how they negotiate contextual interactions and encounters in order to construct teaching practices. As a colleague, working alongside you (even though we are not in the same department) I value the perspectives and insights you bring to the school community.

While I cannot guarantee your anonymity, I can say that the content of our conversation will be strictly confidential and I will do my best to protect your privacy. At various points throughout this study, I would like to provide you with excerpts of our conversations for you to read to ensure your voice and experiences are accurately represented. This conversation will last about 45-60 minutes, but your participation is voluntary so you may stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions about this? Would you like to continue with today's conversation?

Do you still give your consent for me to record this interview? One more question before we begin—would you like to choose your pseudonym for this study? (if so, get a pseudonym). Okay, let's get started.

[The questions listed below suggest general lines of inquiry, however, depending on the emergent issues or concerns raised by the beginning teacher, the order and use of these questions may vary.]

- Tell me a little about yourself---where are you from?
- How did you decide to go into teaching?
- People come to teaching by different pathways. What is your pathway? What type of teacher preparation have you had?
    - How did you come to teach at this school?
- What are your hopes, dreams, desires or visions for the upcoming school year?
- Based on the interactions you've had in the hiring and onboarding processes, how would you describe your school—the people and programs—to someone who doesn't know it?
- Can you describe the types of support you've received as a new teacher, within either the school or the district?
    - Do you have a mentor?
    - Is the support that you have received so far what you needed?
- Is there anything that is at the front of your mind or on your heart that you haven't mentioned yet?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me. Before we go, do you have any questions?

APPENDIX B:
TEACHER DIALOGUE PROTOCOL #2

Thank you again for continuing to participate in this study. It's hard to believe that it's been a few months since our last conversation. As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to understand beginning teacher experiences during the induction period, specifically how they negotiate contextual interactions and encounters in order to construct teaching practices. Today's conversation will last about 45-60 minutes, but your participation is voluntary so you may stop the interview at any time.

Do I still have permission to record today's conversation?

[Similar to the first teacher dialogue, the questions below suggest general lines of inquiry, however, depending on the emergent issues or concerns raised by the beginning teacher, the order and use of these questions may vary.]

- How is the school year going so far?
- Has teaching been what you expected? Why? Why not?
- What is it like to teach here? What do you like about teaching at this school? Are there things that you dislike?
- Can you tell me about moments when you've felt encouraged and supported? What about moments when you've felt isolated and discouraged?
- Is the way that you interact with other teachers helpful to you as a new teacher?
    - What group of teachers do you work with most? Other beginning teachers? Veterans? Or a mix?
- I am interested in the contact that you have with administrators and other teachers on a regular basis, both formal and informal.
    - Can you tell me how often you talk with the administrators, in what kinds of situations, and what you talk about?
    - Can you tell me how often you talk with other teachers, in what kinds of situations, and what you talk about?
    - Do you watch other teachers teach?
    - Do other teachers watch you teach?
- Is what you just described typical of other teachers in this school?
    - How would you characterize the way they work together?
- Do you have a curriculum that you are expected to follow?
    - *If yes*-
        - What kinds of things does it specify (general goals, specific topics, specific lessons, how to use time)?
        - In your view, is it a good curriculum? Why? Do you like using it? Does it work well for your students?
        - Does anyone check to see that you're following the curriculum?
        - Some people think that their curriculum provides too little freedom, and some think that their curriculum provides too little structure. What do you think?
    - *If no*:

        - How do you decide what to teach and how to teach?
        - In your view, does this process of deciding what to teach and how to teach it work well for you? Do you think this works well for your students?
        - Does anyone monitor what you're teaching?
        - Some people think that their curriculum provides too little freedom and some think that their curriculum provides too little structure. What do you think?
- Do you feel sufficiently prepared to teach in the way that you're expected to teach here?
    - Where do you go for information or advice?
- Describe a recent moment in your classroom that stands out to you.
- How would you describe the school's "culture" or "environment"?
- Is there anything that is at the front of your mind or on your heart that you haven't mentioned yet?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me. Before we go, do you have any questions?

APPENDIX C:
TEACHER DIALOGUE PROTOCOL #3

Thank you again for continuing to participate in this study. It's hard to believe that we are nearing the end of the school year and that you are almost finished with your first year of teaching. As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to understand beginning teacher experiences during the induction period, specifically how they negotiate contextual interactions and encounters in order to construct teaching practices. Today's conversation will last about 45-60 minutes, but your participation is voluntary so you may stop the interview at any time.

Do I still have permission to record today's conversation?

[Similar to the previous teacher dialogue, the questions below suggest general lines of inquiry, however, depending on the emergent issues or concerns raised by the beginning teacher, the order and use of these questions may vary.]

- How are you feeling about the way this year has gone?
- In our last conversation you mentioned feeling _____, are those feelings still present now?
- In our last conversation you mentioned moments of support and encouragement, have you had other moments like that?
- You also mentioned moments of feeling isolated and discouraged, have you had other moments like that since we last spoke?
- What are some interactions and encounters you've had with colleagues or administrators that have been useful to you? How so?
- What are some ways that you wish you could have been supported that you were not?
- We spoke about designing and developing curriculum in our last conversation, how do you feel about your teaching practices this year?
- Describe a recent moment in your classroom that stands out to you.
- You described the school's "culture" or "environment" as _____, now that you've taught for a year does that description still align with your experiences?
- Is there anything that is at the front of your mind or on your heart that you haven't mentioned yet?

To capture today's conversation and your teaching experiences, I'd love it if you could engage in the process of reflection mapping. This is a visual representation of influential moments, interactions, or encounters within the school environment. These could be key relationships (students, administrators, colleagues, mentors, or teacher educators), supports or constraints (resources, activities, or systems), critical incidents (dilemmas, tensions, successes, or challenges), or any other contextual factors you feel are significant. You are welcome to draw or document in some way your experiences and feelings about the year as a whole.

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me. Before we go, do you have any questions?

APPENDIX D:
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #1

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to understand beginning teacher experiences during the induction period, specifically how they negotiate contextual interactions and encounters in order to construct teaching practices. As a colleague, working alongside each of you (even though we are not in the same department) I value the perspectives and insights you bring to the school community.

While I cannot guarantee your anonymity, I can say that the content of this conversation will remain confidential. I'd ask that each of you keep all comments made during this focus group session confidential and not discuss what happened today outside the meeting. This conversation will last about 45-60 minutes, but your participation is voluntary so you may leave the session at any time should you wish. Do you have any questions about this? Would you like to continue with today's conversation?

Okay, let's get started. Is it ok to begin recording?

[The questions listed below suggest general lines of inquiry, however, depending on the emergent issues or concerns raised by one of the beginning teachers or the group as a whole, the order and use of these questions may vary.]

- Compare your expectations entering the school year with your experiences from the past few weeks.
- Tell me about a productive conversation with a member of the school community around teaching?
    - What made it productive?
    - How did this impact the subsequent conversations? Did you return to that person for more guidance and/or information?
    - Did you feel heard in that conversation? Why or why not?
- Tell me about an unproductive conversation with a member of the school community around teaching?
    - What made it unproductive?
    - How did this impact the subsequent conversations and/or the relationship with that person?
    - Did you feel heard in that conversation? Why or why not?
- Describe a success that you've experienced during the first few months of the year.
    - Did you, at any point, share your success with other colleagues? How did you choose that person or group to share with?
- Describe a time when you had questions or felt unsure about your teaching during the first few months of the year.
    - Did you feel comfortable approaching someone with your question? How did you choose that person as your go to?

- Are there any pressing issues or topics of discussion that have not been addressed yet in our conversation that you think would be important to raise in conversation now?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me. Before we go, do you have any questions?

APPENDIX E:
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #2

Thank you again for continuing to participate in this study. It's hard to believe that it's been a few months since our last group conversation. As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to understand beginning teacher experiences during the induction period, specifically how they negotiate contextual interactions and encounters in order to construct teaching practices. Today's conversation will last about 45-60 minutes, but your participation is voluntary so you may stop the interview at any time.

Do I still have permission to record today's conversation?

[Similar to the first focus group interview, the questions below suggest general lines of inquiry, however, depending on the emergent issues or concerns raised by one of the beginning teachers or the group, the order and use of these questions may vary.]

- As the year has unfolded, do you feel your voice has been heard more in small team settings, for example within the weekly team meetings or among co-teachers and colleagues?
- Can you describe an example of when a recommendation or idea you shared was accepted or implemented?
- Can you describe an example of when a recommendation or idea you shared was rejected or ignored?
- Which of the following conversations or interactions did you find most helpful in supporting your teaching practices? Is there a specific moment that you remember that you can share from the conversation?
    - Grade team meeting, Department team meeting, Mentor conversations, Administration observation debrief, All staff meetings or other professional development opportunities or graduate school classes
- Which of the following conversations or interactions did you find least helpful in supporting your teaching practices? What about the experience was unhelpful?
    - Grade team meeting, Department team meeting, Mentor conversations, Administration observation debrief, All staff meetings or other professional development opportunities or graduate school classes
- Are there any pressing issues or topics of discussion that have not been addressed yet in our conversation that you think would be important to raise in conversation now?
- Do you have any questions about this research project?
- Would it be OK to bring to you any follow-up questions that may come up?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me.

APPENDIX F:
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL #3

Thank you again for continuing to participate in this study. It's hard to believe that we are nearing the end of the school year and that you all are almost finished with your first year of teaching. As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to understand beginning teacher experiences during the induction period, specifically how they negotiate contextual interactions and encounters in order to construct teaching practices. Today's conversation will last about 45-60 minutes, but your participation is voluntary so you may stop the interview at any time.

Do I still have permission to record today's conversation?

[Similar to the previous focus group interviews, the questions below suggest general lines of inquiry, however, depending on the emergent issues or concerns raised by one of the beginning teachers or the group, the order and use of these questions may vary.]

- Compare your expectations entering the school year with how you view teaching at this moment.
- Think back to your hopes, desires, and intentions from the beginning of the year, how would you evaluate those after completing your first year?
- Is there a specific example, or two, when you participated in or were present during a conversation about instructional practices or curriculum implementation where you either felt welcomed to share your experiences or you didn't feel like your contributions were welcomed?
    - *If so,* why do you feel like you were uniquely positioned to share your insights?
    - What might have contributed to your comfort? Is it related to your established relationships with other colleagues, or prior experiences, etc.?
    - *If not*, why weren't your contributions welcomed?
    - Did you feel shut down? If so, how were you shut down?
    - What would you have added in that moment that would have contributed to and possibly made the pedagogical conversation better?
- Are there any pressing issues or topics of discussion that have not been addressed yet in our conversation that you think would be important to raise in conversation now?
- Do you have any questions about this research project?
- Would it be OK to bring to you any follow-up questions that may come up?

Thank you again for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with me.

APPENDIX G:
WEEKLY NOTEWORTHY MOMENTS PROMPTS

"Noteworthy moments" are any moments, incidents, occasions, etc., occurring over the course of a week, that have captured your attention. Such moments may have been internal (for example, an insight or a feeling you had but did not necessarily communicate), or external (for example, an interaction with a student or colleague), or, of course, both. The moment may be one about which you feel positive or negative (or both or neither…). As "moment" suggests, it may have been quite brief, and not necessarily dramatic. And, to be sure, a "noteworthy moment" *could* be something big, obviously important, and so forth.

For this part of the research project, I ask that you take a few minutes each week to cast your mind back over the week, see what comes up as "noteworthy," and make a brief record (see below) of one such "moment." To be clear, I am interested here both in the large and clearly important incidents, but also in the smaller thoughts, feelings, interactions, and so forth, that might easily be soon forgotten in the busy-ness of life, and yet are part of the texture or fabric, if you will, of your experience as a teacher this year.

Your record might take any number of forms: A brief, journal-like notation; a sticky or virtual sticky note attached to an artifact; a voice memo; a drawing, sketch, or map; a photo; an email. Doubtless there are other possibilities. Perhaps we will experiment with some kind of simple survey. In any case, I do not ask you to spend a lot of time on your record: My hope is that the record itself will serve to jog your memory at a future date.

Here are some *examples* of kinds of moments:

1. An “ah-ha” moment of yours (regarding your “moves,” decisions, etc., as a teacher) (regarding a student’s thinking) (regarding a colleague’s behavior) (regarding a school custom, norm, or procedure) (and/or, *any* aspect of your work and your life as a teacher).

2. A moment of frustration.

3. A moment of satisfaction or pride.

4. A puzzling experience or observation.

5. Something surprising.

6. Something funny.

7. Something disturbing or unsettling, perhaps angering.

8. A decision you made (or one you are considering).

9. A risk you took, or thought of taking.

10. A throwing up your hands moment.

11. Something beautiful.

12. Something you learned this week--about teaching, about yourself, about a student, about something you are teaching, etc.

As for kinds of *records*:

A. An *oral* or *written* record (voice memo, journal entry, email, etc.) could work for any of the above.

B. In some cases, an *annotated artifact* might work well. For example:

A lesson plan,

A piece of student work,

A memo from an administrator,

A page from, screen shot of, or scan of, your weekly planner or schedule or similar document--

Might do well as an emblem or reminder of something satisfying, frustrating, beautiful, etc.

In any use of an artifact, a brief annotation--what, when, why do I remember or want to remember this?--will be helpful.

C. You may sometimes feel that a sketch, a drawing, a map, or a photograph would be a good way to capture a "noteworthy moment." (Again, a brief annotation is advised.)

As a reminder: If I use any of your "noteworthy moment" records in my study, real names and identifying material will be masked or replaced with pseudonyms. Similarly, if I were to make use of any photograph you took, any images of students or others would be rendered anonymous.