



## **Relational Identity Making on the Professional Landscape as a Substitute Teacher: Interruptions and Continuities**

**By Lynnette M. Driedger-Enns**

### **Introducing the Research Puzzle**

This article, which comes out of a research project exploring teaching as intellectual work,<sup>1</sup> focuses specifically on a young woman who worked as a substitute teacher after she graduated from a two-year teacher education program at her local university. For Penny, substitute teaching was an interruption as she shaped a professional life moving toward a full time permanent contract in a western Canadian urban school division. Although she yearned for a permanent contract, Penny's many experiences as a substitute teacher helped her learn what she wanted and what she did not want in her identity as a professional.

One place where the intellectual work of teachers can be studied is in the moment where teachers' and children's lives interact as they meet in schools. This interaction can be understood as curriculum making, a concept that has grown out of the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1992), who believe that curriculum "might be viewed as an account of teachers' and children's lives together in schools and classrooms...in which teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction" (p. 392). Lives are shaped in and out of schools. Children and teachers

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bring their lived experiences outside school into the classroom where their lives meet, along with situations of subject matter, where they inquire into and negotiate learning together. This view of lives together in a classroom shapes their “vision of curriculum as a course of life” (p.393). Understanding curriculum making as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together opens a place for researchers and educators to focus on teachers’ integral role amidst a negotiated experience with others. In this view of curriculum making, the children’s curriculum influences a teacher’s identity. In other words, the children around a teacher shape her or his professional identity.

Understanding identity as a narrative term implies identity as always in the making. A narrative term for identity is “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Relational identity making in this article refers to the stories that a teacher composed about who she was in relation to the children she met in classrooms. Each person, including the teacher, brought stories into their curriculum making space from their lives outside the classroom, which intersected with the stories of others in that place.

The spaces of curriculum making, where children’s and teachers’ lives in motion met (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011), held complex layers of identity making because each individual contributed to the negotiation of learning together. This article focuses on a particular teacher named Penny.<sup>2</sup> Exploring her stories to live by on the professional knowledge landscape, furthers understanding of how her experience was shaped, but also

. . . develop[s] understandings of children as developing and living out their own shifting and multiple stories to live by, stories shaped by their knowledge and context. In this view we draw attention to the narrative life compositions of children, a view that allows us to see children as shaped by, and shaping their contexts. (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 314)

This notion of children shaping their own contexts illuminated the way children shape a beginning teacher’s story to live by. The children Penny taught were significant in her identity making experience.

Wonders about curriculum making and identity making as intellectual work shape this article and make central the role of personal practical knowledge. Personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) refers to knowledge that is influenced in part by the sociality of the personal out-of-school-life and professional in-school-life. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe personal practical knowledge as “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (p. 7). Personal practical knowledge is “imbued with all the experiences that make up a person’s being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of a person’s experiential history, both professional and personal” (Clandinin, 1985, p. 362). Attending to both aspects of personal practical

knowledge, the personal and the professional, provides an understanding of how a beginning teacher begins a professional life. What Penny experienced in her personal life influenced what she experienced as a teacher in her classroom. She was engaged as a whole person in the midst of making a life. In this way early career teachers can be viewed “as more than trends and tendencies, more than graduates from particular programs and more than just beginning teachers” (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011, p. 277). Penny experienced tension as her story to live by emerged in the trends and tendencies of school places. Her knowledge from family places, university places, and in places in between bumped against the dominant narrative of schools that shaped her substitute teaching.

Dominant narrative refers to the story of schools that is “unfolding across western Canada into the experiences of children, families, and teachers in an era of growing standardization and achievement testing at a time when the lives of children, families, and teachers are increasingly diverse” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 1). Penny stepped into this professional milieu as a substitute teacher. She wanted to create a classroom as a place of inquiry rather than of workbook pages, where children with diverse physical, intellectual, social, and emotional abilities gathered, rather than places that separated children into special ability groupings with resource room teachers. She accepted the dominant narrative of standardization and achievement testing as part of her role as teacher, yet it was not a story to live by in her own identity making as a beginning teacher. Rather, the prevailing story to live by for her as a teacher was about interactions between people in a school classroom where each come to school with lives outside the classroom that have shaped them through experience over time. Knowing her students as whole people and co-composing classroom community based on relationship was a significant story in her philosophy.

Like her students, Penny also came to the classroom with knowledge derived from experiences outside school. These personal and practical stories sometimes became counter to plotlines in schools. When personal and practical stories collide with the dominant narrative of school, when they collide with the narratives of others, and with the narratives of the self, an individual’s story is interrupted. I have foregrounded these moments of collision in Penny’s life as a substitute teacher to understand how these experiences shaped an early career teacher’s identity making.

First in this article I have described a narrative account of Penny to offer a glimpse into her personal and professional identity making shaped by University and personal experiences outside school. Next, I turn to one moment of curriculum making where she negotiated a curriculum of diverse lives, which takes us into her lived experience as a substitute teacher. Exploring this moment highlights her ways of making sense of who she was in a particular experience that carried tension for her. Then, I use word images to show how others around her—students, other teachers, and educational assistants—were influential in shaping her unfolding identity as a teacher. Drawing on these narratives, I have underscored a sense of

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the complexity in moments where lives meet, and also raised questions about the experiences of substitute teachers in such moments.

### **Introducing Penny**

After graduating from the Faculty of Education in the top academic ten per cent of her class, Penny Gladwell hoped to obtain a fulltime, permanent contract in the prairie city where she had completed her degree. She wanted to be hired only in this particular city and expected to have fulltime, permanent work within the first few months of graduation as part of her continuing story of success. However, this did not happen. Her story of success was interrupted as she worked as a substitute teacher for two years after receiving her teaching certificate. For Penny, this interruption was not 'educative' (Dewey, 1938:1997) and she felt frozen in a blurred space between her identity as student and identity as teacher.

As Penny negotiated her first years as a substitute teacher, she drew on her personal community to tell tension-filled stories and ask questions of her experiences at schools. Which table to sit at in the staffroom for lunch? How to write a resume? If I quit my second job, will I be able to pay for rent and groceries?

After two years of subbing, she mourned an identity she had not yet been able to live. She said she was not a real teacher yet because she had not had a class of her own. Yet she clung to her single story of what a real teacher was and set a deadline for obtaining the elusive continuing contract. From the midst of her life making an identity as a teacher, stories of staying and leaving competed. She decided that if she did not have a fulltime, permanent contract within the year she would leave teaching to look for another career path.

### ***Exploring a Moment of Relational Identity Making in Curriculum***

Our research conversations took place once a week over a period of two years. I collected conversation transcripts, field notes, artifacts, and portfolio documents that I analyzed to understand Penny's experience. Reading through the field texts, threads of identity making became visible. I chose the following moment for this research text because it was filled with tension between diverse lives that met in a classroom. This moment, with Penny as a beginning substitute teacher, with students who claimed a regular teacher, along with subject matter and milieu in dynamic interaction, offers a situation to explore the complexity of negotiating a curriculum of lives on the current professional landscape. In this transcript Penny is speaking in first person and the 'I' refers to Penny.

I was requested to teach the remedial math and things like that and I didn't have any E.A. support for most of it. Some of [the students] aren't designated but they should be. They were kind of mean. Just difficult kids. [It seemed there was an accepted] higher tolerance for misbehavior [in their classroom]. A lot of things fly by because teachers have to pick their battles. There is a little boy who is just

really hard. And I talked to his teacher from last year and she said, “Oh I hated him. Defiant and rude. Won’t be quiet. If I am trying to talk he is talking over me constantly. Saying rude things to other kids.”

One morning [when I was subbing] he came in saying rude things and I wrote his name on the board. He was the first one [to come into the classroom] that day. He was saying “this is bullshit.” So I said “you have to go to the principal’s office.” And he said “you are racist” and ran out of the classroom. And I was just, that was the hundredth thing, you are just a difficult kid sometimes. Then I had those same kids the next day and taught them art and gym and it was wonderful. [It was a] totally different atmosphere. It’s just so often I feel like I’m being mean all day. I don’t like that. I don’t want to be that. But you are kind of forced to be that. It was kind of wow, all I’ve done all day is “Be quiet. Sit down. Open your book. Blah, blah, blah.” Just naggy all day. I think it just got to me. Cause I’m working so hard and trying so hard I just want a contract so that I can go in [to my own classroom] everyday and be really in this. Right now I feel like I put on a kind of a façade and its emotionally draining when kids are mean to you. I don’t go in there to be mean and make their life difficult. I want to make a positive difference. (Research conversation January 17, 2011)

This moment raises questions about how children and teachers negotiate an experience filled with tension in relationship with each other. The lives of children, their substitute teacher, their classroom teacher (although she is absent), an educational assistant, other teachers, in a specific situation, in a particular milieu, meet in this particular moment of curriculum making.

Unpacking this moment, while attending to tension and uncertainty that happens in curriculum making, helps me understand the complexities of a particular substitute teacher’s experience. Math was the mandated subject matter in which lives met on the first day, and visual art and physical education were the focus the second day. Math was taught with students seated in their desks, working independently from a textbook, while visual art and physical education were inquiry processes involving collaborative participation in physically engaged ways. Penny saw it as her duty to sustain the mandated curriculum that the regular teacher had left as best she could, although she longed to open a space for inquiry in which children could explore, in ways she had learned at the University and in her internship.

In both the living and telling of the moment, the tension is evident. The first tension emerged around the teacher who had taught the boy the year before whom she “hated” because of his behaviors of defiance and rudeness. This comment bumped violently with Penny’s belief that as a teacher unconditional positive regard was sustained through ethical commitment to a professional identity as teacher. When she felt herself moving away from a “loving perception” (Lugones, 1987) in her response to children, she experienced tension and made sense of this feeling as not being her story to live by. It was the story that was being lived but it was not the story she told of herself. Although she felt tension about how that plotline was positioning children, when the previous year’s teacher was unable to hold the

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student in a space of positive regard, Penny's own responses were abrupt and she didn't know how to shift the boy's behavior in any other way except to send him to the administrator. Each day felt like the first day of school for her as she set her boundaries and groundwork for curriculum making in relationship—curriculum making as a “dynamic interaction among persons, things and processes” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 7).

Penny expended enormous effort on a daily basis to develop respectful relationships with new groups of children to shape an open space for curiosity and creativity. The second day, when the subject matters were visual art and physical education, both the children and Penny experienced a day together as an expression that fitted Penny's hopes for in-class curriculum making shaped by relationship. Penny, as their teacher, welcomed spaces for curiosity. When remedial math was the subject matter, Penny saw fewer spaces to engage in curriculum making together. Children were labeled as needing remediation because standardized testing loomed. The view of math as a more controlled subject matter allowed less space for Penny to teach the way she wanted to.

Another moment of tension emerged as Penny lived and told the story of a place bound together by locks and keys. Neither Penny nor her students had free access to all places in the school that are typically available to the school community. Doors to the staff washroom, staffroom, classrooms, equipment rooms, and other places in the school were locked. On the days when Penny had to borrow keys from other teachers, or the day when a key for the sound system went missing from her key ring, tension ran high.

Continuities and interruptions, silences and invisibilities shaped Penny's story to live by, as lives met and in this meeting found expression in her practice. There was continuity between mandated curriculum and Penny's view of indicators and outcomes that she was required to teach. She did not question the dominant story of the regular contract teacher as expert and the story of substitute teacher and children as receivers of knowledge. Yet, the interruptions in her identity when she responded abruptly to children instead of with positive regard raised tension for her, and she felt powerless because she had no way to make herself heard in ways she thought would shift this feeling. Her silence came from invisibility in the planned curriculum, and at the same time her ability to improvise was bounded by the grand narrative of mandated objectives left for substitute teacher to supervise rather than create space for inquiry in relational curriculum making. She felt invisible to those who do the hiring for fulltime contracts although she thought she was doing all the right things.

Looking at the possibilities that Penny brought into the classroom, her enthusiasm for inquiry based learning, and loving perception founded on relational curriculum making with children, this research puzzle was perplexing as the above situation unfolded. Like the boy who defiantly blurted “bullshit” I could see Penny pointing to the hypocrisy of the situation. I wondered how we could re-imagine this

situation as more attentive to the lives of children and their substitute teacher. To do this I must say something about the lives of those surrounding the situation.

***Interruption and Continuity of Relationship in the Moment***

In the lives that met in the above curricular moment neither Penny's nor the children's stories to live by were known by the other. Over daily interaction together, students had created a web of relationships between each other to include their regular teacher and knowledge of each other's personal lives. Woven into a classroom web are personal stories to live by of each person in the classroom. Penny's presence as teacher interrupted this classroom web making. Penny did not know what had happened in the boy's life at home before he came to school that morning, and the boy did not know the experiences Penny was having. They did not know each other's stories to live by that in-school and out-of-school experiences shaped prior to their meeting. Part of Penny's story to live by included wanting to attend to children's lives. Yet this was their first meeting. It was Penny's first time in their classroom but it was not the first day in that classroom for the children. The students had already established lives together, and Penny's role as substitute teacher interrupted their continuity. The children did not acknowledge Penny's stories to live by, and this not knowing interrupted her continuity. When continuity was interrupted each day, it was difficult for Penny to compose and sustain a story to live by. What happens in a classroom is "part of a complex, unfolding narrative in which children's and teachers' stories are intermingled with subject matter and situated within a nested set of narrative contexts" (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 319). However, Penny had no way to know the narrative contexts that the children lived out, except in the intermittent experiences she had when she was called in. Although she was in this classroom numerous times over the two years in which the research occurred, there were gaps and long periods of time between. Relationship building was done in fits and starts and each day felt like the first day to both Penny and the students. From these fits and starts and intermingled stories, I pulled threads of experience, as Penny told them in our conversations, because of the way each thread shaped the curriculum making moment with the potential for shaping Penny's identity making.

By weaving together fragments of stories that emerged across transcripts and field notes, I created a series of interwoven word images. These images, based on conversations between December 2010 and July 2012, were found in Penny's interpretations of the ways she thought others saw her. In the following poem Penny's voice interweaves with the voices of students, other teachers, and an educational assistant who surround the curriculum making moment. To contextualize this and make it clear for the reader, Penny's voice leans toward the right hand side of the page, while the voices of the imagined others are on the left. I also realize there is another layer of interpretation that I composed as I pulled forward the images. The process I used to create the following set of images imitates the composing

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of found poetry developed by Dillard (1995), Richardson (2002), Butler-Kisber (2005), and Huber and Clandinin (2005), Clandinin et al (Clandinin et al., 2006). These authors “find” words and phrases from interviews and transcripts, field notes, and field texts that participants have shared in telling. Researchers then shape them into new interpretive texts they call “found poetry” (Butler-Kisber, 2005, p. 97) or “word images”(Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 114). In the following interpretive texts, I have pulled forward images of those around Penny who shaped her identity making in the previous curriculum making moment.

#### **Penny the Substitute teacher**

*I want to teach from my philosophy.  
But that's the whole thing about subbing.  
It's not you.  
I go against what I think.  
I'm not the kind of teacher I want to be right now.*

#### **Other teachers**

Sitting at the lunch table.  
Talking about another substitute teacher who eats in her car a lot—  
“She just doesn’t like making all that effort in the staffroom every day.  
She had no control of the class.”  
We request her services.

#### **Penny**

*But that's the whole thing about subbing.  
It's not you.  
You are an island as a substitute teacher.  
No one is looking out for you.  
I could take myself off the sub list and I would just be gone.*

#### **Educational assistant**

The substitute teacher is fair and kind.  
She has such a sweet demeanor.  
I saw her crying in the stairwell.

#### **Penny**

*Subbing is forcing me to be not who I want to be.*

#### **Students**

Tyler...  
She is too lenient  
She is kind of funny and tells jokes  
I want to have friends and my friends like it when I am loud and energetic

#### **Penny**

*That is not who I am,*

#### **Justine...**

Remedial Math—I don’t want to be here—I don’t want to do it.

Whose instructions do we follow?  
It's my classroom  
So many constraints  
It's not you.

**Penny**

*That is not who I am.*

Cody...  
I asked her to put the music on during gym time.  
key ring just sitting on her stuff  
The sound system key.  
Someone took it  
I sure don't like being treated like a criminal.  
playing a little lottery here.  
gambling because we know we could get a lot worse.

**Penny**

*It makes me sad to think about who I have become as a substitute.  
I don't even listen to kids anymore.  
You never know what your day is going to be like.  
it is the first day every day  
(interim research text 2013 based on field notes)*

From the above images, multiple plotlines weave into Penny's experience of curriculum making and identity making at school, plotlines of belonging or not belonging to community as Penny lived between and among relationships with other teachers in various schools. She felt criticism of her beginning practice and at the same time recognized that they needed her.

The word image of the educational assistant carries a storyline of seeing Penny struggling, while at the same time resonating with the helplessness of the situation. Both substitute teachers and educational assistants live closely with children yet experience silence when others do not attend to their voices in schools.

Tyler, Justine, and Cody carry multiple plotlines that weave and collide with Penny's story to live by: Plotlines of ground rules for living in a classroom community—whose rules—and consequences that result when rules are broken; making friends, and how humor is part of that process; feeling less than in math; negotiating Penny's role—do students push her into the plotline of policing rather than negotiating relationship? Trust became a significant theme for Penny in moments of relational curriculum making with students. Penny negotiated a situation where her willingness to trust students was broken and as a result she doubted her own trust-worthiness. When Penny reported the stolen key to the principal, she was afraid she would be seen as incompetent, and was surprised when she was called to teach the same class the next day.

Within Penny's own story to live by, diverse storylines collided, creating complexities she had to make sense of. An example of bumping storylines was

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the collision between a spirit of adventure and a feeling of isolation. The spirit of adventure was ever present as she travelled into a new classroom of children each day. The challenge of negotiating surprises thrilled her. At the same time, when she experienced tension in curriculum making moments, she did not have a community of experienced teachers to help her make sense of it. Isolation and longing for connection to the school professional community was a simultaneous storyline.

One way to make sense of these colliding storylines was to create an overarching storyline, an overarching storyline that she was living an experience in ways that were “not her.” She felt she was telling someone else’s story. She had an imagined storyline of who she wanted to be as a professional yet she was not able to sustain that story because of particular curriculum making moments with students that interrupted continuity.

#### **Unpacking Intersections**

The word images exemplify the complexity of the many lives that meet in a classroom. Turning back to the moment of curriculum making, I suggest that the possibilities and challenges are great as storylines intersect in the negotiation of a curriculum of lives.

The children and others negotiated curriculum making as conflicting plotlines intersected. Although Cody, Justine, Ty, the other teachers, and the educational assistant were not in the room when the particular moment occurred, they shaped Penny and the boy’s experience.

In previous literature, marginalization, commodification, and meaninglessness have been common ways of describing experience of substitute teachers. How did the dominant institutional story of substitute teacher as a marginal member of the education community influence the negotiation? (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Shilling, 1991). When Cody’s sense of pushing the boundaries and gambling with how much he could get away with met Penny’s storyline of trust in a milieu of locked doors, how was that negotiated? Perhaps Penny was less patient with the boy that morning because of the numerous experiences like those with Cody. Negotiating as a rules enforcer from the margins where her voice is powerless depleted her physical energy. And Justine, living a plotline of not wanting to be at school, intersected with Penny along with the boy that morning reinforced school as a negative place. Penny wanted it to be a positive and creative place for children where they made a difference in each other’s lives. And then, with other fulltime contract teachers who lived a plotline of community at the staffroom lunch table, how did this play out when they positioned Penny with another substitute teacher who isolated herself by eating in her car? These intersections influenced Penny’s curriculum making moment with the first child coming into the classroom that morning, and marginalization was significant in each meeting.

Research literature also stories substitute teachers as a commodity to be managed (Baldwin, 1934; Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Perkins, 1966) rather than as “real”

teachers (Lunay, 2006, p. 171; Young et al., 2012, p.112). Other teachers as experts used the services of Penny as a lesser commodity, while Penny wanted to live the storyline of a valued professional involved relationally over time. Cody lived the storyline of teachers as good commodities and lesser commodities that he gambled with. Administrators who spent time showing Penny the physical classroom space, helping her with logging on the attendance program on the computer, finding the lesson plan, dealing with students that were disrespectful to her, and other managerial situations all contributed to the moment of curriculum making in this article.

Maxine Greene (1995) helps me shift into a new way of seeing a beginning teacher. Seeing big allows us to see Penny's experience from her point of view in the midst of both her personal and practical life rather than as a commodity to be managed by an institution.

To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening. (p.10)

When researchers and people in school systems embrace Penny as uniquely human within intersections of curriculum making with children, we allow her to make the situation meaningful for herself. As she made sense of an experience in educative ways, she broadened her story to live by to include more than one single story.

The intermingling puzzles become a network of challenge for everyone surrounding the beginning teacher in the role of substitute teacher, and require us to be thoughtful about how to shift challenges into educative spaces rather than spaces that freeze learning into fear and enticing stories to leave by. Although Penny clung to yearnings of settling into a life of marriage and a household of children whose holidays would be similar to hers, these lifestyle goals were not enough to sustain her as a substitute teacher. Her single story of making a difference in children's lives as a teacher in a permanent contract held her. It was her single story to live by that both interrupted her identity making and sustained it.

*That knowing that I have a gift with children  
helping raise kids actually  
It's not a knowledge that is surface but rather a deep part of who I am.*  
(Research conversation 2011)

When Penny's story of who she is as a teacher did not fit with the students' preceding classroom situation, continuity was interrupted for both of them as they negotiated moment by moment. One way to interpret the immediate environment of tension was for Penny to say that it wasn't her choice to react the way she did. She interpreted her response to be contextually set. This single story of success was

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shaped by experiences both professionally and personally, in-school and outside-of-school places. Yet how does she sustain this story to live by in the complexity of the curriculum making moment?

#### ***Safe Spaces on the Professional Landscape***

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) describe in-classroom and out-of-classroom places as metaphorical spaces where a teacher's professional knowledge is shaped.

Teachers spend part of their time in classrooms and part of their time in other professional, communal places. These are two fundamentally different places on the landscape: the one behind the classroom door with students and the other in professional places with others. Teachers cross the boundary between these places many times each day. (p. 25)

They suggest in-classroom places to be safe places. "Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). For Penny this was not consistently her experience because she crossed boundaries and stepped into in-classroom places that were in different schools and classrooms each day. Some days she felt the scrutinizing eyes of the absent teacher who would be returning, and experienced students who were disrespectful. The classroom she was in one day was also a classroom experience that shaped the next classroom she would be in the following days.

An "out-of-classroom place" is described as "a place filled with knowledge funneled into the school system for the purpose of altering teachers' and children's classroom lives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). As a substitute teacher and as a beginning teacher, Penny was not frequently part of these out-of-classroom places. When she was, she did not question what was "coming down the pipe" as teachers with tenured contract positions do.

Teachers express their knowledge of out-of-classroom place as a place littered with imposed prescriptions. It is a place filled with other people's visions of what is right for children. Researchers, policy makers, senior administrators, and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes, and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25)

Although Penny was aware of power imbalances between policy makers and practitioners, she was not prepared to challenge the institutional stories coming down the conduit at the risk of appearing in compliant to those with hiring capabilities. And in some situations she felt teachers had put her in the "out-of-classroom" place as one of the "others" with a vision of what was right for children.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) speak of out-of-classroom places as places where a smooth story of life in the classroom is told.

When teachers move out of their classrooms into the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school. Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their stories to live by. (p.25)

Penny's telling of cover stories in out-of-classroom places was limited. The transient nature of substitute teaching does not allow shaping out-of-classroom relationships with other teachers in the same way permanent contract teachers are able to. As teachers talk together, reflecting on imposed policies and visions from others, they are making sense of tensions these impositions release.

Much of Penny's frustration came from impositions on her as a substitute that limited her ability to negotiate curriculum with children over time. Her sense making of tension-filled experiences took place in personal places such as conversations with her mother, who had also been a teacher. As she reflected on her practice, her personal practical knowledge expanded and was carried into other professional stories to live by. Questioning an experience complexified her single story to live by and turned her perspective from mis-educative to educative experience. The people with whom she had these reflective conversations helped her make sense in ways that sustained her as a teacher. Personal practical knowledge making happened in reflection on practice in out-of-school places. Research conversations were another of those out-of-classroom places that made a safe space for Penny to reflect on experiences. Both with her mother and with me as narrative inquirer, Penny was able to tell "secret stories"<sup>3</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25) rather than cover stories as she made sense of the experiences she was having.

### ***Making Sense Methodologically***

My intent with this narrative inquiry was to understand the experiences of Penny, a beginning teacher, shaping her identity while working as a substitute. It is possible to point towards particular relational research methods and narrative inquiry practices that moved understanding for both of us forward.

A narrative practice that assisted Penny and me was to identify and understand the intersecting points where lives met. "As narrative inquirers into classroom curriculum situations we are trying to understand multiple participants' experiences nested within institutional narratives" (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 331). These nested, complex storylines of interaction and negotiation in curriculum making raised particular questions and tensions. Seeing tension without a "negative valence" (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Murray Orr, 2010, p. 82) and identifying those points as places to reflect on led to growth in personal practical knowledge and sustaining her on the professional landscape.

Another practice that helped both the researcher and the participant make sense of experience was the weekly research conversations. Research conversa-

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tions became moments of sense making and encouragement for Penny. She was sustained as a teacher partially because of these conversations. However, after two years of weekly conversations, Penny asked that the research be completed. She was hired into a temporary teaching contract and worried that she would not have time or energy to continue research conversations. Penny said she trusted the writer completely and signed ethics consent forms, however, for me, as a narrative inquirer “guided by a relational form of ethics” (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 81); this ceasing of contact caused some tension ethically. Member checking throughout the writing of the research text could not happen except on an imagined plane. This became a significant piece of the writing, as I reflected on how and what she was saying. It was important to me that the words in the research text were the story Penny told and retold over the time we spent together. It was important to me that the words on the page would resonate with Penny, and she would read them saying “that’s me!” However, Penny was finished.

#### ***What Do We Do Now That We Have Heard Her Stories?***

Substitute teachers fulfill a central role in maintaining the continuity of K-12 education (Duggleby & Badali, 2007). Teaching classes while the regular classroom teachers are in professional development, while they are collaborating and team teaching, while they are on educational leaves, personal leaves, or fulfilling responsibilities with teachers’ federations and organizations, there are many reasons substitute teachers are called in. Increasingly, the regular classroom teachers need another teacher to step into their classroom while they are away. Illness is another reason for teachers to call on substitute teachers. A report funded by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012) reports a decline in teacher wellness as the following findings iterate.

Teachers’ levels of work-related commitment, engagement, and satisfaction are continually being eroded by formidable workloads that involve average work-weeks that exceed 50 hours, increasingly complex and expanding responsibilities, exposure to a considerable array of negative work-related stressors, and the toll that work-related stress has on their personal lives and their physical and mental health. The sobering truth is that our findings are entirely consistent with other large-scale investigations of the work life and health of teachers in other Canadian provinces and international jurisdictions. (p.28)

In light of these realities, Martin, Dolmage, and Sharpe (2012) are not surprised by attrition rates among teachers and the concern regarding recruitment. They argue that the “demands and expectations that are placed upon teachers need to be modified and/or reduced, and that substantial improvements must be made to the supports and resources that are offered to teachers” (p.28). With teachers facing pressure that affects their wellbeing, substitute teachers are needed even more, yet with the milieu as it is, their work is increasingly challenging as well.

A short-term response may be to offer more than one story to live by for new

teachers entering the field. Penny had one story of success and, when this one story did not unfold as she had hoped, she questioned whether she would continue in the profession.

A story that isn't told, or perhaps is told and not heard, is not an alternative to teaching other than a permanent full time contract after graduation. The omission of this story influences a beginning teacher's understanding of her own particular situation as a substitute in the context of dominant plotlines that include fulltime permanent contracts.

To help beginning teachers see themselves in diverse roles, it may be important during their undergraduate degree to explore the possibility of their role as a substitute teacher. Opening this story as a possibility and talking about it as a reality for beginning teachers as a next step after graduation, along with providing details about substitute teaching, is important. Furthering this idea, which may be a more in-depth solution, might include shifting the role of substitute into a residency founded on relationship.

### **Imagining a Relational Residency**

Creating a relational residency, where each individual beginning teacher is part of a team of people to shape their next steps into the profession could address issues of marginalization, commodity, and meaninglessness. If teachers were involved in hiring processes they would be able to shape a position for a resident to grow into. Administrators who work alongside the resident would network with other administrators to find a position for their resident, while a cohort of residents who worked in diverse schools would meet once a week to tell stories and share experiences, and a university advisor who remained in contact over the residency to facilitate sense making and growth of personal practical knowledge in educative ways would be another important piece. Being part of a particular classroom would allow children to shape a teacher's relational identity making without interrupting their own classroom webs of community and their own individual relational identity making. In this way a community is formed around an individual beginning teacher; her growing identity can be challenged and affirmed on a foundation of educative possibility. With a network of people surrounding her in this way, her identity making as a beginning teacher could be sustained and shaped in relationship.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Ward, A., Glanfield, F., & Murphy, M. S. (2007). *Reclaiming teacher practice as intellectual work*. Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Penny is a pseudonym, as are all names throughout this article. This is done as an ethical consideration for protecting privacy of the participant and those she speaks of in research conversations.

## *Relational Identity Making*

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<sup>3</sup> Secret stories are lived practices in classrooms which are, for the most part, safe places. When they are told, they are told in secret places to other teachers.

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