Exploring Reflective Practice and Intentional Response with Teachers: Implications for Wellbeing in the Classroom

by

Marla McLellan

M.A., University of British Columbia, 1998
B.A., University of Victoria, 1983

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Approval

Name: Marla McLellan
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy
Title: Exploring Reflective Practice and Intentional Response with Teachers: Implications for Wellbeing in the Classroom

Examing Committee: Chair: Yaroslav Senyshyn
Professor

Susan O’Neill
Senior Supervisor
Professor

Allan MacKinnon
Supervisor
Associate Professor

Stephen Smith
Internal Examiner
Professor

Georgina Barton
External Examiner
Associate Professor
School of Teacher Education and Early Childhood University of Southern Queensland

Date Defended/Approved: April 2, 2019
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Abstract

This qualitative study explores teachers’ use of reflective practice and an intentional response cycle to help guide their responses to unexpected and/or challenging events in the classroom. I refer to the relational approach to intentional response and reflective practice as a reflective-response cycle. This cycle brings together two areas of research that have tended to be treated separately in relation to research on teaching practice: effective coping skills and reflective inquiry and practice. Drawing on a reflective-response cycle, teachers learn to engage in a simple and accessible process that can assist them in feeling more present and in control of their reactions to unexpected and/or challenging events that arise in their day-to-day interactions with students in the classroom. The focus of the literature review is research on reflective inquiry and practice, as well as an exploration of related concepts that impact teacher wellbeing, including the construction of one’s sense of self, mindful awareness, and compassion. A phenomenological method was used to examine, understand, and describe the lived experiences of nine teacher participants as they engaged with the reflective-response cycle over a 4-month period. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the contextual meaning of the participants’ experiences before and after their interaction with the reflective-response cycle. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thirteen themes and three subthemes were identified. These themes and subthemes are represented under five categories: 1. Critical reflection: Insights (Questioning Beliefs and Teacher Identity) and New Perspectives; 2. Mindful Awareness: Presence and Shifts in Practice; 3. Compassion: Open-Hearted and Open-Minded; Teacher Wellbeing: Optimism, Gratefulness and Agency; 4. Mentorship: Guidance, Probing and Challenging, Encouragement, and Outcomes. Two overarching themes, Connection and Growth, emerged through this process. The findings indicate a need and a desire on the part of teachers for reflective practice and intentional response education and professional development. Many of the participants spoke of ending their school day feeling the burden of guilt from unintended reactions toward challenging situations in the classroom. They found their engagement with the reflective-response cycle to be beneficial in relieving their sense of guilt, replacing it with an improved sense of connection with their students. Implications for educational practice and future research are discussed.
**Keywords:** reflective inquiry; reflective practice; intentional response; teacher wellbeing; mindful awareness; compassion; connection; personal growth
Dedication

I wish to dedicate this thesis to Todd Ritchey who ignited the spark that sent me along a path I was not intending. This has been an incredible experience of personal growth and development that I could not have predicted when I decided to delve further into the concepts of triggers and self-reflection. I am grateful to Todd for planting the seed that led to this new beginning.

I also dedicate this work to all of those who were open to exploring the reflective ↔ response cycle with me. If it were not for the positive feedback and expressions of gratitude, I would not have thought to move forward with this endeavour. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to offer others a way of muting their triggers and responding to situations that feel more compassionate and in line with who they wish to be in this world.
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While there were moments when I felt quite alone on this journey, I would like to acknowledge all those who worked tirelessly to help me to the finish line.

I am exceedingly grateful to Dr. Susan O'Neill who listened to my proposal and heard something worthy of exploration. Her guidance, mentorship, encouraging words, and inspirational teaching allowed me to navigate through the uncertainties, fears and complexities of academic research and writing. I am also grateful to Dr. Allan MacKinnon who offered feedback and resources that stretched my thinking and perception so as to create a more comprehensive piece of research.

I am grateful to the nine teachers who allowed me to enter their space of thoughts and emotions in the classroom over the four-month period. They were willing to open up and express their vulnerabilities as we worked together on this project, exploring alternate strategies to deal with the daily challenges that arise in any typical classroom.

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And finally, I would like to thank my family for their generous gift of time and patience. I thank Ken Beattie for believing in me and accommodating the endless time restrictions I brought to our family over this past four years. Without his support, I could
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Reflection is an essential skill for improvement in all domains of life. Montie and colleagues (1998) refer to reflection as, “a deliberate pause to examine a behaviour, goal, practice, or experience” (p. 6). Although definitions of reflective practice vary among scholars (Lyons, 2010; Thompson & Pascal, 2012; York-Barr et al., 1998; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), most would agree that the word “deliberate” in the above definition is a key attribute. It is the *purposeful* deliberation of the event with the goal of improvement that changes a reflection from being merely descriptive or technical to being a critical examination aimed at growth and improvement (Schön, 1983, 1987).

Engaging in reflective practice is particularly significant among professionals such as teachers who are generally committed to professional growth. Reflective practice in teaching or ‘reflective teaching’ requires a teacher to question his or her assumptions as well as “the goals and the values that guide his or her work, [and] the context in which he or she teaches” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 1). For example, when a student reacts to a comment or a redirection in a negative way, the teacher will likely wonder what could have caused such a reaction and how could the scenario have played out differently. A reflective teacher will go a step further and examine his or her own “responsibility” (Dewey, 1933) in relation to the student’s reaction. The teacher’s reflection may not occur in the moment; indeed, it is more likely to emerge in the wee hours of the night when sleep is desperately calling and none is in sight. While the teacher’s desire to react differently is often compelling, the way into the shift from frustration to curiosity or anger to compassion is not always clear.

My aim in this research is to explore and further develop an approach to critical reflection that infuses reflective practice with an intentional response cycle that assists teachers in identifying their values and goals and then examining feelings and thoughts as they arise in the moment of conscious awareness so that they can be more purposeful in their responses to unexpected and/or challenging events that arise in the classroom. The main purpose is to bridge the gap between inner convictions – (e.g., “I will not react in anger when students arrive late to class”), and outer praxis – (e.g., “Drat!
I did it again! Why can’t I figure this out?”). I refer to this approach as a reflective response cycle.

The reflective response cycle is meant to be easily accessible to teachers and something that they can practice despite the busyness of the classroom setting. Once teachers have reflected on and identified their goals for the classroom, they set an intention for the day. The stress response in their body alerts them to a pending reaction, and the intention is the marker on which to focus when deciding on a course of action – it is something on which to reflect in the moment of the emergence of a triggering situation. The teacher’s conscious mind (that which is aware of feelings and thoughts in the present moment) will, with a commitment to practice and critical reflection, connect with the chosen intention and select a response with purpose, with the goal of subverting an unwanted reaction. When teachers feel distressed in the classroom it is difficult to stay present and connected to their students and their professional goals. Unwanted reactions can undermine their best intentions to make more meaningful and relevant the learning and education of their students by sabotaging the learning environment. Unwanted reactions have the potential to disconnect teachers from their students and to trigger the stress responses of the students themselves. It is difficult to create a space for personal growth and development – for changing old ways of dealing with challenges in the classroom – when teachers are unable to pause in the midst of an unexpected or challenging event and respond thoughtfully, with deliberate intention.

1.1. A Reflective Response Cycle

I began to develop the reflective response cycle over a period of several years through my work as a counsellor with students, teachers and parents. Prior to this study, I had only my personal experiences of the practice to draw on as well as anecdotal evidence from those students, teachers and parents with whom I discussed the process. These testaments suggested that the practice could add value to teacher and student experiences in the classroom. However, I had concerns that teachers would see this as a counselling technique as opposed to a reflective teaching practice, so I

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1 A double-sided symbol is used rather than a dash between ‘reflective’ and ‘response’ to draw attention to their relational nature (they define and are defined by each other within a given context) and to indicate that the process emerges both ways through a flow of the two actions that work in harmony throughout all phases of the cycle.
worked on creating a workshop that was tailored specifically for classroom teachers. I also developed a visual that I hoped would help keep the practice simple and accessible so that they would be able to incorporate the practice within their busy classroom lives. Georgina Barton, whose research focuses on a specific reflective practice in the creative arts, discusses the “increasing evidence that suggests that well scaffolded reflection creates platforms for potentially transformative learning moments” (p. 74). The phases and accompanied visual are meant to provide this sort of scaffolding. There is both a coping skills component as well as a reflective practice component to the cycle. Reflection is infused throughout all five phases of the reflective response cycle, both in-action and on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987) as indicated by the visual (see Figure 1.1). A commitment to practice along with critical reflection of that practice while in the trenches of the classroom are vital for the cycle to serve as an effective coping strategy and an on-going reflective teaching practice.
1.1.1. Set Intention

In this initial phase, teachers are invited to set an intention for the day. This intention may vary or remain static. The intentions are derived from a list of life goals identified during an initial one-on-one coaching session which encourages teachers to look at their personal and professional goals along with past experiences that may uncover unexamined beliefs or unwanted habits of thought and/or action. Like others
(Dewey, 1933; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2010; Laarivee, 2000; Montie et al., 1998), I believe that true reflection is necessarily purposeful and deliberate. The intention gives a point of focus for those engaging with the reflective response cycle, helping teachers remain attentive and mindful of their goals.

1.1.2. Trigger: Learning to be Aware

A trigger refers to any event that creates a stress response in the body. Teachers are asked to start by paying attention to and reflecting on the changes in their physiology. This requires an ability to be present – to slow down and just notice the impact within of any unwanted classroom encounter. As stated prior, a commitment to practice and critical reflection are vital; this may be the only phase on which some teachers choose to focus for a period of time during their initial engagement with the reflective response cycle. I would argue that this is perhaps the most important phase for it could influence most profoundly the difference between a reaction – jumping to a potentially false conclusion about what is happening in any given situation – and a response – choosing with careful deliberation how best to act. Learning to be aware, to pay attention, takes effort and practice. As Allan MacKinnon (1996) points out in his work on reflective practice and “learning to teach at the elbow” (p. 660), it is not a skill that can be learned in the absence of activity. And Anne McCrary Sullivan (2000), in her work on the art and science of attention, remarks that the attention her student teacher paid “to exteriors had helped her go more deeply into awareness of complex interiors” (p. 226), growing increasingly patient as “she focused attention on individuals and deepened her sensitivity to their contexts” (p. 226). This kind of focus and awareness can only come from practice while living among those one wishes to understand and attend.

1.1.3. Emotion: Learning to Identify and Describe

In this phase, teachers are asked to identify and name the emotion they are feeling at the time of their stress response to the triggering event. This is a continuation of the second phase of the cycle in that it asks teachers to remain present and focussed on their own internal process as opposed to the external event and the judgments or assumptions they may be tempted to make. I have found some of the most commonly though not exclusively identified feelings of teachers are anger, frustration, irritation,
embarrassment and guilt. These are listed on the visual as examples to which the teachers can refer.

1.1.4. Identify the Fear: Analyzing the Emotion

As Damasio (1994) points out, the stress response is in place for the survival of the organism; an unexpected and/or challenging event in the classroom could be interpreted as a threat. Fear is an emotion that activates the body for fight, flight or freeze. Teachers are asked to analyze their feelings – of anger, frustration, irritation, embarrassment, guilt, etc.– and uncover any potential fear they may be experiencing. They are invited to pay attention “to what lies beneath those [complex] surfaces” (McCrary Sullivan, 2000, p. 221). For example, could it be a fear of student failure, or a fear of losing control of the class, or a fear of being seen as incompetent or insignificant? Several of the participants in this study found that an underlying fear identified during the workshop was a common thread that ran throughout their life stories based on past experiences and beliefs that were no longer relevant to their present lives. From this discovery, they were able to identify and question the validity of the fear at the time they were experiencing it in the classroom. They were able to understand what past experiences may be driving their interpretations of the unwanted event, bring their attention to the present moment, and then shift to an intentional, proactive response as opposed to an automatic reaction.

Some participants reported that they began to use this strategy outside the classroom, wondering what the fear might be under others’ reactions to challenging situations. They found this thought process helpful, often inviting feelings of compassion for individuals exhibiting challenging behaviours. Through their work with poetry and attention, McCrary Sullivan’s (2000) students reported that, “to get under the skin of the other, rather than to simply report observable externals, demanded a deeper sort of attention, an attention that required an imaginative penetration of barriers and that conjoined with empathy” (p. 225). It takes intense attention, what McCrary Sullivan (2000) calls, “aesthetic vision”, to see so much more fully and deeply. She asserts that, “aesthetic vision suggests a high level of consciousness about what one sees. It suggests an alertness, a “wide-awakeness”, which Maxine Greene (1978, 1995) has urged educators and researchers “to learn from artists” (p. 220). This is the work of this fourth phase of the cycle.
1.1.5. Choose Response: Learning to Respond Purposefully

This final phase connects the teachers to their pre-set intentions. They are invited to align their responses to the challenging event with their intention. If their intention is student connection, for example, they are asked to choose a response that will likely allow connection to be the outcome of the interaction. Becoming angry and reactive will more likely disconnect one person from another. By responding deliberately, with patience and curiosity, with the intent to understand what is happening in the moment, the chances of those involved feeling heard and understood will be strengthened and connection will potentially increase.

1.2. The Context for the Study

A classroom is a complex ecosystem. It is made up of individuals who are influenced by a unique set of past experiences, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, feelings, moods, personal agendas and aspirations, all of which have been shaped by individual, social and cultural factors. As in any ecosystem, within the classroom there is interdependence between the teacher and the students – the teacher’s responses to students and the students’ responses in reply to the teacher. As one of the key role models in the classroom, I suggest that the teacher’s sense of wellbeing is integral to the balance and wellbeing of the entire group.

There is an ever-growing body of research exploring the importance of social and emotional wellbeing in the classroom (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Watson et al., 2012). Most would agree that there is a link between a child’s ability to learn and his or her state of wellbeing. Here, wellbeing refers to the development of skills related to emotional regulation – caring for others, responsible decision-making, and handling effectively challenging situations (Brackett et al., 2012). In their extensive research into reflective practices for teachers, Carol Rodgers and Miriam Raider-Roth (2006) state that,

“Research has demonstrated that the quality of [student-teacher] relationships is not a frill or ‘feel-good’ aspect of schooling, it is an essential feature of learning. What allows this relationship to flourish is
complex and calls upon the mental, physical, emotional and relational resources of the teacher.” (p. 266)

The attributes related to flourishing in the classroom have been linked with five domains for emotional and educational wellbeing by the Dalai Lama Heart-Mind Education Centre (“Dalai Lama”, n.d.) as follows: gets along with others; is compassionate and kind; solves problems peacefully; is secure and calm, alert and engaged. These attributes, while generally directed toward students in the research literature, are equally if not more important for teachers. As role models in students’ lives, educators play a critical role in helping to teach and demonstrate effective coping skills. This begins by becoming more aware of those factors that impact a teacher’s sense of wellbeing both within and outside the classroom walls.

1.3. My Journey to the Research

My journey to creating a reflective response cycle for teachers began at a workshop in January of 2012. By that time I had moved out of my role as a secondary school classroom teacher and into the counselling office. I had been a teacher for eight years before deciding to pursue a master’s degree in counselling psychology with the goal of spending more time listening to my students’ compelling life stories and helping them work through their social and emotional challenges. I was led to this decision after teaching in a program known as The Literacy Program situated in an inner-city secondary school in East Vancouver, British Columbia. The program consisted of a group of teenage refugees, unable to read or write in their home language, whose stories of trauma left me feeling overwhelmed and unable to support them in the classroom. The challenges and rewards of working with that group of teens were immense, and from the experience I knew that I wanted to spend my days doing more listening and less talking. I left teaching two years later and began working toward my master’s degree and becoming a high school counsellor.

Seventeen years later, comfortable in my role as a school counsellor, I attended a Professional Day workshop. The keynote speaker, Todd Ritchey, gave a presentation on Answer Model Theory (Montgomery & Ritchey, 2008), a therapeutic system based on neuroscientific research into the brain mechanisms associated with survival. Ritchey’s presentation caught my attention because of its emphasis on the brain and a potential way into the counselling process that I was just beginning to explore. I was interested in
Ritchey and Montgomery’s understanding of how the brain works to keep the organism “safe”, both physically and psychologically, and how it can potentially sabotage one’s efforts to change. I hoped to learn how to help my students and their families understand why they may react as they do to situations in their lives, often at the expense of their goals or intentions.

During his breakout session, Ritchey asked participants to list their eight deepest intrinsic desires. He then explained the workings of the survival mechanisms of the brain drawing on the research of anthropologist and neuroscientist, John Montgomery, and Ritchey’s own experiences of working with counselling clients. The central thesis of Ritchey and Montgomery (2008) is that one way into the root of dysfunctional behaviours is to examine past experiences through the lens of biochemical activity. By looking at how the brain behaves through biochemical reactions and neuronal feedback loops to keep an organism physically safe, Ritchey articulated a step-by-step process through which to work in order to potentially unlock one of the mysteries to undesirable reactions.

Intrigued by the process, I decided to put it to the test. Equipped with my intention – based on one of my eight intrinsic life goals (inner calm) – my self-identified feelings from past experiences (shame and rejection), and the recognition of my undesired reactions to stressful situations brought on by unexamined thoughts that seemed to lead to the above stated feelings, I set out to be mindful of any discomfort in my body. My first opportunity came at the end of a long day as I cycled home from the workshop. As I cycled to the stop sign – past the long line of cars presumably also trying to make their way home at the end of a long day – I saw a driver on the opposite side of the road shake his head. I assumed he was angry with me and wanted to show his disgust in me for passing the cars waiting to go through the stop sign. As soon as I felt the discomfort in my body — the gnawing in my stomach, the heat in my face, and the sweat on my palms – I identified the feeling of anger. Following Ritchey’s process, I looked for the feeling under the anger and found shame (I was not following the rules of the road). I then questioned the validity of both my thought (“That driver is judging me” – truthfully, I had no idea if his head movement had anything to do with me), and shame (“Am I really shameful?”). Through this reframing of the situation, I was able to release the tension and choose a response that was in line with my intention (inner calm) — I released my negative feelings about the driver and my culpability and calmly cycled home. I did not stew over his right to criticize my choice of action nor did I criticize myself.
for my choice; I also did not go home and eat a sugary treat to soothe my psychic wounds – a typical reaction I had to unpleasant feelings.

The more I practiced setting a daily intention, staying mindful of my body’s stress response and pausing to examine briefly my feelings and thoughts when triggered by a challenging situation, the better I became at the process. It was not long before my deliberate practice became more of a habit and less of an effort. I will add that this seems to be one practice that may never become an automatic behaviour in the way that riding a bike becomes automatic. It does require mindful awareness and sustained attention as well as intentional effort, though the experience of my own practice suggests that the effort becomes less demanding of one’s full attention over time. As Tremmel (1993) argues in his work on the “art of paying attention”, the process of feeling, seeing or noticing and then adjusting one’s practice becomes almost intuitive.

My excitement and what I would term personal transformation led me to pass on the process to others: friends, family members, students, and parents of students. My efforts were often met with unsolicited gratitude and positive feedback that I had never before encountered in my counselling practice, particularly with adolescents. Those with whom I worked seemed to appreciate the simplicity. It gave them a road map that didn’t require dwelling on the past to find a way out of their repetitive, unwanted feelings, thoughts and behaviours. I am not proclaiming that I helped rid all who learned the process of their fears and unexamined beliefs; practice is the key and like many habits, they can easily slip if not kept up. Being mindful, as I will discuss in the literature review, as well as being diligent – committed and motivated – in the practice, is what is seemingly most important.

1.4. The Emergence of an Approach

1.4.1. The Connected Classroom Program

My interest in working with teachers specifically began with an introduction to cognitive approaches to learning. About a year into my counselling exploration of Answer Model Theory (Montgomery & Ritchey, 2008), Ritchey and his colleague Bill Adair, a secondary school Physical Education teacher, approached me with a classroom program that sounded intriguing. Adair had learned of Montgomery and Ritchey’s work a
couple of years earlier and was convinced that it could enhance his teaching practice as well as his students’ experiences of learning. He had been experimenting with the concepts and received positive feedback from both students and colleagues; Adair had been asked on several occasions to include students in his classes who had not been thriving in other Physical Education classes within his school as well as in others nearby. Through Ritchey’s understanding of the body’s stress response and Adair’s work with students in the classroom based on that understanding, they created a program, *The Connected Classroom*, specifically designed for classroom teachers and students. *The Connected Classroom* offered teachers an understanding of Answer Model Theory along with strategies to use with their students for the purpose of connecting them to their intrinsic goals as well as to one another in a caring and compassionate way. Given my enthusiasm with the process I had been using in my own life as well as in my counselling practice, Ritchey and Adair asked if I might generate an interest in *The Connected Classroom* among other teachers in my school. I gathered a group of eight teachers who agreed to meet with Ritchey, Adair and I for three after-school sessions.

The initial session was met with genuine interest, as the teachers were able to reflect on themselves, identifying their intrinsic goals and examining their behaviours and beliefs based on past experiences. They could see how this understanding could help them deal with unexpected and/or challenging incidents in the classroom. However, the other aspects of the program were met with some resistance. The teachers were not willing to give up any portion of their already jam-packed class time to teach their students about the brain and to add more content and peer-to-peer activities into their lesson plans as prescribed by *The Connected Classroom* program. They saw *The Connected Classroom* as an add-on to the already unmanageable task of fitting in all the components of the curriculum they needed to cover in the year. While they saw how it could work within the Physical Education curriculum, they could not see it working in a Math, Science or Social Studies classroom. Ritchey and Adair did not have the time or the resources to go into each of the classrooms and model the program, showing how it could fit into their current lessons. Further, the teachers saw this program more as one designed for counsellors than for teachers. They believed they were being asked to teach strategies for dealing with mental health concerns on top of their subject area content and they did not see that as their role in the school. Given these objections and potential constraints of the program, the teachers did not wish to pursue it further.
1.4.2. *The Connected Classroom – A Modification*

I continued to work with students and their families in my counselling office, inviting them to consider the practice I had found helpful in dealing with my own responses to stressful situations. I had learned over time, through *reflection-in-action* – on the spot reframing of experiences and reconsidering of responses – and *reflection-on-action* – reflecting critically on experiences after the fact (Schön, 1983, 1987) – that I could rethink stressful experiences in a way that allowed me to calm down and revise my responses to a given situation at the time of the triggering event. With the incident on my bicycle, I was able to reflect immediately on my internal reaction (the gnawing in my stomach) to the incident (the driver shaking his head) and then reframe my experience so as to calm down enough to choose a desirable response. The more often I was triggered by events and then took the time to reflect on my unwanted reactions, the better I became at reframing and reconsidering my responses in the moment.

With families, I found that the practice was most effective when at least one parent was willing to do the work alongside their child. While the child/student could learn the reflective response cycle in my office and then practice it when dealing with challenges amongst friends, it was extremely difficult when faced with challenging situations at home or in the classroom, particularly if the incident involved a parent or teacher directly – the power imbalance in such a relationship was evident. Since a large portion of my counselling work involves interacting with students and teachers who are frustrated with the classroom situation, I decided that instead of focussing on the wellbeing of students as *The Connected Classroom* did, I would focus my attention instead on teacher mindfulness, reflection and intentional response with the hopes that it would also serve to enhance the wellbeing of their students. Mindfulness here refers to conscious thought as opposed to automatic, knee-jerk reactions. Langer (1989) distinguishes between “mindfulness” and “mindlessness”. She sees unexamined thoughts and automatic behaviours as “mindlessly entrap[ping] us” (p. 31). In contrast, she defines “mindfulness” as a mental state that allows for openness to new information and awareness to other perspectives and therefore, different options for action.
1.5. Research Context

Two areas of research that have tended to be treated separately in relation to research on teaching practice are effective coping skills for the tensions that arise in the classroom, and reflective inquiry and practice. My purpose was to look at critical reflection coupled with intentional response as a coping mechanism through the lens of self-awareness and wellbeing with the hope of improving the experiences of teachers in the classroom. While much of the literature on reflective practice expounds its importance and potential benefits (Williams & Grundoff, 2011), few studies offer an approach that also addresses the very useful and much needed skills of coping with and managing the barrage of dilemmas that arise in the day-to-day work of the typical classroom teacher. It was also important to me that the strategy I offered teachers was simple and accessible. During my study, several teachers commented on how grateful they were that the reflective response cycle fit into their regular teaching routine – it was not an add-on to their already full teaching day that other researchers in this field have offered such as journal writing, after-school working groups, or regular outside coaching sessions (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Filby, 1995; Kemmis, 1985; Tremmel, 1993; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001). This is not meant to question the validity of these approaches; rather, I was attempting to address the concerns that many teachers express about being unable to sustain reflective practices that require extensive time outside the classroom. Thompson and Pascal (2012) speak to the importance of incorporating into any reflective approach the “pragmatic element of the use of time” (p. 320). Reflective practice can lose its focus on critical reflection — analysis and learning through experience — when not easily incorporated into the busyness of professional’s typical workday. Further, much of the reflective practice literature is directed toward pre-service teachers – when I searched the Education Source and ERIC databases for research involving reflective practice by teachers within the K-12 school, more than half of the studies were aimed at pre-service teachers. These emerging teachers often realize once their training is complete how little time in the day – and energy outside of the day – they actually have to envision and then put into use an on-going reflective and response practice such as those listed above that they may have encountered and been encouraged to use during their pre-service teacher education. And yet, as posited by Thompson and Pascal (2012), “The more pressure we are under, the clearer we need to be about what we are doing, why we are
Doing it, what knowledge is available to help us do it to best effect.” (p. 320). Pre-service teachers are certainly under an enormous amount of pressure that does not necessarily diminish over time — it is merely the focus of the pressure that shifts over time.

As such, the overarching question that inspired this study is:

**How might a focus on a reflective response cycle in the classroom impact on teachers' responses to unexpected and/or challenging events in their day-to-day interactions with students?**

Like Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006), who believe that “reflective teaching cannot be reduced to a series of behaviors or skills”, but “involves self-knowledge, trust, relationship and compassion” (p. 266), my hope was to help teachers, through a goal-setting coaching session followed by a reflective response cycle, feel more present and in control of their reactions in the classroom.

Reflection involves both critical thinking and a commitment to on-going learning and improvement (Thompson & Pascal, 2012; York-Barr et al., 2006). Therefore, a phenomenological method was used to explore, understand, and describe participants’ lived experiences with the reflective response cycle over a four-month period. Phenomenological methods in research are useful for helping participants bring to the surface deep issues, articulate their perceptions and experiences, and make their voice heard and understood (Moustakas, 1994). Participants were interviewed using open-ended questions that were followed up with probes such as “tell me more” and “please explain” to explore and expand upon their responses. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the contextual meaning of the participants’ experiences in response to the research questions. Along with interviews, participant journal entries and debrief sessions made up the data set used to generate themes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The data set was read multiple times for familiarity and then coded for meaningful extracts. The codes were then examined for patterns of meaning and potential themes, which were subsequently refined and discussed with my senior supervisor. Together, we clarified the assumptions and categories that emerged through the thematic analysis. Key themes were delineated through this process.
1.6. Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 provides a detailed examination of the literature on reflective inquiry and practice, including an exploration of the self, mindfulness, compassion, and wellbeing. Chapter 3 details the specific research design and protocols of this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and results of the study. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the main findings, and discusses the limitations of the research, its implications for education, and directions for future research.
Chapter 2.

Literature Review

This is a literature review with some personal narrative included throughout. I have italicized the narratives to avoid confusion. The purpose of the personal narratives is to add clarity by providing examples and experiences that relate to the findings in the literature.

Nora Lyons (2010) describes reflective thinking as the ability “to foster being aware, conscious, and reflective of one’s own and others’ ways of thinking and being” (p. x). These competencies reflect the goals of my counselling work with youth and adults, my personal development, as well as those of the teachers who volunteered to participate in this study. As such, seminal works on reflection were drawn upon to provide an understanding of reflective thinking/inquiry along with various approaches to reflective practice as a point of comparison to my own proposed approach. These studies provide insight into forms of reflection that have been considered influential in creating positive change in reflective practice in general as well as in reflective teaching practice.

This literature review also includes research that explores the construction of one’s sense of self. One could argue that the practice of “being aware, conscious and reflective” is an initial step in the construction of a sense of self. As Greene (1995) articulates, “I have been creating and continue to create a self by means of that [life] project, that mode of gearing into the world” (p. 1). Here, Greene refers to her ‘life project’ as her search for a deeper understanding of teaching and learning. Greene speaks to the importance of what she calls ‘wide-awakeness’, “of awareness of what it is to be in the world” (p. 35). Self-awareness asks for understanding of the multiple forces – social and cultural – that help create one’s identity and sense of self. Tremmel (1993) remarks that, “in order to be mindful and truly reflective, one must have the skill and the courage to begin to know the self” (p. 449). It takes both skill and courage to delve into the deeper meanings of our beliefs and experiences.
Mindful awareness, compassion and wellbeing are also areas of exploration in this chapter. As Tremmel (1993) asserts, mindful awareness is an integral aspect of reflective practice. This section will clarify the term “mindful awareness” as it is used for the purposes of this study. Since reflective thinking/inquiry/practice is the central focus of this research study, these concepts are presented first.

2.1. Reflective Inquiry

In her opening to The Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inquiry (2010), Lyons identifies three major theorists, John Dewey, Donald Schön, and Paulo Freire, as key contributors to the field of reflective inquiry. She suggests that by examining each of their particular ways of understanding reflective inquiry, a broader, more comprehensive framework for reflective practice can be brought to light. It is my intention in this section to examine these key philosophies of reflective thought/practice in the hopes of highlighting how they might help teachers engage with the processes that have contributed to this study.

2.1.1. John Dewey on Reflective Inquiry

John Dewey (1859-1952), a philosopher and educational thinker in the early 20th century, was among the first in the United States to consider educators as reflective practitioners (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Dewey’s epistemological positioning was that of pragmatist, a philosophical paradigm that came out of the desire of that time to reconcile empirical “truth” with religious beliefs (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 1997). Dewey, whose “interest in education was embedded in a wider concern about progressive social change” (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 1997, p. 2), saw reflective thought as a way into the dilemma of reconciling scientific “facts” with the reality of the complexities of being human. He saw the aim of education as combining logical reasoning with personal attitudes such as open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, responsibility and directness, which he believed enriched the world with meaning. This notion of making meaning from human interaction is in my mind at the heart of education. When an educator can look into the eyes of their student and try to understand what it is like to be them and what is beneath the behaviours that present
themselves in often undesirable ways, they can then begin to teach the person standing before them in a meaningful way.

These introductory readings on Dewey provided me with a context for interpreting some of his own writings on this topic. For example, Dewey (1933) recognized that thought aims at belief:

“Thought denotes belief resting upon some basis, that is, real or supposed knowledge going beyond what is directly present. It is marked by acceptance or rejection of something as reasonably probable or improbable.” (p. 4)

According to Dewey, reflective thought happens when “a belief is deliberately sought and its adequacy to support the belief examined” (pp. 1–2). He considered reflective thought a “conscious inquiry into the nature, conditions and bearings of belief” (p. 5). He understood the difference between taking the easy way out of a dilemma in order to end the struggle, and critical thinking, a conscious aim that includes drawing on past experiences and prior knowledge in combination with the attitudes of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, responsibility, and directness. He understood reflective thought as “a conscious and voluntary (emphasis mine) effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of reason” (p. 6). I highlight the word voluntary here for it distinguishes the difference between an automatic reaction to an event, and the effort it takes to be deliberate and to choose a response based on goals and intentions. These are the skills of critical reflection that are embedded in the reflective practice and intentional response cycle presented in this study.

For Dewey (1933), reflective inquiry is a way of thinking, a “habit of mind” – an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). Reflective inquiry is a practice; in order to create a habit one must be “persistent”, and practice it enough to have it become, to a certain degree, automatic. For Dewey, reflection begins with some form of “obstacle”, “perplexity” or “unsettled situation” that provides a problem on which to reflect and then an attempt to resolve.

Dewey (1933) proposes five aspects of reflective thinking: 1) Suggestions that offer possible solutions, 2) An intellectualization of the situation at hand, 3) The use of hypotheses to guide the process towards resolution, 4) The reasoning of each
hypothesis, and 5) *Testing the hypothesis* through some form of action, either “overt or imaginative” (p. 107). As indicated previously, Dewey’s framework of reflective inquiry also includes four attitudes: 1) *Open-mindedness* – the willingness to being open and available to listening to new and varying perspectives, 2) *Whole-heartedness* – a genuine enthusiasm for the content matter, 3) *Responsibility* – a conscious consideration of the consequences of a course of action and then taking responsibility for those consequences, and 4) *Directness* – the absolute confidence in the consciously deliberated action chosen to deal with problems. For Dewey, both of these skills and attitudes are needed if reflective thinking is to be realized. It will become apparent in the sections that follow how these aspects and attitudes have influenced the thinking of others who have gone on to design reflective practice approaches and frameworks for teachers.

For Dewey then, reflective thinking is a process that helps the learner move forward in their understanding of the subject matter, allowing them to make relevant connections to previous experiences. While Dewey focussed on the *content* of teaching, I, like Carol Rodgers (2002), believe the process is equally relevant to all aspects of teaching. The focus of this study is not on the student learner but rather the teacher who strives to move forward in their understanding and meaning-making of those unexpected and/or challenging incidents and events in the classroom that activate their stress response. This idea will be expanded further in the sections on reflective practice for teachers.

In conclusion to this brief exploration of John Dewey’s sense of reflective thinking, I turn to Hatton and Smith (1995) who outline four questions they found unanswered in researching both Dewey’s work as well as subsequent interpretations of it: 1) Is reflection limited to thought about action or is action a vital component of it? 2) Does reflection demand a time frame of immediacy or is it a long-term process? 3) Is reflection problem-centred? 4) Does reflection necessitate critical reflection and if so, to what extent? In other words, “how consciously [does] the one reflecting [take] account of wider historic, cultural and political values or beliefs in framing and reframing practical problems to which solutions are being sought?” (p. 34). These are issues that have been singled out as lacking clarity in Dewey’s work, and so I turn to Schön and Freire to further elaborate on these issues.
2.1.2. Donald Schöen on Reflective Inquiry

Donald Schöen (1930-1997), whose work was largely influenced by that of Dewey, believed that “we are in need of inquiry into the epistemology of practice” (p. viii). Schöen was a philosopher and professor of urban planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, as Dewey, recognized the importance of context when considering the concepts of knowledge, learning and growth. Like Dewey, he saw the limitations of the scientific method for creating knowledge. Schöen (1987) saw a need to escape what he called “technical rationality”, which was the “dominant epistemology of practice” in professional education” (p. 21). From his perspective, the student “has to see on his own behalf and in his own way the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved…he can’t see just by being told” (p. 17). As such, Schöen (1983) believed there was a need to study “the experience of learning by doing and the artistry of good coaching” (p. 17). He wrote that one could learn by doing, particularly in the “swampy lowland where situations are confusing ‘messes’ incapable of technical solution” (p. 42).

In his book, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983), Schöen explores the relationship between knowing and doing, thinking and doing, and research and practice. Unlike Dewey, Schöen’s main focus is on “the doing.” He asks the question: “What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage [emphasis mine]?” (p. viii). He examines reflective inquiry through the lens of understanding – ways of knowing in action – one’s professional practice. By knowing in action he is referring to the “tacit” knowledge that is, “implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing” (p. 49). The tacit knowledge is that which practitioners hold, but may not be able to articulate how it has come to be known. This is where the need for “good coaching” arises, whereby the coach can pass on the tacit knowledge through modelling. Reflection on “knowing in action” is holding one’s awareness in the here and now with the intention of focusing what is being thought about in order to try and articulate that knowledge to another.

Teachers who are engaging in reflective practice need to be aware of their thoughts and actions in the present moment, in the “swampy lowlands” of the classroom, if they are to monitor their response processes to puzzling situations that arise. Since reflection is for the purpose of personal and professional learning and growth, an
intentional focus on the present moment is one opportunity to be aware and make adjustments to one’s practice. Given this social nature of learning whereby “experience is mediated by the social surroundings” (Moon, 2004, p. 22), it is through the doing and reflecting on the doing, that one can reflect on and possibly reconsider that “tacit” knowledge practitioners hold without always knowing exactly why or questioning its present relevance.

For Schön (1983), practitioners, “stimulated by surprise, ...turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action”, asking themselves, “What are the criteria by which I make this judgment?” or, “How am I framing the problem that I am trying to solve?” (p. 50). Like Dewey’s ‘obstacle’, ‘perplexity’, or ‘unsettled situation’, Schön identifies the “surprise” or uncertainty as the starting point of inquiry. This differs from Dewey in that it is not presented so much as a problem but simply a curiosity. This addresses one of the questions asked by Hatton and Smith (1995): Is reflection problem-centred? Schön’s work would suggest otherwise. Perhaps too, both philosophers were of the same mind but simply chose a different way to express their thoughts.

The critical thinking aspect of reflection is also apparent in Schön’s work. Both “reflection-on-action” and “reflection-in-action” require critical thinking skills. Reflection-on-action looks back at what has been done and considers other possibilities. Reflection-in-action asks that one question one’s assumptions – there is the need to think consciously and critically about one’s thinking, and to make adjustments on the job – Schön (1983) calls it an “on-the-spot experiment” (p. 28). The initial stage is to experiment with thoughts and is followed by choosing a response and seeing its effect on the situation. Reflection-on-action, then, would be looking back on the response and assessing critically its efficacy. It could also be a way of planning for future actions should a similar situation arise. Both stages require critical thinking in order to examine the thoughts, actions and consequences of the situation.

2.1.3. Paulo Freire on Reflective Inquiry

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), who shares with both Dewey and Schön a keen interest in education and its potential impact on democracy (Lyons, 2010), focuses his work on reflective inquiry towards the social and political spheres of education. Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, studied a method particular to literacy education for
adults. In the opening remarks in Freire’s seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Richard Shaull (2005) states that, “in learning to read and write students [of Freire’s method] come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often [taking] the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them the opportunity of participation” (p. 9). Freire (1970) writes about oppression that in order “to no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world to transform it” (p. 36). He challenges the oppressed to “confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality” (p. 37). He called reality “a mere perception” and as such, it requires both critical reflection and action for transformation to be possible. Freire’s focus was most prominently on the need for critical reflection to the extent that “historic, cultural and political values or beliefs” (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 34) are to be examined in great depth.

Like Schön, Freire (1997) is fierce in his beliefs about the essential need for action: “When words are deprived of the dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well” (p. 68). What sets him apart from Schön is that the “action” to which he is referring is concerned with examining power relationships and exposing the imbalances. Freire added the social, cultural and political to the critical reflection dialogue. He recognized that beliefs and actions are historically embedded and never stand in isolation. He asserted that since reflection serves human interests it is necessarily a political process. As well, he understood that there is always a power imbalance between teacher and student, and when a teacher feels backed against the wall, he/she can always choose to use his/her power as a figure of authority to manage the students. The justification of power needs to be scrutinized through reflection so as to break down this implicit barrier to connection.

Freire (1970) saw his method of transformation as a two-step process: Stage one calls for a change in perception of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Reflection requires raising one’s consciousness to include behaviours, worldviews and ethics. Freire defines oppression as “any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (p. 40). He explains that when the oppressed take back their humanity by taking away the power of the oppressor, “they restore to the oppressors the humanity they lost in the exercise of oppression” (p. 41).
Stage two is the purging of unexamined and false beliefs “created and developed in the old world order” (p. 40).

For further clarification, I turn to Stephen Brookfield (2010) who, in his work on the importance of critical reflection, contrasts the concepts of uncritical versus critical reflection. Brookfield remarks that critical reflection “assumes that the minutiae of practice have embedded within them the struggles between unequal interests and groups that exist in the wider world” (p. 216); its objective is to uncover any assumptions that hold onto unexamined “habits of mind”. Such habits of mind refer to beliefs or judgments that we accept unquestioningly because someone once told us that they were true. Brookfield equates ideology critique with critical reflection whereby “we try to penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequities and oppression that lurk beneath” (p. 221). Here he is referring to the socially constructed reality of life. Often what we believe to be absolute is in fact a reality based on held beliefs and perceptions that, once scrutinized, “by turning logic on its head, looking at situations sideways and making imaginative leaps, we realize that things are the way they are for a reason” (p. 216). He states that the key to critical reflection is “a self-conscious awareness of how we come to know what we know and an ability to appraise the accuracy of the grounds for truth that undergird assertions and practices to which we subscribe” (p. 226). Maxine Greene (1995) further reinforces this need when addressing teachers’ responsibility to teach thinking critically and consciously about one’s thinking:

“People must become aware of the ways they construct their realities as they live together – how they grasp the appearances of things, how and when they interrogate their lived worlds, how they acknowledge the multiple perspectives that exist for making sense of the commonsense world.” (p. 65)

From my experience, this takes effort, constant, conscious attention to feelings, thoughts, and assumptions, along with open-minded and purposeful interaction with others in order to be exposed to and attentive to those multiple points of view.

2.2. Reflective Practice for Teachers

While there is an ever-expanding interest and body of research on reflective practice for teachers, there seems to be lack of clarity around its definition and structures of practice (Atkins & Murphy, 1992; Calderhead, 1989; Moon, 2004; Rodgers, 2002;
Smyth, 1989; Tremmel, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Rodgers (2002), who points to the work of Dewey as encompassing most of the essential aspects of a valuable reflective practice, suggests that those who do turn to philosophers for their direction are often philosophers themselves and are not representative of the practitioner looking to actually construct an effective reflective practice approach. Moon (2004) considers reflective practice “a professionalized form of ‘reflective learning’” (p. 80). She uses the terms reflection and ‘reflective learning’ interchangeably, understanding that the purpose of reflection is to learn. She posits that ‘reflective learning’ “simply emphasizes the intention to learn as a result of reflection” (p. 80). In other words, reflective practice is simply an expansion of reflection.

2.2.1. Approaches of Reflection

There are dozens of reflective teaching models to choose if one is looking to develop a personal practice. Nicola Filby (1995) for example, cites 36 models at the end of her work on reflective professional development models. I have chosen studies that do not have a solely subject matter focus, since I am interested in the values and interrelational aspects of reflective practice. While the process (approaches and frameworks), preconditions (attitudes, mindset), content (values, subject content, context), and product (effective teaching, emancipation, interpersonal skills) (Calderhead, 1989) may vary, there is much similarity within each category. I turn to a few selected approaches for illustration.

Stages

Many reflective practice approaches involve a process of delineating stages or steps through which to cycle. Joelle Jay (1999), in his work on examining reflective practices, outlines three stages of reflective practice as developed by instructors of the Teacher Education Program at the University of Washington: 1) Description – What is happening? 2) Comparison – What are some different explanations?, and 3) Evaluation, –What is the best decision based on my own morals and ethics and who is served by this choice? In their book, Reflective Practice to Improve Schools (2001), York-Barr and colleagues suggest a four-step process to reflection: 1) Description – What happened? 2) Analysis/Interpretation – Why did this happen and what were other potential contributing factors? 3) Meaning and Application – So what? What have I learned?, and 4)
Implications for action – Now what? With whom should I reflect on this and what do I want to remember for next time? (p. 47). Barbara Larivee (2000) offers three stages: 1) Examination – Questioning one’s actions in relation to desired outcomes, 2) Struggle – Becoming self-aware and noticing patterns in behaviours, and 3) Perceptual Shift – Shifting thinking and engaging in new patterns of thought and behaviours. Finally, Korthangen and Vasalos, (2010), include five phases in their model of Core Reflection: 1) Experience/problematic solution, which is a description with a focus on strengths instead of problems, 2a) Awareness of ideal situation – “What did you want to achieve or create?” 2b) Awareness of limitations – “How are you refraining yourself from achieving this?” 3) Awareness of core qualities 4) Actualisation of core qualities, and 5) Experimenting with new behaviour (p. 540).

While differing in terminology as well as in number and complexity of steps, these four approaches are very similar in that they all begin with some form of “perplexity” (Dewey), “surprise” (Schön), or inner discomfort that causes the reflective practitioner to pause and look critically for explanations. The final stage of each approach is to act based on the newly discovered perspective. Three of the four are examples of reflection-in-action; York-Barr and colleagues (2001) recognize reflection-in-action as a “potentially powerful” aspect of reflection, but reserve its potentiality for master teachers whose minds are more “freed up” from all the other aspects of teaching such as curriculum demands and student engagement. For the purpose of this study, I would argue that all but perhaps the very novice teachers may be capable of pausing in action to notice, assess and choose carefully a plan of action. However, such ability may call for what Calderhead (1989) termed “preconditions” or mindset.

Mindset

Reflective practice could be considered a state of mind coupled with a set of activities. John Dewey included open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, responsibility, and directness (or confidence) as key attributes for reflective thought. Most scholars of reflective practice would undoubtedly argue that for one to be self-aware and open to other perspectives, or even to choose to engage in some form of critical reflection that includes both considering multiple perspectives as well as weighing the long-term social and moral consequences of decisions (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993), a certain
mindset is required. The following paragraphs provide some examples from the literature.

Within their conceptual framework for teacher reflection, Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) suggest that teachers need to be motivated to grow, be willing to take risks, and be inclined to serve the best interests of their students. They further identify efficacy, flexibility, and social responsibility as key attributes for teachers wishing to engage successfully in a reflective practice. Efficacy refers to the belief that they can make a difference; flexibility is required in order to be open to other points of view; social responsibility is the concern with caring about others, students and the greater community. I would argue that teachers who strive to remain responsive as opposed to reactive in the classroom cannot help but foster more responsive students who will then go out into the community and respond in kind.

The central theme of Tremmel’s (1993), *Zen and the Art of Reflective Practice in Teacher Education*, is the value of “paying attention, not only to what is going on around us but also within us” (p. 447). Tremmel believes that this skill is the most important to reflective practice. Tremmel was inspired by Schön’s work on both reflection-in-action and awareness – “awareness of the world, awareness of the self acting in the world, and awareness of being aware” (p. 447). Tremmel sees teaching the skill of paying attention as a way of helping teachers “change the way their minds work so that they are prepared for reflection” (p. 441). One might equate this to Dewey’s spontaneous interpretation where thoughts and assumptions are questioned after the sensory effect of the perplexing experience.

Tremmel (1993) offers three ways to teach the art of paying attention: 1) “Freewriting,” which is a form of stream-of-consciousness writing whereby the person writes down everything that comes to mind, free of editorial comment, 2) Using the term or tool “paying attention” to discuss an interaction – in Tremmel’s example, he discusses a teacher’s misdirected anger toward a time constraint as reflective of the mind losing track and then becoming flustered and unable to find the thread of the lesson being taught, and 3) “Slices of classroom life,” which entails a written description of a school event followed by a reflection of in-action and on-action thoughts and feelings that arose. In reflecting on the research he was doing with the concept of “paying attention” Tremmel (1993) remarks:
“Several years ago I never would have thought that addressing distracting thoughts and feelings, such as wandering attention and anger, would become part of my teaching. However, today I can think of a no more important and difficult lesson to learn. Sometimes slowly, and sometimes through the haze of my own distractions, I am beginning to recognize not only the importance of teachers’ skills and knowledge, but also the importance of how their minds work.” (p. 450)


Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) suggest three key dispositions needed for reflective practice, all of which they place under the term “presence,” defined as being “in touch with one’s core potential” – open mind, open heart, and open will. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) also identify the importance of presence, which they define as,

“A state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step.” (p. 265)

Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) assert that it is through an open mind, open heart, and open will, that “personal strengths, insights and possibilities can surface creating a new relationship between the practitioner and the environment” (p. 542). They then identify the importance of dealing with biographical issues in order to be fully present. First, one needs to feel the negative impact of limiting beliefs. This I equate to Brooksfield’s (2010) “disorienting dilemma” whereby one feels acutely aware of the ability to function in the here and now. Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) point out that one can only feel this inner discomfort if one has already had a firm sense of presence in advance of the dilemma. This is the pre-work of becoming aware of the body state in balance, or homeostatic – when the body is not in a state of stress or on high alert for pending ‘danger’.

Understanding is another attribute Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) deem essential. What they are referring to here is the understanding of belief as a “mental construct” that can be challenged. When one thinks about one’s thinking and challenges assumptions and beliefs based on past experiences and knowledge, one has the potential to disarm seemingly powerful forces that pull a person away from desired responses and outcomes. A final attribute is “will” or motivation. According to Korthagen and Vasalos, in order to effect change, one must have the will to do so.
Barbara Larivee (2000) states that, “to be critically reflective is to act with integrity, openness, and commitment rather than compromise, defensiveness, or fear. Here she is referring to values and goals. She recognizes that first one must bring to awareness one’s values, stay committed to goals, and also be open to flexibility when a particular value needs to take precedence over another conflicting value. An example would be if a teacher values both consistency and fairness for all students but learns that a student in his or her class is unable to arrive on time because of family obligations. In such a case, the teacher may consider placing fairness ahead of consistency and allowing what is fair for that particular student to take precedence over consistency of classroom management protocols. Also probing these notions within the realm of creative arts activities, Georgina Barton (2015) argues that reflective practice and critical analysis are “major components in any creative discipline” (p. 65). Although focused on the meaning of music for undergraduate students, her “collaborative professional approach” of reporting and responding, relating, reasoning and reconstructing offers another insight into the value of reflective practice for moving people through the “process of deconstruction, reconstruction and analysis” that ultimately results in “a focus on self-understanding” (p. 65).

**Content and Product**

In much of the research, the content (values, subject content, context), and product (effective teaching, emancipation, interpersonal skills) of the reflective approaches I have examined tend to be linked, so I have chosen to merge them together for the purposes of this review. In my search into the literature on reflective practice for teachers, I found that a good portion is directed toward student teachers. As such, much of the content is on reflective teaching and student learning of subject matter. In these studies, the product is generally focussed on effective teaching skills. Since the primary focus of this research is on effective teaching with regard to intra- and inter-personal skills, with a concentration on personal values, beliefs, context and self-awareness skills, I have focussed my research on those particular approaches.

While content may be considered a very important aspect of teaching, Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993), Joelle (1999), Korthagen and Vasalos (2010), Larivee (2000), and Tremmel (1993) all include self-awareness, value and belief identification and exploration, and social responsibility. While the terminology and specific content
within each framework might differ, the purpose of their work is focussed in the same direction – critical reflection for the purpose of personal and professional growth. Colton and Sparks-Langer (1993) focus on the social and ethical decisions that teachers make daily. They state that along with technical proficiency, morals and democratic principles must have equal attention when considering reflective teacher decisions. Joelle (1999) looks at bridging the gap between theory and practice, asking teachers to examine their biases and assumptions and alter them as needed. Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) propose a way of “shedding light on the underlying issues determining the situation” (p. 529), as opposed to finding a “quick fix” to any number of complex circumstances that arise during the chaos of a typical day in the classroom. Larivee (2000) recognizes the changing landscape of the classroom where more and more students arrive at school ill prepared for learning. She believes that teachers cannot manage such realities without self-awareness, self-inquiry, and self-reflection. She sees these skills beginning with the teacher as opposed to his or her students. And finally, Tremmel (1993) believes that the failure of many reflective practice approaches is due a lack of understanding and skill in “the art of paying attention” (p. 434). It is clear from these researchers that the ‘curriculum’ for learning is much more than simply course content; critical reflection for the purposes of analysis and learning from experience are also at the forefront of many practices in reflective thinking and learning.

From my experience and observations, the skills needed to teach an effective lesson, manage the classroom, provide effective study skills, open students’ minds to great thinkers in the world, and provide students opportunities to grow as individuals, are very important. However, I would have to agree with those researchers who recognize that some of the most important work must come from within – from the individual teachers who are forced daily to face unexpected and challenging situations that trigger emotions, which if left unchecked, can lead to consequences such as school refusal, failure, and increased anxiety, to name only a few (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). On the part of teachers, it could potentially lead to teacher dissatisfaction, depression, increased anxiety, resignation or early retirement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

With all of these factors in mind, I turn to my own reflective practice/intentional response approach, one that I began to use personally in advance of this study. In delving into the literature to better understand its potential efficacy for others, I find it is
better described as a new combination of the already identified important aspects of an effective reflective practice.

**An alternate reflective practice cycle**

**Goal Exploration – The Pre-Work**

The reflective response cycle I developed begins with an intention that comes out of an exploration of values. An intention can also be considered a “mission” or an “ideal,” which Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) see as looking at one’s “ideal” practice or self in the classroom. The purpose of the intention is to have an easily accessible focus on which to direct one’s attention when faced with a decision on how to respond to a challenging incident in the classroom. Thompson and Pascal introduce the notion of “reflection-for-action” whereby “planning, thinking ahead about what is to come, so that we can draw on our experience” (p. 311) is at the forefront of one’s mind. This is the purpose of the intention – it allows the teacher to have a ready plan of focus when an unexpected situation arises. All nine participants in this study found their own method for keeping their intention at the forefront of their minds, either with a note on their desk, a word on the whiteboard, or a meditation at the beginning of their day. The intention is chosen based on a values exploration and an examination of past experiences – pre-practice exercise – during which teachers are asked to identify their most important intrinsic desires/values, and then to look at past events to uncover patterns of thought, feelings and behaviours. Maxine Greene (1995) discusses the importance of the imagination as being the first step to change, “toward acting on the belief that they can be changed” (p. 23). When one can identify what is deeply valued and call up those images in the imagination, then one has a goal/desire to aim for. Greene continues to explain that,

“A space of freedom opens before the person moved to choose in the light of possibility; she or he feels what it signifies to be an initiator and an agent, existing among others but with the power to choose for herself or himself.” (p. 23)

Once a teacher has looked closely at his or her intentions for classroom practice, based on personally explored and identified values and goals, he/she has a direction in which to go, a roadmap to follow that is personal. This can be empowering; it is the power to choose and act in accordance with self-selected values rather than values that have been pre-selected or collectively expected of all teachers. As an example, when asked
to consider their values, several of the participants in this study identified peace or inner calm. This may not have been uncovered if they were directed to look at only professional goals for the classroom. The open, non-specific question, “What are the eight things you want most in life,” allowed them to examine their intentions in any aspect of their lives.

Korthagen and Vasalos (2010) named their process of identifying goals as Professional identity and Mission. The first is to uncover the type of teacher the reflective practitioner would like to be, and the second delves into questions of “calling”, “inspiration”, and “meaning”, both professionally and personally. However, since this process is guided, it may send the teacher in a very specific direction. Barbara Larrivee (2000) also discusses the importance of value and belief exploration. She does not, however, offer a specific route for such exploration. Further, Larrivee (2000) articulates the discrepancy one may find between beliefs and values proclaimed and those used in action. This may be one of the drawbacks to reflection in isolation; one may not notice self-selecting data of values based on personal meaning and assumptions.

As recognized by Dewey, Schön, and other scholars of reflective inquiry, the process of reflection can be done in isolation, but the depth and richness of the engagement in learning is heightened through interaction with others. For this process to be as meaningful as possible one must consider carefully with whom to interact for it is very personal work. Zeichner and Liston (1996) remark that, “without those companions, and without that trust, our reflection on our teaching will be severely limited” (p. 19).

Further, Kemmis’s (1985) work on action research and the politics of reflection highlights collaboration as one of four key aspects essential to a true reflective practice. Like others, he sees collaboration as a way of cross checking one’s beliefs and assumptions, which he refers to as self-deceptions, recognizing that “collective self-deception remains [always] possible” (p. 153). Collective self-deception is possible because peers may choose their collaborators based on similarity of ideology. It is much less risky to disclose classroom difficulties to those whom one trusts to be of like mind. Further, Kremmis (1985) outlines the benefits of collaboration in analyzing/exploring personal uncertainties and dissatisfactions. Open-mindedness, one of the attributes deemed important by many for effective reflective practitioners, necessitates openness to differing perspectives. One must seek from others, either personally or through professional literature, differing points of view.
**Dialogue**

As stated above, the reflective practice in this study assumes the pre-work of value exploration has been done, preferably through dialogue with another. For this kind of deep work to occur, as suggested earlier, there must be a trusting relationship in place. The necessary skills must also be learned for it takes great effort and a certain level of vulnerability to create a space for true dialogue. I refer here to David Bohm’s (1996) concept of dialogue, which asks that those in dialogue be open to questioning of fundamental assumptions. David Bohm (1917-1992), a physicist whose research was based on quantum theory, focussed a great deal of his work on the nature of thought. He was interested in helping others change the way they think and the way they think about thinking. He saw dialogue as a way of achieving such a change. Bohm (1996) states that true dialogue “goes into the process of thought behind the assumptions, not just the assumptions themselves” (p. 9). Bohm’s (1996) four key principles for dialogue are as follows:

- **Participation**: Bohm believed that if we all participate as a whole as opposed to living in a “fragmented” way in which we identify with our thoughts and consider them the “truth,” then we will live together more peacefully.

- **Coherence**: Bohm saw knowledge as a construction of a whole. He believed that by examining our thoughts and comparing them to the present moment, we will get to this realization – that there is no “fragmentation” except in our own mistaken beliefs. He explains that the problem is that, “The parts [of knowledge] are parts of a whole [and the] things which really fit, and belong together, are treated as if they do not” (p. 56).

- **Proprioception**: Bohm also calls this “self-perception of thought,” “self-awareness of thought,” or “thought is aware of itself in action” (p. 91). He explains that by being more attentive, we can be aware of the result thought produces outside of as well as inside ourselves. Further, we might even be able to recognize how perception is influenced by our thoughts.

- **Enfoldment**: Bohm believed that the nature of reality and consciousness is an unfolding, never-completed process. He believed that thoughts do not simply disappear but rather reappear time and again and manifest our reality. The more we repeat those thoughts, the more ingrained they become until they “prove” themselves and then create “facts” that aren’t actually facts.

For clarity on how to put these principles to practice in the form of dialogue, I turn to Isaacs (1999) who has broken them down into four essential skills: listening, respecting, suspending and voicing:
• **Listening:** this requires openness to others’ perspectives. It is not defensive but rather empathic. Bohm (2013) asks that those in dialogue become “aware of the subtle fear and pleasure sensations that “block” [one’s] ability to listen freely” (p. 5). Listening is a combination of Bohm’s participation and enfolding; we listen to and take in the whole person. Issacs lists five points of consideration for effective listening: be aware of thought, stick to the facts, follow the disturbance within, listen without resistance, and be willing to sit with inner silence.

• **Respecting:** this relates to really understanding the speaker and where he/she is coming from. This is respecting the self, others, the differences and the oppositions. Bohm believes that dialogue is not about reaching agreement but rather the ability to tolerate difference and conflicting opinions. This skill is not only about respecting the other but also their language, their facial expressions, their tone of voice and the space in which the dialogue is happening.

• **Suspending:** this requires the suspension of one’s own assumptions or opinions, neither believing nor disbelieving them but simply holding them at bay. Bohm also talks about suspending one’s reaction to another’s opinion. By doing this, “not only will I now not insult that person outwardly, but I will suspend the insult that I make inside of me” (p. 23). Here he is referring to the way thoughts have a ripple effect in our bodies that can magnify an already difficult situation if left unchecked. We act as mirrors to each other so if I say something unkind, there is an internal effect on me as well as on the person to whom I have addressed my comment. Further, I will see the effect on the other through their body reaction and my own internal reaction will potentially magnify. Bohm states that by suspending a strong opinion, “I can see things that I wouldn’t have seen if I had simply carried out that anger, or if I have suppressed it and said, ‘I’m not angry’ or ‘I shouldn’t be angry’” (p. 23).

• **Voicing:** this is both the skill of listening to one’s inner voice as well as choosing what to say and what not to say aloud. The point here is to use silence well, letting the space between what is heard and what needs to be said linger long enough to really choose well what needs to be articulated.

As stated earlier, these skills do not come easily and take great effort and a certain level of vulnerability to create a space for true dialogue. Bohm (1996) acknowledges that, “you can have the attitude of the dialogue by yourself, as you weigh all the opinions without deciding” (p. 14). However, working in dialogue with others provides a much richer and possibly more meaningful experience. While both Bohm (1996) and Issacs (1999) work is focussed on dialogue in large groups, I propose that this form of dialogue can be very useful one on one during the values work as well as internally for the reflective↔response cycle outlined in this study.
Past Experiences – Pre-work

As mentioned in step one, this next pre-work exercise, which comes after the values exploration in the reflective process, asks teachers to reflect on times of stress in their lives, identifying the emotions and the coping strategies they used to deal with those emotions. The purpose of this exercise is to uncover patterns of emotion and response to challenging situations. As Bohm (1996) states, “the different opinions that you have are the result of past thought: all your experiences, what other people have said [etcetera]” (p. 10). And Heesoon Bai (2015) writes that, “much of who we are, how we are, and what we do seems to be unconscious or barely conscious” (p. x). One of the participants in the study expressed his constant agitation in meetings. He felt frustrated, helpless and “trapped”, unable to excuse himself from these situations. Through our discussions, he was able to identify a past childhood experience when he was indeed trapped in a car for a period of time. This helped him see a pattern of rushed and often frantic behaviour that created discord in his life. After the study had ended, he told me that he no longer “attended meetings” – he simply had “interesting conversations.” A change in perspective – “I am not actually trapped” – opened the door to a new way of thinking about meetings. He was awed by this discovery and, in reference to Bai’s comment above, recognized that it had not been in the realm of his consciousness. Another participant discovered a pattern of helplessness in her recollections of past experiences. Part of her daily intention was to be more assertive in her dealings with students. What she realized was that “helplessness” was not an actuality but rather an unexamined, unconscious belief.

Bohm (1996) addresses this in his discussion on memory. He explains that thoughts and past feelings, what he refers to as “felts”, cannot be separated – both are a function of memory. He states:

“You can produce states of stress in the body from memory of states of stress. Therefore, when memory acts you cannot separate the intellectual function, the emotional function, the chemical function, the muscular function – because this tacit knowledge is also a kind of memory – they’re all there.” (p. 7)

Bohm is referring to Michael Polanyi’s use of “tacit knowledge,” which is knowledge we have but are not able to articulate in words. Schön also refers to “tacit knowledge” when discussing the knowledge of a coach that cannot be easily passed on to the apprentice.
without experiencing the knowledge in action. According to Bohm (1996), this “tacit knowledge” comes from our thoughts that originate from our whole culture. He states that, “We pick it up as children from parents, from friends, from school, from newspapers, from books, and so on” (p. 59). Since we cannot simply “cut out [some parts over others], we have to go into it more deeply…we want to get to the root of it, to the base, to the source of it” (p. 57). This is the deep work that is made more accessible through those unique skills of dialogue.

The Work

Once teachers have uncovered personal values and goals, explored possible thought and belief patterns, and selected an intention for their classroom work, they are ready to take the reflective response cycle into action. Keeping their intention at the forefront of their mind – to the best of their ability in the busyness of the classroom – they are asked to notice when triggered into a stress response whereby the state of the body may alter by way of skeletal muscles or heart rate changes (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). This could be equated with Bohm’s (1996) internal dialoguing – noticing the feelings in the body. This is the signal to pause and reflect on what thoughts may have triggered the response. Again, as Bohm (1996) suggests, teachers are asked to make the connection between the thoughts and the feeling. Teachers are further asked to try to find a personal fear behind those thoughts – the emotion. Fears are simply opinions. If I am afraid that students will fail if they do not do their homework, and that their refusal reflects badly on me and I will be seen as an unworthy teacher, my opinion may be that it is my fault if the student does not get their work done. The purpose of this exercise is to shed light on the belief or opinion so that it may be questioned and possibly reframed. Once the belief is exposed there is room for open-mindedness to alternative realities.

Bohm (1996) talks about the absolutes and the possibility in dialogue to discover that what once seemed an absolute necessity is not necessarily so. Through dialogue, there is the possibility of discovering that one’s views are false and that most things are in fact negotiable. In the classroom, this process could unfold in the following scenario: A student laughs as the teacher is speaking to the class and the teacher feels his/her heart begin to race, his/her face flush and his/her palms perspire. The teacher feels anger, but instead of reacting immediately, he/she pauses for a moment – rational thought “requires
a nice, quiet brain” (p. 62). The teacher then checks into the feeling beneath the anger and identifies the familiar feeling of shame that has cropped up time and again in his/her life. This could be a hypothesis as suggested by Dewey’s (1933) work on reflective thought. The teacher acknowledges that he/she is not shameful in this situation and that he/she is simply passing on important information to his/her students – Dewey’s reasoning. The teacher also acknowledges that he/she has no idea why the student had laughed at that moment – Dewey’s testing. He/she feels his/her heart begin to slow down, his/her body cool off and he/she calmly chooses a response that will align with his/her desire for greater connection (the intention) with his/her students.

This example can also be seen through the lens of Schön’s (1983) “knowing in action”; the teacher is aware in the here-and-now of what he/she is thinking and doing in order to try and articulate the knowledge as he/she works through his/her distressing thoughts. It also speaks to the omnipresent power struggles in all human interactions that Freire discusses in his work. In the situation above, it could have gone in a completely different direction if the teacher had reacted automatically and unconsciously to his/her anger. That student who may have laughed at his/her friend’s joke or a passing thought of something that had happened earlier in the day, could have been crushed by the words or tone of his/her teacher. His/her reaction, given the power differential of most teacher-student relationships, could have sent him/her into his/her own stress response based on past experiences, and his/her learning in that class could have ended in a moment, for his/her reaction could have potentially created thought patterns leading to his/her own unhelpful ‘habits of mind’.

The ethical and political nature of teacher decisions is about the willingness to see the world as “unveiled” (Freire, 1970). Students, parents and other educators who may have differing philosophies of education based on differing life experiences constantly challenge a teacher’s instruction. The teacher who is open and willing to look at and reflect critically on such varying philosophies has a better chance of breaking down the power differential inherent in teaching and allowing students a sense of freedom from alienation. Freire (1970) argues that, “as men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena” (p. 70). This brings to mind the technology dilemma that teachers often face. When students are expected to bring their own device to school for the purposes of accessing technology, the teachers,
parents and students are put in difficult situations. For some teachers, smart phones, laptop computers and tablets are a distraction in their classes. They are an opportunity for students to disengage and hide their boredom, fears or exhaustion behind screens. For many parents, this liberation of technology in the schools ignites their fears about distracted or irresponsible youth who may lose or have stolen their expensive devices. Parents also fear for their children’s future based on poor marks and stringent university entrance requirements if they are allowed phones and other devices in the learning environment. Students also know themselves and often report that they struggle to resist the daily barrage of texts and social media posts they are accustomed to responding to instantly. And yet, many schools see the value in technology and want students and teachers to have unlimited access to their devices.

Willingness on the part of a reflective teacher to see all aspects of the technology dilemma and remain open to weighing in on both the constraints and affordances may be helpful so as not to alienate any one person through a hasty dismissal of an opinion. Engaging in dialogue with students, parents, colleagues and administrators is a way into a deeper understanding of all interest groups. Dialogue allows Dewey’s (1933) ‘essential attitudes’ to work in the reflective process, for in order to engage in true dialogue, one must necessarily remain open-minded, show wholeheartedness, be responsible to the process, and be direct in the action taken. Beck and Cassidy (2009) remark that, “open-ended dialogue where the intention is to ‘receive’ the other, and ‘attend’ to the other through empathic listening, enables both sides to move to new co-understandings that have the potential to break through the most intractable of positions and situations” (p. 58). “Co-understandings” allow dialogue to help break down the power differentials to which Freire (1970) refers – when one feels heard and acknowledged there is an increased likelihood of feeling like an equal participant in the process.

When teachers are able to stay calm and grounded in their values and intentions then they may be better able to stay connected to their sense of self (the concept of self will be examined in the following section of this literature review). Teachers may also be able to model a sense of calm in dealing with discord for those students who are watching as well as for those who need help in finding more effective coping strategies. With an inner calm, there may be an opportunity to see more possibilities for action than when one is rushed and in a state of stress. My personal experience tells me that a stressed brain cannot teach or learn well; staying calm allows those in the classroom to
function more effectively. As Nel Noddings (2004) has articulated, “recognition of the relational nature of teaching should enhance the experience of both students and teachers” (p. vii). The teacher is a role model for developing strong connections/relationships (Greenberg, 2009). Without their leadership, the students may struggle with their own sense of self. If the teacher is able to model caring and concern for others then hopefully the students in the class will see themselves and others as worthy of care and concern. Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) write:

“A fog of forgetfulness is looming over education. Forgotten in the fog is that education is about human beings. And as schools are places where human beings get together, we have also forgotten that education is primarily about human beings who are in relation with one another.” (p. 5)

Teachers may at times need to be reminded that we teach people first and curriculum second, for there is not much use in curriculum if the students are too disengaged to absorb it. In reality all children are not necessarily interested in learning. Gert Biesta (2004) argues that, “education is located not in the activities of the teacher, nor in the activities of the learner, but in the interaction between the two” (pp.12-13). And Bai (2015) states that, “what one human being learns from another goes far beyond explicit instruction […] we need to take the phenomenon of implicit teaching seriously” (p. x). It is the relationships that matter in the classroom. Allan MacKinnon calls the caring relationship a teacher has for his/her students “intellectual empathy”. In a comment to me on one of my papers in 2017 he wrote:

“Excellence in teaching has less to do with how well the teacher conveys the curriculum and more to do with how he/she absorbs what the students bring to the classroom. The establishment of relationships that are educational depend on teachers’ empathy and care for students, specifically their capacity to reframe their world from the point of view of the students themselves, their families, the milieu and so on. It would be an exaggeration to say that the teacher becomes ‘selfless’ […] but that’s close. The teacher can see possible futures for the students that they cannot see for themselves at the time, and that can only be achieved through this deep intellectual empathy” (personal correspondence).

When there is a sense of calm in the classroom, there is an opportunity for the brain to feel ‘safe’, and the teacher and student to take in and optimize the learning experience.

Beck and Cassidy (2009) remark that having the ‘intent’ to care does not make classrooms caring places. This is where reflective inquiry can be so helpful for teachers
who wish to connect better with themselves as well as their students. If I ask a student to stay in after school to go over some homework that has been clearly misunderstood, but the student looks frustrated by my request and communicates through tone of voice or body language their irritation with my ‘caring’ request, then is my request received as one of caring? My response is “yes”, provided I have paid attention to those non-verbal forms of communication that Bohm (1996) refers to as coherence and Isaacs (1999) calls the skill of respecting. If I pause for a moment, sit in silence and really listen to what the student is communicating, then I can hear them out and find a way to navigate through the situation.

This scenario played out in my office one day when a student relayed the story of a teacher’s “lack of caring” for him. He believed his teacher disliked him and did not have his best interests at heart when she had him stay behind after class. From his perspective, she clearly did not care at all that he had responsibilities at home to attend to and that his mother depended on him to be home straight away after school. When I approached the teacher, she was mortified that she had not taken the time to ask his permission to be held back for extra help but had forged on, assuming her proffered help would be welcome and appreciated. Both parties ended the day feeling alienated from the other. The student felt misunderstood and the teacher felt rejected. From this new information – a new perspective – the teacher was able to re-examine her assumptions about student motivations for learning in general, and specifically for that particular student’s life situation. The teacher was able to explain to the student her intentions and they figured out a way that she could help without causing distress.

In their research on the ethics of care, Beck and Cassidy’s (2009) school participants found that “care of others entailed the knowing of self, increased awareness of self and others, and the ability to increase the capacity to perceive and understand the needs of others” (p. 61). This is illustrated in the above example with the teacher’s increased awareness of the student’s perceptions of her request and his home situation coupled with her uncovered beliefs about student needs and desires, led her to better understand herself. She was also given the opportunity to generalize those lessons to other students in her classes. For a teacher to be other-oriented requires focused self-reflection and knowledge.
Critical reflection as defined by Barbara Larrivee (2000) “merges critical inquiry, the conscious consideration of the ethical implications [which is the impact of self-concept] and consequences of teaching practice, with self-reflection, deep examination of personal beliefs, and assumptions about human potential and learning” (p. 293). She further remarks that,

“Teacher beliefs are self-generating, and often unchallenged. Unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves infusing personal beliefs ["convictions we hold dearly, have confidence in their truth, while acknowledging they are not susceptible to proof" (p. 295)] and values into a professional identity, resulting in developing a deliberate code of conduct.” (p. 293)

The reflective response cycle examined in this study asks teachers to find their intentional, well-thought-out “code of conduct” and then to model it. As Parker Palmer (1997) states, “We teach who we are” (p.15), and Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) echoes him with, “I cannot unproblematically bring subjugated knowledges to light when I am not free of my own learned racism, fat oppression, classism, ableism, or sexism. No teacher is free of these learned and internalized oppressions” (pp. 307-308). How do we peel back the nuanced layers of our ‘selves’ to discover hidden truths and darknesses?

“When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly I cannot teach them well” (Palmer, 1997, p. 15). Here Palmer refers to connecting in order to teach well, connecting first to self and then to others. When I see my students through the lens of my past experiences and beliefs I am likely to react in ways that are not a true reflection or understanding of them. And if I am not able to at least attempt to see them for who they are, I am not able to connect with them in an authentic way. In essence, who I will be connecting with are students I am creating based on my own internal perception and dialogue which is potentially unrelated to those who sit before me in the classroom. We need to become visible to ourselves before we can ever hope to see our students with any clarity.

The question then is how do we open the door for teachers to engage in such self-exploration? Where do we offer the opportunities to teachers already in the field to explore and redefine themselves? And then, how do we follow up with them in order to help them stay on track and ever vigilant of learned beliefs and reactions creeping back
in? In this study, I explore the potential of a reflective response cycle for helping teachers address these questions.

2.3. Exploring the “Self”

In the unlikely event of loss of cabin pressure, panels above your seat will open revealing oxygen masks...secure your own mask first before helping others.” (Flight attendant on any airline before takeoff)

Reflective practice as defined by the previous section is essentially a way to examine and understand better how our sense of self has been constructed by the collective culture in which we are born and raised (Bohm, 1996), with the intention of personal and professional growth. It attempts to dig into “habits of mind” (Dewey, 1933) through the process of being aware of and thinking critically about thinking (Bohm). Further, it suggests that by scrutinizing one’s thoughts “in-action” (Schön, 1983) and uncovering the deep feelings within those thoughts, there is an opportunity for unexamined and no longer meaningful beliefs about self and others to be revealed and then replaced by those more fitting to one’s current time and place. As noted in the flight attendant quote above, the reflective response cycle used in this study asks first that teachers prepare by examining their own sense of self. It supports the belief that while the teacher cannot control all of the variables that get in the way of student learning such as insufficient study time, lack of sleep, or family and peer conflict, there is the possibility of influencing them in a positive way through the classroom environment.

2.3.1. Defining a Self

Being moored, learning to moor oneself and being unmoored is a good summary of the trajectory of self and the problem of navigating a human life. (Benson, 2001, p. 101)

There is no common answer to the question of what it means to be a self (Damasio, 1999; Harré 1998; Martin, Sugarman, & Hickinbottom, 2009). The literature reveals that it is a complex construct whose creation is equally challenging to unravel. Some philosophers and researchers suggest that we have multiple selves, while followers of the Cartesian tradition look at the brain/body duality as a way into what it means to be a self. Rom Harré’s (1998) investigations into of the study of self suggest that, “no aspect of humanity is so marked by muddled thinking and confusion of thought”
For the purposes of this research, I will explore the concept of self as pertaining to the whole person, in his/her entirety, as one person, one body, one self.

Harré (1998) states that, “each unique human being is a complicated patchwork of ever-changing personal attributes and relations” (p. 2). He believes that having a sense of self is having a sense of one’s location; he refers to the self as a “site” (as opposed to an entity), from which a person is able to perceive and act upon the world. There is one “site” which is the body of the one, unique individual/person/self. Maxine Green (1995) states that, “we can only know as situated beings [since] every one of us inhabits a humanly fabricated world” (p. 4). Antonio Damasio (1999) sees the “scope” of the self as ever changing as a result of experiences. He explains that survival mechanisms in the brain and body along with education and acculturation serve as a basis for building a sense of one’s self. And Martin and colleagues (2009) refer to persons as “embodied, embedded, and emergent within their worldly coordinations” (p. 156). These “worldly coordinations” refer to the activity and interactivity a person comes across in their lives as relational beings.

These scholars all see the person as only one self with multiple interactions impacting on how they engage with themselves and others in the world. Ciarán Benson (2001) expresses the complexity of the concept of self in the quotation at the opening of this section. “Being moored” is the potential to “know,” or at least begin to unravel who we are as human beings in a given point in time and space. Our complexity makes “knowing” an ominous pursuit. “Learning to moor oneself” is the aspiration of reflective practice. There are a multitude of opportunities in the classroom to become “unmoored” by way of interruptions, disruptions, and discomforts that come with the territory of being a teacher in the classroom. Awareness of thoughts, beliefs and the world around us is a lofty undertaking that necessitates an understanding of where we are positioned within it. How we might begin to locate ourselves in space and time is by understanding our “embodied” and “embedded[ness]” so as to grow, develop and thrive as we continue to “emerge” in the world.

Our beliefs begin within the culture of our families. What we learn as children we take along with us. Benson (2001) states that, “past encounters are neurally encoded as dispositions to re-construct and re-present themselves as feelings of recognition” (p. 104). According to Damasio (1999), “all the contents in our minds are subjective,” based
on all our experiences and our thoughts about those experiences. His *Somatic Marker Hypothesis* connects the body’s automatic responses to memory for the purposes of survival. He explains that while the accrual of these markers is a process of continual learning, “the critical, formative set of stimuli to somatic pairings is, no doubt, acquired in childhood and adolescence” (p. 179). When given opportunities to examine those subjective contents, which are connected to beliefs, and then consciously choose those that best align with how we see ourselves in the present moment, we “experience new possibilities and ways of being persons” (Martin et al., 2009, p. 166). Without such exposure to “new practices of personhood” (Martin et al., 2009, p. 166), we run the risk of holding onto those old, automatic, “neutrally encoded” and unexamined beliefs. We allow emotions, thoughts and feelings to determine our story — the way we interpret the events, people and situations in our lives — which then determines our present reality and henceforth influences our actions. As Damasio (1994) suggests, being conscious of emotions “offers you flexibility of response based on the particular history of your interaction with the environment” (p. 133).

For clarity, I turn to a classroom incident that I was made privy to several years ago when a teacher dismissed the fears of a student over an upcoming assignment. The student was led to believe based on his teacher’s dismissive reaction to his plethora of questions that she was unconcerned about his worries and his success. In reality, the reason for the teacher’s temperament stemmed from an earlier encounter with an angry student in the hallway. She walked away from that student doubting herself and her teaching ability, and those familiar feelings of insecurity, originating from past experiences and old beliefs, carried into her next class. This internal struggle led her to an emotional state that did not leave her open to flexibility in response to the worried student in the classroom. Her abrupt reaction reinforced to both herself and her student that she was not the caring person she longed to be; her story of “not good enough” became her reality for that moment. Fortunately we were able to work together to examine the situation and untangle the internal turmoil that led her to such a frame of mind, and she was able to emerge with a new sense of selfhood, at least in the short term. As Martin and colleagues (2009) state,

“because we are self-interpreting and react interactively with whatever practices we inhabit, our ongoing coordinations within such practices serve to transform both ourselves and the practices within which we are engaged.” (p. 166)
Through purposeful reflection and interaction with another, this teacher was able to “transform” her thinking and perspective on who she was as a teacher, thus “mooring” herself to a new reality – a new sense of self.

For Benson (2001), “the biological roots of knowing and feeling are intimately connected. So, also, are those of self and feeling” (p. 111). Here Benson is referring to Damasio’s understanding of the brain. What we “know” — our beliefs — come from our feelings, which in turn come from our emotions. As Benson goes on to explain, our emotions are our evolutionary compasses that are in place for our survival, either by way of threat or opportunity. When an opportunity presents itself, neurochemicals are released to ensure we are made aware of that opportunity in the hopes that we take advantage of it to increase our chances of survival. The same is true in the case of a threat. In their book, The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience (2016) Varela, Thompson, and Rosch explain how this might play out in everyday life when a person is not aware of those “biological roots”:

“Constantly one thinks, feels and acts as though one had a self to protect and preserve. The slightest encroachment on the self’s territory (a splinter in the finger, a noisy neighbor) arouses fear and anger […] Such impulses are instinctual, automatic, pervasive and powerful. They are completely taken for granted in everyday life.” (p. 62)

Our biology, then, is on constant alert, keeping us abreast of potential danger to the body. Without this understanding and awareness, we run the risk of reacting to situations based on our biology as opposed to the reality of what is truly in front of us.

For Damasio (1994), feelings are the processes of perceiving or mentally experiencing changes in body states that are connected to mental images; he refers to these body state changes as emotions. Damasio explains that the biological purpose of emotions is to regulate survival. Feelings are the brain’s way of interpreting the emotions; they signal pain and pleasure. He states that the “essence” of feeling is, “That process of continuous monitoring, that experience of what your body is doing while thoughts about specific content roll by” (p. 145). As human beings we then take the feeling of the emotion and name it. If, for example, a bear was coming toward me, the emotion or body state I would probably experience would be changes in the various regulatory systems that work to keep an organism safe such as increased heart rate, dilated pupils, tensed muscles and opened sweat glands. Mentally, I would identify this
familiar sensation as the feeling of fear and then follow with a “mental state” or thought, “I am about to be killed”, which would trigger an action – fight, freeze, or run.

In a classroom scenario, this could look quite similar. While introducing a new concept to the class, the teacher notices the student rolling her/his eyes and snickering. The teacher’s emotion might be similar to that in the bear scenario since anger – the potential feeling – is commonly overlaid on fear. The thought that may have triggered the identification of the feeling of anger could be, “How rude! I have had enough of this student’s insolence in my class.” The action that follows which correlates to “neurally encoded past encounters,” might be fight (yell at the student) or freeze (pretend not to have noticed). It is the thought if left unexamined that determines the course of action. Neither of these actions will leave the teacher feeling good about the response.

For clarification I return to Damasio’s (1994) hypothesis of the “somatic markers,” the body’s internal preference system for determining the best outcome for the organism. Damasio states that somatic markers are “under the influence of an external set of circumstances which include not only entities and events with which the organism must interact, but also social conventions and ethical rules” (p. 179). Most teachers do not feel good about losing their temper, particularly in a public space such as a classroom of 30 students. Further, while ignoring the eye roll may be beneficial in the moment to avoid conflict, if left unaddressed, resentment could spill over to the following days and months of the year just like the feeling of self-doubt carried into the classroom after the teacher in the earlier scenario encountered the angry student in the hallway.

What Damasio (1994) is referring to in his work on consciousness or “wakefulness” and the self is “the neural basis for the self” (p. 238). He believes that the self and its subjectivity as necessary for consciousness. He asserts that, “you cannot have an [uncompromised] self without wakefulness, arousal, and the formation of images” (p. 238). Those images are representations of “key events in an individual’s autobiography” which create one’s sense of self in the moment as well as possibilities for the future. They are also representations of the body, what it has been like in the past and in the recent present, which he believes create the basis for a “concept” of the self. Like Harré (1998) and Martin and colleagues (2008), Damasio defines a self as an entire being with both body and mind/consciousness working in harmony to create its
uniqueness, based on social and cultural interactions particular to its history and circumstances.

2.3.2. The Self in Location

Our location is intrinsically connected to our sense of self. For Varela and colleagues (2016), “The body is the location point of the senses” (p. 65). Hence, where the body is, one’s sense of self will also be. In his discussion of Harré’s work, Benson (2001) writes: “My sense of who I am is tied to where I am since it is from such places that I perceive and act, and also where I am perceived to be” (p. 99). Harré (1998) states that, “To have a sense of self is to have a sense of one’s location… it is to have a sense of one’s point of view” (p. 4). If, for example, a student struggles in mathematics and excels in drama, the class in which she/he finds her/himself will affect her/his sense of self. In math class she/he is “stupid and not good enough,” but on the stage performing for an audience, she/he is “brilliant and charismatic”. Similarly, a teacher outside the classroom, leading a club filled with keen and engaged youth, may identify as fun loving, energetic and patient. And yet, when faced with a class of students, many disengaged for reasons outside the realm of his/her lesson, that teacher may describe him/herself as someone quite differently.

As Benson (2001) further notes in his remark, “My sense of who I am is tied to where I am since it is from such places that I perceive and act, and also where I am perceived to be” (p. 99), one’s sense of self is not only connected to self-perception in location but also other-perception. We all play myriad roles in our lives; I am teacher, counsellor, colleague, student, mother, friend, daughter, wife, and sister, to name only a few. My sense of self differs depending on which role I am identifying with and what is happening in the moment in which I am performing that role. As counsellor, working with a student in my office, I am confident and skilled. But as a student writing this thesis, my sense of self varies depending on the day; some days I feel confident and worthy, while others I feel quite the opposite. Further, if I am the confident and skilled counsellor in my office and unexpectedly the student with whom I am working is triggered by something I say and I become “unmoored,” my sense of self could suddenly shift to self-doubt. This sense of self as lacking competence could then be further reinforced through the eyes of the student witnessing my unraveling. The student may see me in a different light and whenever I see that student in the hallways or in my office, I might be made aware
through “neural encoding” of my incompetent sense of self. This is the temporal aspect of the sense of self to which Benson (2010) and Harré (1998) refer.

As Damasio (1994) has stated, being conscious of emotions “offers you flexibility of response” (p. 133). By being aware of body states coupled with the skills of being able to reason and decide on a course of action, one can potentially stay “moored” in any given location. Damasio remarks that in order to reason and decide, one needs knowledge about the situation, the response options and the potential consequences of those options. Without those, unmooring is almost inevitable. In a classroom, for example, if a teacher who believes that a student has cheated on a test becomes angry and reactionary, one could say that he or she has become “unmoored.” However, if that same teacher is aware of the emotions that arise as he or she witnesses the student cheating, and is able to come to a desirable response based on good reason from having spoken with the student, then the “unmooring” may be avoided. In this case, the teacher’s sense of self, as located in that place, remains intact as one who is compassionate and caring. Further, if the teacher’s reaction is out of place, the students in the classroom may also react in an undesirable way as the incident unfolds.

In my years as an educator, I have seen these scenarios play out time and again. I have seen students who have come to see themselves as “stupid” or “bad” or “a waste of space” who shine in so many other “spaces” in the world. One student who comes to mind was rarely in class, did little if any homework and simply wandered the halls seemingly looking for trouble. And yet, there are mural walls with his work displayed all around the city. Outside of school, he is creative, skilled, and full of life. I have also seen teachers who are triggered into reactions of frustration daily by student behaviours they witness in their classes. And yet, outside the walls of their classrooms, they are loving and generous to the students who wander the halls.

Parker Palmer (1997) states that, “the divided self will always distance itself from others” (p. 18). When one’s sense of self as teacher is determined in that place as someone unworthy of teaching, he or she will struggle to connect to all the attributes that come together to create a sense of self. Further, that teacher may disconnect from his or her students through anger or withdrawal and the experience of teaching will not reflect his or her true capabilities. For Palmer (2007), “teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse” (p. 15). If a teacher presents in the
classroom, based on beliefs and past experiences, as angry, insecure or burned out, then that is the self he or she will be known as to that class. As Harré (1998) states, “my beliefs about myself shift and change with context and companions as do my self-presentations” (p. 93). Herein lies the hope of a cognitive shift. With awareness and opportunities for new insight, one’s sense of self can transform. This is the aim of reflective practice. Palmer (1997) asserts that, “integrity requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not” (p. 17). I need to be aware of my body states, thoughts and feelings in all places so as to have greater flexibility to choose my actions and reactions.

This is not to say that it is easy to stay true to one’s values and beliefs. In his book, Schools of Recognition (2001), Charles Bingham addresses the sense of self and its connection to culture. He writes that, “one’s core self is beholden to that which is “outside” of it. Who I am, deep down is not about who I am as much as it is about the social scripts that allow who I am to come into being” (p. 92). If, for example, there is the belief that teachers put their students and their work above all else, then a teacher’s sense of self as teacher may be in conflict with such a belief. If that teacher already carries into the classroom a feeling of unworthiness and is then faced with a parent or a student questioning her or his inability to return an assignment in a timely manner or arrive early or stay late for a meeting, the teacher may see her or himself as a poor example of a teacher as opposed to loving and caring person not only for the students but also for her or his own family.

Bingham (2001) states in his discussion on “mirror recognition” that, “in the presence of an other, one rethinks who one is” (p. 43). If a student believes he or she does not matter and then someone shows that student otherwise, to the extent that the student can believe what is placed before him or her, he or she can “rethink” whom he or she is. There is an opening through which to discover a new dimension of self that has been buried by past experiences. According to Benson (2001), a human being navigates the world through the social emotions of others, and through this process, a person’s own sense of self begins to emerge. One learns how others react in various situations; one learns what others believe and value. These emotions, actions, beliefs and values of others could act as guides to help navigate a person through perceptions and culture.
2.3.3. The Self in Relationship with Others

This idea of the creation of one’s sense of self through relationship with others is paramount to the work of Martin and colleagues (2009) who define selfhood as a, “first person experience and understanding of one’s particular existence that emerges within a person’s active, relational being in the world” (p. 157). They further state that it is a “recognition by others and through others by one’s self as a unique individual with a particular biography and personality” (p. 157). It is the “coordinated” activities of human beings acting in the world that create a self.

Harré (1995) also addresses this idea of the uniqueness, the interconnectedness and the dynamic nature of one’s sense of self: “There is a unity of each person in the context of so much moment by moment, situation by situation diversity” (p. 2). He uses the analogy of three separate selves to clarify, recognizing that these selves are simply aspects of a person, not truly separate entities – he refers to the notion of selves as “grammatical fictions”:

- **Self 1**: This self represents the body from whose point of view one perceives and acts on the material environment. It is the person’s phenomenological experience of the world.

- **Self 2**: This is “the totality of attributes of a person including that person’s beliefs about him or herself” (p. 177). It is a person’s autobiography as told to oneself and/or others at some moment in time, “forever being updated and revised” (p. 138). This is the self that is mostly relational and is “in constant flux as the relations to the social and material environment shift and change” (p. 7). It is tied to self-concept for it is in relationship with the environment that one develops one’s sense of self, through “the stories one tells about oneself and the actions one performs as oneself” (p. 177). Harré defines self-concept as “the cluster of beliefs that the person holds about him or herself rather than the attributes that person actually, at the moment, possesses” (p. 129).

- **Self 3**: This self is the totality of the personal impressions one makes on others. It is manifested through the interactions one has with others. What differentiates this self from Self 2 is that it is all about interpretation. One has no control over the discrepancy between what one reports and how another hears the reporting.

Making sense of the complexity of the self seems only possible if there is some sort of understanding of one’s place in the centre of one’s own life story. Without examining what we have come to value and believe, how can we possibly know how to chart a course forward, with intention? Palmer (1997) asserts that, “identity and integrity have as
much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strengths and potentials” (p. 17). One could say that our identity is our perception of ourselves, our stories of whom we are based on where we have come. Our integrity is who we are as a whole person, in our totality, not merely the one who presents to the world in one particular situation, where past beliefs and actions followed by reactions can shadow or even make disappear those “strengths and potentials”.

2.3.4. Agency and the Self

In the literature on teacher stress and social and emotional competencies, much is said about teachers’ inability to self-regulate when faced with challenging situations (Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser, Schonert-Reichl, Jha, Cullen, Wallace, Wilensky, Oberle, Thomson, Taylor, & Harrison, 2013). Without knowing what causes the emotion, based on our perception of the external event or thought, which then leads to the feeling, how can we ever begin to take action to alter our reactions? It is in the understanding, along with the skills and the will to change that a person has the power to reframe, and construct a more desired sense of self.

This concept of will is an important one to consider. Benson (2001) suggests that there can be no creation without some form of energy expenditure, and “many things that happen to us change us, but the question of self-creation is concerned with the sorts of effort that a person voluntarily makes to realize an idea of him or herself” (p. 84). Martin and colleagues (2009) define human agency as,

“the deliberative, reflective activity of a human being in framing, choosing, and executing his/her actions in a way that is not fully determined by factors and conditions other than his/her own understanding, reasoning, and moral consideration […] It is the “willed action of persons.”” (p. 158)

Harré (1998) also talks about the agency of persons and their ability to manage and monitor their actions and act to both set and achieve their goals. While neurobiology alerts a person to possible danger or pleasure based on perception (Damasio, 1994), one can use focussed attention or consciousness as a stepping stone in the process of planning customized, adaptive responses. Neurobiology creates the concern, and consciousness and agency of thought enable the problem solving.
It is essential, then, that we take the next step in the process of change; we must go from knowing to doing. This takes practice. And this is where many lose their way. Our evolutionary imprint has left a deep mark in our neurobiology. It takes much more consistent effort to change those patterns and beliefs that are so entrenched in our sense of self. If we do not believe in our agency, in our potential to change, it will be difficult to sustain the effort, the practice necessary, to emerge from our entanglement with undesired beliefs. And in order to believe something at a deep level, there must be understanding. When we begin to understand our sense self, from where we have come and where and why we are situated as we are in the present based on our past, only then can we move forward into action of the newly examined beliefs of our transformed selves.

According to Benson (2001), just like the artist creating a piece of art outside of him or herself, so too are we the artists of our selves:

“The doer is significantly changed as a consequence of doing [...] with each successful ‘work’ they become ‘other’ to themselves, and therefore visible to themselves in a way that would not otherwise be possible.” (p. 85)

Self-reflection requires an opportunity to step back, almost to locate our selves from the outside, in order to see beyond the turmoil of whatever is getting in the way of our knowing who we are. This is the creative act that enables the intentional creation of the self. Richard Shuall (2000) articulates in his forward to Paulo Freire’s, Pedagogy of the Oppressed,

“Provided with the proper tool for such encounter [with Freire’s dialogical work], the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it.” (p. 32)

Given new skills and a new location or sense of place in the world as a result of a new understanding, a person has the potential to grow and change.

Finally, with regard to the will to change, is the concept of one’s moral self, which also has the potential to shift over time. The extent to which we value any particular identity or ideal will determine our willingness to change our points of view once presented with the necessary skills and perspective. This cannot be overstated. Teachers do not want to disconnect from their students, for when they do, teaching
becomes so much more challenging than it is already. No one can see a teacher’s insecurities and exploit them better than an adolescent who is feeling not only his own disconnection but also that of his teacher. However, when beliefs and values are left unexamined, this can be the painful result.

As Benson (2001) states, “pride, guilt and shame are emotions of responsibility” (p. 147). Guilt and shame are emotions that teachers commonly acknowledge as part of their daily repertoire after a challenging group of students has entered their classroom. These teachers often feel responsible for the behaviours they witness; yet they do not know how to change the situation. How this plays out at times is to put blame onto the students. When a teacher cannot locate personal feelings of inadequacy, he or she may react toward a student’s misbehaviour in a negative way and then justify that reaction by blaming the behaviour for his or her reaction. As seen in previous examples, misbehaviour is usually grounded in unexamined feelings about one’s self. To blame another for a misguided reaction is to try and divert responsibility; this can only happen if one is unaware of the situation that has led to the reaction. One cannot act with intention without being fully conscious of one’s own beliefs and values. When this is the case we are acting through the past, filtered through our pre-set beliefs and actions from past experiences.

Ultimately, self-reflection requires an opportunity to step back, almost to locate our selves from the outside in order to see beyond the turmoil of whatever is getting in the way of our knowing who we are as individual, social and political selves. Nora Lyons (2010) describes reflective thinking as the ability “to foster being aware, conscious, and reflective of one’s own and others’ ways of thinking and being” (p. x). The practice of being aware – mindful awareness – is a first step into becoming aware of one’s sense of self.

2.4. Mindful Awareness

“A person’s consciousness is the way in which he or she thrusts into the world. It is not some interiority, some realm of awareness inside the brain…By attending, listening, gazing, a perceiver structures what presents itself.” (Greene, 1995, pp. 25-26)

For one to be fully conscious and “thrust” wholeheartedly into the world, making use of all those acts indicated in Greene’s statement, a true state of awareness is
essential. While the term mindful awareness may sound like something that takes place inside the brain, it is so much more than an exercise of the brain alone.

The concept of mindfulness as distinguished from mindful awareness, has been debated for centuries (Tremmel, 1993) and is rooted in Buddhism as well as other contemplative traditions (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In essence, its purpose is to study the mind (Tremmel, 1993), to pay attention with one’s full concentration to the present moment, to what is occurring moment-to-moment within the mind. Brown and Ryan (2003) have defined it as, “an enhanced attention to, and awareness of, present reality (p. 662)”. And Bishop and colleagues (2004) define it as a form of “mental training to reduce cognitive vulnerability to reactive modes of mind that might otherwise heighten stress and emotional distress” (p. 231). The ability to look within is considered the starting point to a mindfulness practice.

Meditation is considered an effective “tool” (Langer, 1989) by which to hone such a skill for it is considered a way to train the mind to notice thoughts, but not to attach to them, to let them pass through one’s consciousness, so as not to be distracted by them. Mindful awareness as delineated for the purposes of this study could be similarly considered “post-meditative mindfulness.” Since distraction from the present moment, through the mind’s ability to time travel either by rumination on the past – by “conditioned patterns of thinking, perceiving, feeling and acting that were laid down in us in the past, from early childhood, as body memories and brain circuitry” (Bai, 2015, p. x) – or by fortune-telling – attempting to predict the future – has a significant influence on a person’s ability to interpret and respond to situations, one can see how such a practice of intentional focus could be of benefit to anyone wishing to fully engage, to “thrust” one’s self into the world.

For the purposes of this study, I turn primarily to the work of Brown and Ryan (2003), Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007), Langer (1989), Tremmel (1993), and Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2016), who separate traditional mindfulness practices of meditation from what Tremmel calls “the art of paying attention” in action. As Varela and colleagues state,

“From an enactive perspective, mindfulness practices should be viewed as forms of skilful know-how for enacting certain situated mind-body
states and behaviours, not as a form of inner observation of a private mental realm.” (p. xxv)

They refer to this practice of meditation-in-action as a “Buddhist modernist style”. This speaks to the reflective response cycle offered in this study. Teachers were not asked to simply observe their inner ecology; they were asked to feel with their body, think with their minds and then act purposefully based on their goals and intentions. This was not an opportunity to relax, dissociate or reach the mystical as Varela and colleagues explain to be true in Buddhist traditions of mindfulness. The concept of mindful awareness for my purposes means reading situations from the inside out; one first notices what is occurring within and then responds, with both mind and body – the mind, the heart and the senses are equally engaged.

Social psychologist Ellen Langer (1989) identifies three essential aspects necessary for a “mindful state of being”:

- The creation of new categories – here she is referring to differing perspectives. For example, one teacher might equate a late student to a disrespectful student who needs consequences, while another might see this as a student in distress, and embrace this as an opportunity to discover what isn’t going well in that student’s life situation.

- Openness to new information

- Awareness of more than one perspective – one cannot easily create new categories without having an awareness of other possibilities.

These categories are similar to those examined in the literature on reflective inquiry. Dewey spoke of the need for open-mindedness and Schön postulated the necessity of good coaching for the purposes of modelling and learning other ways of knowing and doing. Tremmel (1993) asserts that, “although mindfulness should not be equated with reflection in the broad sense there is important common ground between mindfulness and reflection-in-action” (p. 444). In his article, Learning to teach at the elbows: The Tao of teaching, Allan MacKinnon (1996) blends reflective practice with mindful awareness in his discussion on the necessity for “mindfulness in the activity (emphasis mine) of teaching children” (p. 660). While mindfulness has been traditionally considered a practice of the mind, MacKinnon recognizes the importance of the accompanying action.

Much of Langer’s (1989) work on mindfulness – as opposed to mindlessness – is concerned with paying attention to thoughts about what is happening externally. She
offers options for practitioners to reconsider negative thoughts about other people and situations. She suggests that, “in order to develop a limber state of mind” (p. 64), one should consider other possible perspectives, taking into account mindset, variability and context of self and other. Here, as in that described in the section on reflective practice, mindset is referring to one’s ability and openness to flexibility of thought. Learned helplessness, for example, is considered a state of mindlessness, for “even when solutions are available, a mindless sense of futility prevents a person from reconsidering the situation” (p. 64). Variability refers to the ebb and flow of real life whereby there is rarely a fixed reality; people’s interests, motivations, and situations change from time to time and from place to place. When one chooses not to question assumptions, one is in a mindless state and not living in the mindful moment of the present.

Langer (1989) defines context as “a premature cognitive commitment” (p. 37). One often looks at a situation through one’s own unique lens and does not consider the context that is controlling the behaviour of others. Langer asserts that, “contexts control our behaviour, and our mindsets determine how we interpret each context” (p. 37). In the earlier example of the tardy student, both teachers responded to the student within the framework of their own context. Perhaps the first teacher valued punctuality above all else and could not see any reason for a young adult to arrive late to class. The second teacher may have had previous experiences with underlying causes of student tardiness and was open to learning more about the situation behind the behaviour.

Rodgers and Raider-Roth’s (2006) use of the term “presence” is another way into approaching mindful awareness. They define presence as,

“A state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate first step.” (p. 266)

This definition connects well to what mindful practitioners in the education arena are attempting to accomplish. In the classroom, it is not only the internal state of the teacher that needs to be considered. Mental phenomena are more than the mental events that traditional mindfulness practices ask practitioners to notice but not act upon (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). Mindfulness in the classroom “involves self-knowledge, [self] trust, relationship and compassion” (Rodgers et al., 2006, p. 266). Staying connected to one’s self as well as one’s students is a delicate path teachers must navigate. As
Rodgers and colleagues write, “in order to engage with their students they must stay connected with themselves and recognize the parts of themselves that can short-circuit the connection” (p. 278) when mindlessness or habit take over.

Varela and colleagues (2016) consider reflective practice as a “form of experience [that] can be performed with mindful/awareness” (p. 27). They assert that reflection,

“…can cut the choir of habitual thought patterns and preconceptions such that it can be an open-ended reflection, open to the possibilities other than those contained in one’s current representations of the life-space.” (p. 27)

This is the state or “habit of mindlessness” (p. 27) that Langer also emphasizes in her work. It is about “unlearning” (Varela et al., p. 27) old habits of mind or, in the words of Bai (2015), “decondition[ing] and recondition[ing] ourselves” (p. xi). This begins with learning to quiet the constant chatter of the mind that wants to make sense of and react to the external world quickly for the sake and safety of the organism. Mindfulness disrupts mindlessness and gives the person the opportunity to choose how best to move forward. Mindful awareness provides an opportunity to learn how to change the way the mind works.

Mindfulness, then, is a construct that allows for an enhanced awareness of emotion, behaviour and environmental events. Mindful awareness is the ability to be in tune with emotional states coupled with the ability to then alter those states. Until an irritated teacher recognizes his or her feelings and then addresses them, it is very challenging to think of alternative interpretations of whatever event caused the irritation. Mindfulness is the opposite of a habit, which diminishes one’s ability to attend to what is happening in the present moment. Being mindful means holding one’s habits out for inspection and choosing an alternate course of action if that habit no longer makes sense in the newly examined situation.

2.5. Compassion

Maxine Greene (1995) believes that imagination is the pathway to change: “imagination is what above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empathy spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called ‘other’ over
the years” (p. 3). As discussed in the section on the self, beliefs in one’s sense of agency coupled with the feeling of hope are key factors that can affect one’s willingness to move toward change. Yet, before belief, one must have the ability to imagine the possibilities. Critical reflection, which involves mindful awareness of one’s inner and outer worlds, opens the door to those possibilities. Greene asks,

“Is it not imagination that allows us to encounter the other as disclosed through the image of that other’s face? And is this face not only that of the hurricane survivor or the Somalian child or the homeless woman sitting on the corner but also of the silent or the fidgety or the hopeless child in the classroom, be that child girl or boy?” (p. 37)

And, it is through the imagination, that one also unlocks the door to the possibility of compassion toward the other.

Like most constructs, compassion is not easily defined and there is much controversy within the literature on its meaning and accompanying components (Goetz, Keltner & Simon-Thomas, 2010). Some consider compassion as equivalent to the notion of care (Wilde, 2013; White, 2017), while others understand it as a form of love and empathic concern (Lavelle Heinberg, 2016), and still others consider it a feeling affected by reason (Ruiz & Vallejos, 1999). Sandra Wilde describes compassion as “the conscious suspension of judgment” (p. 53). For an in depth review of the literature and a greater sense of clarity, I turn to the empirical review of compassion by Goetz and colleagues. My reasoning is that this review summarizes concisely the findings of the major researchers in this field whom I had explored in advance of discovering the review by Goetz and colleagues. The following is a chart encompassing their main findings on the meaning of compassion:
Figure 2.1. Appraisal model of compassion displaying how witnessing negative outcomes leads to felt compassion with moderation of relevance to self (Goetz, Keltner & Simon-Thomas, 2010).
As outlined in Figure 2.1, Goetz and colleagues suggest that compassion is determined by the following criteria: 1) the relevance of the sufferer to the self, 2) the sufferer’s deservingness of help, and 3) the individual’s ability to cope with the situation at hand (p. 356).

From their research, Goetz and colleagues (2010) interpret compassion as an “affective state defined by a specific subjective feeling […] that arises in witnessing another’s suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help” (p.351). The key point here is the call to action for the purpose of helping ease the suffering, what Richard White (2017) calls an “impulse to help” (p. 20). This differs from some of the other researchers in the field who see compassion as simply “an attitude or as a general benevolent response to others” (p. 351).

As indicated in Figure 2.1, Goetz and colleagues (2010) have found that the assessment of the victim’s deserving of compassion is an integral part of the decision-making process. If the witness of the negative outcome does not feel the victim is worthy of compassion, some form of anger will ensue. In a classroom situation, a teacher might assess a truant student as lazy and not deserving of compassion, and then follow up with some form of disciplinary action. Another teacher, aware of the life circumstances of the same student, might find compassion the most effective way to encourage the student to keep trying to make it to class to the best of his or her ability given the difficult situation.

Like others, Goetz and colleagues (2010) differentiate compassion from empathy, which they define as referring “to the vicarious experience of another’s emotions” (p. 351). While compassion leads to behaviours that reduce the suffering of the other, “empathic distress leads to actions that reduce one’s own suffering” (p. 363). In her discussion of pity, Martha Nussbaum (1996) argues that pity/compassion is different from empathy in that empathy “does not take into account one’s separateness, that one can never really feel another’s suffering. The “empathic identification” is in estimating the seriousness of the suffering” (p. 34). Like Goetz and colleagues, Nussbaum concurs that there is a cognitive assessment involved in the process in order to determine the “worthiness” of the victim for compassion. Nussbaum explains the change from the historical use of the term “pity” derived from the Greek elos and the French pitié, to the use of “compassion” from the Victorian era onward, because pity
“has acquired nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer” (p. 31). Goetz and colleagues define pity as “the concern for someone considered inferior to the self” (p. 351).

Nussbaum posits three criteria for pity/compassion: 1) There is a belief by the witness that the suffering is serious rather than trivial, a value judgment based on the subjective and not necessarily well-informed point of view of the one who is feeling/expressing pity, 2) There is the belief by the witness that the suffering was not caused primarily by the person’s own culpable actions either because it is presumed that the person is without blame or, if there is some fault, there is a belief that the suffering is out of proportion to the fault, and 3) There is the ability for the one who is feeling/expressing pity to see themselves in a similar situation to the sufferer with their own pain and vulnerabilities. Again, as stated earlier, Nussbaum differentiates this acknowledgement of possibility from empathy because she sees the need to take into account the separateness of each individual.

Nussbaum (1996) describes compassion as “a central bridge between the individual and the community” (p. 28). Goetz and colleagues (2010) express this same notion through their discussion of the “evolutionary approach to compassion,” which states that the emotion compassion developed for the purposes of enhancing the welfare of vulnerable offspring, improving mate selection, and motivating the formation of “nonkin” relationships. White (2017) sees compassion as a form of generosity whereby the individual puts his or her own concerns to one side and makes a space for openness and attention toward another. And Wilde (2013) talks about compassion as “an example of social engagement rooted in the deep awareness of interrelatedness” (p. 7). She states that, “With compassion, we make room for the other” (p. 97), that it “is not a personal, individual, subjective experience, rather it is borne out of the recognition that self and other are deeply related” (p. 46). One could say then, that the experience of compassion is driven by the desire to connect, to “engage socially,” and it requires some form of thought or reasoning about the wellbeing of self and others.

In considering the impact of the other on one’s impulse to feel and act in a compassionate way, Goetz and colleagues (2010) outline the factors that may impact the intensity of feeling. Their research suggests that compassion also increases with similarity of values, preferences, behaviours and physical characteristics, as well as
emotional closeness; the feeling of compassion increases if one is genetically related to the other. They further state that, “compassion should be most intense in response to the suffering of individuals who are self- and goal-relevant” (p. 356). Again, the emphasis here is on the self-other distinction and appraisals are made based on the respondent’s interaction with the other as it pertains to the self.

Lavelle Heinberg (2016) offers a slightly different perspective on compassion in her discussion of a compassion-based contemplative approach, “Sustainable Compassion Training” being used in the context of education through The Courage to Care Coalition (http://courageofcare.org/sustainable-compassion/). As stated earlier, this model understands compassion as “a form of love and empathic concern that wishes for someone who is suffering to be free from stress and pain” (p. 288). According to this model, there are five aspects to compassion: 1) Affection – “sensing others as worthy of unconditional love and respect” (p. 288), 2) Empathic concern – being aware of and sensing the similarity of another’s suffering to one’s own, 3) The wish for others to be free from stress – this is a “natural capacity” when witnessing a “loved one” in distress, 4) Compassionate action – this “naturally” follows the above, and 5) Wisdom or insight – “recognizing that others are more an just one’s limited shifting, biases, thoughts or perceptions of them” (pp. 288-289).

As Goetz and colleagues (2010) point out in their review of past studies, the intensity of compassion is often determined by the closeness of the sufferer to the witness. Further, the “worthiness” may be dependent on the circumstances that brought on the suffering in the first place. While Lavelle Heinberg (2016) recognizes the limitations of this model and the personal, exploratory work that needs to be done in advance, I wonder if it is too much to ask of a teacher? I am not surprised to read that little attention has been given to this program for teachers. From my perspective, it would seem to entail a good deal of personal, counselling-type work. As Lavelle points out, “high quality, in depth means for supporting and training teachers” (p. 292) along with teacher “buy-in and openness” (p. 292) would be essential for such a program to move forward on a larger scale.
2.6. Wellbeing

From the perspective of this study, the goal of reflective practice is to improve the wellbeing of practitioners – to help teachers flourish in their classrooms. In this section I will begin to examine what it means to be well or to flourish, and then bring the concept back to the classroom environment.

Much has been written in history on what it means to live well or to flourish. In recent years, the concept of wellbeing has gained interest by both scholars and policy makers (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Seligman, 2012), possibly due to the emergence of positive psychology as well as the desire to connect mind, body and spirit (White, 2007). Pollard and Lee (2003) and Kahneman and colleagues (1999) have suggested that the interest in wellbeing emerged out of a long needed shift away from the negative aspects of psychology, from “disorders, deficits and disabilities […] to the more positive strengths, assets, and abilities” (Pollard & Lee, 2003, p. 59). This could be one explanation for the interest and emergence of positive psychology into mainstream dialogue.

My quest for conceptual clarity within the wellbeing literature has led me to conclude that most researchers believe wellbeing to be a multi-faceted concept, whose spelling, definition, and even measurement are still lacking consensus (Atkinson, 2013; Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Saunders, 2012; Gough & McGregor, 2007; Lomas, Medina, Ivtsan, Rupprecht, & Eiroa-Orosa, 2017; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Watson et al., 2012). The word itself has been written in various formats, from hyphenated, to offset with inverted commas, from one word to two, and sometimes with a capitalized first letter. It is often paired with health and/or mental health. In their critical analysis of social and emotional wellbeing, Watson et al. (2012) give the explanation for the format they chose — one word, no hyphen nor capital first letter — as “normalizing” (p. 27). This choice resonates with me as well. The term wellbeing has most certainly become a “normal” household word in contemporary Western society. I have chosen, therefore, to use wellbeing in this format throughout.

Along with terminology, the articulation of the concept seems to have somewhat eluded researchers. Several have broken it down into various components, some of which may not be considered necessary in order to “achieve” a sense of wellbeing.
Others have attempted a broader definition of the term. The following is a breakdown of several researchers’ contributions to its definition. Once the concept is pulled apart into its various components, I will reconstruct it through my own delineated groupings.

Most of the researchers have as part of their analysis of wellbeing included a physical component (Dodge et al., 2012; Kahneman et al., 1999; Nussbaum as cited in Watson et al., 2012; Pollard & Lee, 2003), which can be thought of in terms of pains and pleasures, internal homeostasis, and overall bodily health. They also agree on a psychological aspect (Dodge et al., 2012; Kahneman et al., 1999; McGregor in Gough et al., 2007; Nussbaum as cited in Watson et al., 2012; Pollard et al., 2003; Seligman, 2012), which includes mental health and illness, emotions and moods, self-regulation, personality, a sense of agency, adaptation potential, and a sense of purpose or meaning. A third commonality is a cognitive or intellectual factor (Kahneman et al., 1999; McGregor in Gough et al., 2007; Nussbaum as cited in Watson et al., 2012; Pollard et al., 2003) that includes thought, education, and the ability to reason. A fourth aspect of wellbeing cited is the social or cultural element (Dodge et al., 2012; Kahneman et al., 1999; Nussbaum as cited in Watson et al., 2012; Pollard et al., 2003; Seligman, 2012) which includes relationships, social class, income, crime, ethnicity, gender difference, age, employment, accomplishments, affiliations, play and laughter (Gough et al., 2007; Kahneman et al., 1999; Nussbaum as cited in Watson et al., 2012; Seligman, 2012).

Sarah Atkinson (2013), in her work in the areas of public health and wellbeing, defines the concept as,

“...an effect, dependent on the mobilisation of resources from everyday encounters with complex assemblages of people, things and places. Through such a framing, wellbeing can be conceived of as stable and amenable to change, as individual and collective and as subjective and objective.” (p. 137)

Wellbeing seems to be both a concept and a process that ebbs and flows depending on encounters with self, others, and the environment. It is a process of being, becoming and belonging (Watson et al., 2012).

The above conceptualization has led me to organize the remainder of this section of the literature review on wellbeing into three separate yet interconnected parts: the cultural (contextual), the social (relational), and the individual (embodied). I have chosen to begin with the cultural and work toward the individual for it is the overarching
components of the larger entity that trickle down to invariably impact upon the individual while the individual is also acting on and impacting the world around him/her.

2.6.1. The Cultural

Much of the literature on wellbeing recognizes the impact of culture on an individual’s sense of what it means to be well in the world. As expressed by Gough and colleagues (2007),

“Culture, as an evolving and dynamic system of norms, values and rules, provides guidelines for what meanings are to be attached to what men, women and children in a particular societal context observe and do, and as such it is an essential medium of both societal transmission processes and systems of social authority.” (p. 329)

In most Western classrooms, there is the expectation that students will ask questions for clarification or raise their hands to provide answers to any questions asked by the teacher. This, however, is not the case for students who come from other parts of the world and have been partially educated in their home country. *I have had many students in my counselling office in tears because of their paralysis related to speaking to their teachers, either one-on-one or within the classroom. This is not an accepted practice in all parts of the world, and these students have attended schools with the expectation of silence in the classroom along with the belief that it is a sign of disrespect to question their teachers.*

The impact of this embedded cultural norm on these students is both internal distresses as they struggle to succeed in their classes knowing that participation is an integral part of the evaluation process, and a feeling of disconnection from the internal workings of the classroom. These students feel set apart from the mainstream students who are able to interact with their teachers in an informal manner, creating deeper connections and a sense of belonging. For these newcomers who long to fit in and find connections with both their teachers and peers, a sense of wellbeing in the classroom is a struggle. When they are unable to participate in class, there are fewer opportunities for others to find a way to get to know them. Both teachers and classmates struggle to understand how to make sense of their ‘lack of effort’ to engage. As a result, the entire classroom ecosystem suffers. However, once a teacher is aware of this cultural norm, she or he can help a new student from another country transition more easily, breaking
down peer-to-peer barriers as well as her or his own barriers of belief based on Western classroom experiences and expectations. Without barriers to connection, there is a greater likelihood of an overall sense of wellbeing within the classroom culture.

Then there are those who fit the cultural ideal but do not feel that they “measure up”. While others may see them in a positive light, they do not see themselves in the same way. I recall one student who was well respected and loved by all her teachers and peers. From the outside, one would think she had a very positive sense of wellbeing. It was discovered near the end of her final year in high school that she had been struggling with an eating disorder throughout her years at the school. The teachers had assumed her quiet demeanour and perfectionistic tendencies were signs of her care for others and her concern for her future success in university. The truth was that she longed to be like those students who felt free to chat in class or forfeit a few marks to attend a party or a graduation event. And though she did get the marks that she worked so hard to attain, she still did not feel worthy of them. This student was not flourishing in her life. Her teachers’ sense of wellbeing was also affected by her situation, at first positively and then the opposite. When she was perceived as a flourishing student with her life in order and achieving her goals, they felt content with their role as educator. However, once her situation was revealed, they suddenly felt incompetent and guilty for having been blind to what was really going on for her internally.

As Scheper-Hughes and Lock suggest, “the individual body should be seen as the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity and struggle” (p. 31, as cited in Watson et al., 2012). Perhaps it is in the struggle against those truths and contradictions that we find in individuals their closer subjective sense of wellbeing. But one may wonder if that struggle against them is simply another version of the same performance. Their subjective struggle is really a personal struggle against a cultural norm that they resent. I recall working with an adolescent who would get up each morning and dress in a shirt that would expose her midriff. While she felt awkward and self-conscious throughout the day, she told me she was fighting against the expectations of her family and the other girls in the school. She did not want to have to choose her clothing based on her body shape. And so, she spent her days in discomfort, unable to learn and work productively due to her efforts to spite the cultural norms of her family and school. Can we say that she is empowered by her decision? Is this a true sense of
agency or is she simply acting out against cultural norms? Does she truly have control over her subjective sense of wellbeing as some might suggest in the literature on positive psychology?

Her teachers also struggled with her choice. They interpreted her clothing as sexual and promiscuous, rebellious and disrespectful. They struggled to look beyond what they saw to find the hidden truth to her comportment. Both her teachers and this student expressed their discomfort in the presence of the other. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), in her work on critical pedagogy writes,

“If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and ‘the Right thing to do’ will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive.” (p. 324)

That of another can easily affect one’s own sense of wellbeing, and the cultural norms in which each operates will certainly impact upon beliefs, perceptions, and ways of interacting.

John White (2007) has surmised through his research into human flourishing and individual activity choices that,

“…personal flourishing is not, as market theorists and others may have us believe, a matter of the satisfaction of the individual’s major informed desires. Its ingredients are not relative to our particular wishes […] They lie outside us as individuals […] They are created largely within cultures.” (p. 21)

It is suggested in some of the literature that culture, the economy and politics ultimately decide what to focus on and bring to the forefront of the attention of individuals (Atkinson, 2013; White, 2007). While exposure to the Internet has afforded multiple possibilities, not all grounded in the social context in which one lives, the question of one’s true autonomy of choice — another virtue of wellbeing — remains in question.

Positive psychology books on flourishing and happiness, books on various exercise systems and diet regimes, and myriad other options to address concerns of wellbeing are currently flooding the market as individuals perform the Western dance of what it means to live life well. Atkinson (2013) addresses the importance of commodity
thinking in terms of policy for “it drives intervention in terms of what can be done to enhance individual-directed acquisition of the components of wellbeing” (p. 139). In terms of education, one such policy that comes to mind is the implementation of physical education as a graduation requirement up until Grade 10 in British Columbia. While this seems logical from a health and wellbeing perspective, the reality is that some youth feel forced to do something that actually ends up diminishing their sense of wellbeing. Some youth with whom I have interacted over the years as a counsellor have reported feeling marginalized because of their body type and have found the course demeaning and humiliating. This is a policy driven by healthcare under the guise of wellbeing may not improve one’s sense of wellbeing for a certain sector of the high school population. The impact of students’ feelings of marginalization is often felt by their teachers who struggle to motivate them to exercise and embrace what they believe is a necessary aspect of a healthy lifestyle. I have heard the frustrations of many Physical Education teachers who believe that their students are as good as doomed if they do not attend every class in full gym strip and participate wholeheartedly. What they do not take into account are other ways of being in the world.

While the feeling of wellbeing may begin within, one cannot overlook the socially constructed external forces that impact the individual’s sense of wellbeing. And while it is embedded, it is not fixed, as cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (p. 1070) points out:

“Cultural identity is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But, like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.” (as cited in St. Denis, 2007)

Culture does play a role in defining the concept of wellbeing, but it is not the only factor to take into consideration. In their discussion of the impact of relationships on one’s sense of flourishing, Cohen and Bai (2012) remind us that,

“We are individuals within the context of relationships. Without the other we would exist as a singularity. This latter is a fictitious construction and, depending on your perspective, either is not possible and/or seriously obstructs human interrelatedness that is vital to human flourishing.” (p. 259)
As indicated in the research on the self, it is the context that influences and is so important to one’s subjective experience of both one’s sense of self as well as one’s sense of being well. From here, I turn, then, to the social aspect of wellbeing.

### 2.6.2. The Social

Wellbeing researchers acknowledge the importance of the social aspect of human flourishing. All of the lists of components and factors presumed necessary by the researchers have included the social within its definition. As cited in Watson and colleagues (2012):

> “Children and adults do not flourish in isolation from others; they form and maintain relationships and these provide a platform for wellbeing experiences. Wellbeing is not just concerned with an analysis of human nature, needs and even capabilities; it is deeply interrelated with questions of intersubjectivity and interrelationality in all human encounters.” (pp. 223-224)

It is the interaction with a person in a particular context in a particular moment that may impact both people’s sense of wellbeing.

> I remember an encounter with a staff member at one of my schools that could have deeply impacted my sense of wellbeing when she lashed out in a moment of distress. Always friendly and calm, her outburst took me by surprise. If I had interpreted her behaviour as a personal slight and reacted in kind, our collegial relationship could have been damaged. Fortunately, I recognized her tone as a stress response, remained calm, and let the moment pass. Gaydarov (2014), in his work on children’s wellbeing in education, states, “when the individual perceives himself/herself as a part of supporting social space, he/she is content with the world and thus increases his/her psychological wellbeing” (p. 3). When my colleague later apologized, I felt supported, acknowledged and in relationship with her once again.

In his work on finding the self in a philosophy of education, Dwight Boyd (1997) asserts that, "we are simply born into some groups, and socialized into others" (p. 11); there is no getting away from the reality of our associations. Our identities are formed by our group membership; they are products of our experiences, discourses and practices. It is ultimately our identities as social beings that drive our subjective sense of wellbeing. And Biesta (2012) asserts that, “my coming into presence always depends on how my
beginnings are taken up by others” (p. 143). How I am seen by others has as much impact on my sense of self and wellbeing as how I see myself.

From an Indigenous point of view, there is no one without the other, for individuals are embedded within the group and when the individual is out of balance there is disharmony within the group (Ross, 2014). The wellbeing of all is dependent on that of everyone else. Ross (2014), a scholar in Aboriginal visions of existence and healing, uses the analogy of a plant in a meadow and the interconnectedness of all that comes to inhabit and depend upon the wellbeing of that meadow, from the soil to the rain to the grasses to the birds and animals and insects that are drawn to it (p. 4). Ross relates that analogy to the offender who is a product of all the relations and encounters that preceded his crime. Through an Indigenous lens, he needs to be healed through those relationships as opposed to punished for his behaviour “if there were to be any hope of turning him around” (p. 8). According to Ross, “You can’t simply heal the plant and send it back into an unchanged meadow” (p. 9). He recognizes the complexity of life within a social network that has caused the discord within the offender whose future potential for enjoying a higher state of wellbeing is tied to the healing work he must do within his community. He is a product of his political and social environment and in an Indigenous worldview his healing must come from the group dynamic – only in relation to someone else can he come to know himself (Ross, 2014).

I recall a classroom scenario where the teacher and the students were struggling with the misbehaviours of one particular student in the class. It seemed that all had lost patience and the capacity to endure his presence. When the teacher let me know what was happening in her room, I was able to give some context to explain some of the student’s actions. She did not know of his tragic background and assumed he was “choosing” his actions to annoy her and get attention from his peers — I have not yet met a student who says that their goal is to be disliked by their teachers and peers. The teacher was moved by his story and began to see him from a different perspective. Once she opened her heart to him, his misbehaviours lessened and the others in the class also began to let down their guard. This is a common story. Once a teacher is given information to better understand those students who are not coping well in the classroom setting, feelings and behaviours begin to shift. Once the teacher sees the potential within the student who can be challenging to work with, and feels confident in his or her ability to try and effect change, there is an opportunity for the others to see it, too. When we
can let go of pre-determined and fixed beliefs, there is the potential to heal all within the social group.

Further to this point, when a person sees him- or herself reflected in the eyes of another, he or she is given the opportunity to move a little closer to self-understanding. In the above example, when the teacher was able to reflect back to the student her empathy and his potential for success instead of focusing on his misbehaviour, he was able to see himself in a more positive light. It was a different perspective from what he saw at home with his parents who were extremely critical of him in their hopes of making him stronger and more successful. Similarly, when the female student who chose to dress in rebellion against her mother and her friends later noticed the pain in her mother’s eyes as we worked through her disconnection with her own values, she was able to see the truth behind her actions. She came to see that her rebellion was not so much about her anger with the system but more about her anger within. Until she connected to her social group, her family and her friends, she was only able to focus on the external, cultural barriers that were causing her pain.

Ross (2014) gives the definition of a healthy person as,

“Someone who understands that he is a nested component of that complex web of interconnections, who acknowledges fundamental dependence upon them, who is aware that he has been given significant responsibilities within those responsibilities and who is determined to fulfill them as best he can.” (p. 229)

As well as the need for connection, Ross’s definition speaks to the notion of one’s own purpose that comes up specifically in Seligman’s (2011) list of needs for wellbeing. I cannot imagine a sense of wellbeing with an absence of purpose.

2.6.3. The Individual

This section is inspired by John White (2007) who wrote, “If individuals are not authorities on what a flourishing life is for themselves, who — if anyone — is? (p. 22).

As stated earlier, there are myriad factors that can impact the experience of a flourishing life. When I think of subjective wellbeing, I prefer the idea of pleasures and pains in real time (Kahneman et al., 1999). This incorporates the fluidity of wellbeing given that mood states, affect, and even pain states can change suddenly and unexpectedly with a
thought, a word, a feeling of discomfort, or an event — hence the challenge in measuring wellbeing over a long period of time (Larsen & Fredrickson, 1999, as cited in Kahneman et al.). Mood and affect can readily change one’s perception of a conversation or an event.

_I can remember a student talking about his Grade 8 Social Studies teacher whom he had always looked forward to seeing. This teacher was playful with his students and encouraged them to be the same. Unfortunately, there were too many times when the students, unable to read his mood on certain days, would cross an invisible line and the teacher would lash out, diminishing them in front of the class. These demonstrations of intolerance left this particular student confused and no longer trusting his once favourite teacher whose mood dictated the appropriateness of the students’ antics and humour. What started out as a classroom environment of wellbeing, ended for this student as one of unpredictability and disquietude._

Looking only at the individual as it pertains to mood, thoughts and attitudes may be problematic as a way of conceptualizing wellbeing since more and more of the onus is being placed on individuals to take full responsibility for their situation regardless of the inequalities that exist in our social context. The idea that it is either through an individual’s strength or faith — or the kindness of individual strangers— that a person is able to overcome their adversity, without sufficient attention to the social conditions that created the situation, can be debilitating. As Atkinson (2013) points out, if happiness is based solely on cognitive and affective states, then those with advantages may not take the initiative to fully understand global and local issues of inequalities and they may even come to feel a sense of complacency with regard to the circumstance of the disadvantaged. _In the case of the student whose misbehaviours were interpreted by the teacher as intentionally directed at her, this teacher was not yet aware of the full complexity of her student’s situation. She nearly gave up on him and allowed her class to do the same._ Similarly, the disadvantaged may feel a lack of agency and so fall into complacency and acceptance of social injustices. This can happen in schools when classes are at over capacity with high needs students. Teachers often feel powerless to effect change and so they carry on with their classes but feel the effects of the difficult circumstances. This can translate into teachers who are easily frustrated with their students, or others who simply give up on high expectations for their students and allow them to perform below their potential.
Atkinson (2013) suggests that, “an exclusive focus on wellbeing as internal and amenable to self-management logically leads to policy responses that similarly focus primarily on individual deficits in fostering and sustaining positive wellbeing” (p. 140). Inequality, therefore, can end up being blamed on the individual who is not positive enough, or not performing correctly an “appearance” of subjective wellbeing. Turcotte-Summers (2016), in his discussion on egalitarianism in education, reminds us that, “simply imagining that we all have the same social rank does not make it so, as the larger social context works to reinforce our unequal status” (p. 94). We need to be aware of the inequities within society so as best to work toward the potential of wellbeing for all.

In schools, teachers face inequities on a regular basis. There are those who are assigned more students per class than others in each class; there are some who have more designated students but no extra support; there are others who have hours of marking; and, there are some who teach all day and then attend daily after school, evening and even weekend activities. It is easy to hold the individual responsible for an inability to cope well if one chooses to ignore external circumstances that are often out of the teacher's control.

A further point to be made along the lines of individual responsibility and wellbeing is the ensuing failure one may feel as a human being should self-management not be successful. Without taking into account the normative values that are socially constructed, a teacher who, for example, seemingly fails to turn around a difficult student, may be seen by either self or others as a failure. A sense of wellbeing could then become conditional upon the norms of society, or in the above case, the school system; if one feels the burden of guilt based on external and possibly also internal shaming for not “measuring up”, the potential for wellbeing becomes less likely. And where does this notion of agency – one of the commodities listed as essential in the wellbeing debate – come into play? Is it true agency or only a perceived sense of choice? Is the individual actually choosing through thoughtful examination his or her own personal definition of wellbeing or is it placed before him or her as a menu is placed before a diner in a restaurant?

It is important to look at the entire context in which each individual is situated. Gough and colleagues (2007) state that,
“...people are whole persons with a biological, psychological and emotional constitution; that they are also social beings; that they are actively engaged in the reception, interpretation and construction of meaning; that persons are different from each other, both in their internal constitution and their social being; and that they live in time.” (p. 324)

We can neither separate the person from their context nor interpret for them what it means to feel a sense of wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing and objective wellbeing are all embedded in a context of culture.

Finally, Gough and colleagues (2007) break down wellbeing in its simplest form as, “the love of friends and family, of music and verse, of dancing, of food, of a good joke” (xxi). I appreciate the simplicity of this. It spans across cultures, political boundaries, societal norms and gets at, what in my mind has always been, at the heart of wellbeing. Fundamentally, we are all the same – we have ears that allow us to hear the music and bodies that need to move, taste buds that can appreciate delicious food and a brain with the capacity to understand and enjoy humour. Yet, equality is not the same as equity. Gender, sexuality, race and religion are social constructs that get in the way of our sense of commonality, in the way of our “simplicity”. They place limitations on our perceived choices in the same way that poverty does. While self-management has its place and there are many testimonials in a plethora of books that will give examples of such successes, it is not easy when the limitations placed on certain individuals through cultural, political and social constructs constrain their efforts.

And so, the question remains: what does it mean to live life well? From my perspective, it begins with the individual, in the present moment. It is his/her subjective experience of time and place. Given the fluidity of moment-by-moment experiences, I suggest that the present moment is the only true measure of wellbeing. And how can this sense of wellbeing be improved? That would depend upon internal workings such as biochemistry and self-management of cognitions and affect, as well as external factors over which he/she feels some sense of agency, to the degree that agency is possible. Connectedness needs also be a part of the framing for it is clear to me through scientific research in biochemistry coupled with Indigenous world views as well as those of other spiritual leaders, that social connection is embedded in the embodied sense of self. Atkinson (2013) takes this a step further and discusses a “flow of affects” between subjects and the external world whereby, “the external world primarily affects the emotional responses and approaches in which the affective state of the subject primarily
determines and interprets the external stimuli” (p. 142). This speaks to the complex interconnectivity of the internal and external worlds of human beings. There is no real division between the two and the blurring of lines makes a clear understanding of the concept of wellbeing difficult.

2.6.4. Teacher Wellbeing

A classroom is a complex ecosystem. It is made up of individuals all influenced by a unique set of past experiences, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, feelings and moods, personal agendas and aspirations, all of which have been shaped by individual, social and cultural factors. As in any ecosystem, within the classroom there is interdependence between the teacher and the students, between the teacher’s responses to them and theirs to the teacher. As the key role model in the classroom, I would suggest that the teacher’s sense of wellbeing is integral to the balance and wellbeing of the entire group.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009), in their work on social and emotional competencies, state that, “Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive and encouraging relationships with their students” (p. 492). Strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of students (Hamre, Pianta, Borchinal, Field, LoCasale-Crouch, Downer, Howes, LaParo, & Scott–Little, 2012). High self and social awareness, pro social values and the ability to manage emotions are the main characteristics of socially and emotionally competent teachers as indicated by Jennings and Greenberg (2009, p. 495) who have found that teachers with inadequate skills in these areas “may develop a callous, cynical attitude toward students, parents, and colleagues [and] are less likely to demonstrate sympathy and caring to their students” (p. 498). When “depersonalization” occurs, feelings of alienation and disconnection are likely to follow, and the overall sense of wellbeing in the classroom is adversely affected.

Given the complexity of today’s classroom where students arrive for multiple reasons ill-prepared to learn, and given the “intersubjectivity and inter-relationality” (Watson et al., 2012, p. 224) of all classroom encounters, the teacher’s need for a strong sense of wellbeing is ever more critical. The teachers participate interactively with all
occurrences in the classroom ecosystem, and so they must be aware of the forces that impact their feelings of well-being therein.

In schools, there are diverse cultures within which to navigate. Each individual in the classroom has a particular sense of culture based on the norms, values and rules of a family; each classroom is a culture within itself determined in part by the teacher; and, there is a larger, whole school culture that is formed by existing and past leaders. Teachers need to be aware of the norms, values and rules on a whole school level that may come into conflict with their own personal beliefs. For example, if a teacher believes that electronic devices in the hands of students are a distraction and not appropriate for classroom use but the school board values and expects all students to bring their own devices to school, then the teacher needs to reconcile this dissonance. If the teacher holds true to his or her own beliefs, there is the risk of discipline from the administration for going against the cultural norms of the school district. And, if the teacher gives into the prescribed norms, a residual feeling of frustration and powerlessness may result. Like their students, teachers cannot easily leave at the door whatever thoughts and feelings occupy their minds; frustration and powerlessness may turn up in their interactions with their students. Teachers need to be aware in advance of what is and is not in their control and where, if possible, they can claim a sense of agency in any situation.

In my school, the “bring your own device” policy causes much stress among many teachers and the feeling of powerlessness runs deep. Some teachers have expressed feelings of inadequacy at being unable to manage the constant fight with students to turn off their various devices. Others collect any devices that are found being misused and endure the verbal battles from those students who feel affronted by such disciplinary tactics. Still others have given up the fight and let those who want to learn, learn, and those who prefer to waste their time, use their phones. The result, however, is not peace within. Those teachers did not choose this vocation to allow students to disengage and choose distraction over learning. Giving up is not agency. Those teachers who have found a way to embrace the school norm while at the same time maintaining their professional integrity seem the least impacted by this policy. They are able to see the value in the devices, and they have a relationship with their students that allow them to dictate when the devices are permitted. These teachers have chosen to unburden themselves of the sense of powerlessness with regard to a forced policy. They
have found personal agency where others have remained trapped in interpretations of control. Without a sense of agency, wellbeing is compromised.

There are, of course, situations that are more complex and much harder to find possibilities for agency. In the school district in which I currently work, about 10 percent of the teachers live in that district and 30 percent live in the adjacent one. This is a significant change from 1993 when about 33 percent lived in the district and 41 percent lived in the next closest. This means that today 60 percent of the teachers in my school district commute at least an hour and a half daily to and from work, and it is not a district that is easily accessible by public transit. Commuting adds stress on many levels; there is the obvious stress of ever worsening traffic as our city expands; the expense of owning and maintaining a vehicle; and, there are more subtle stresses on an educational community when only 10 percent of the educators actually live in the community. Parents, managers, students and teachers themselves, have expectations about teacher participation before and after school and sometimes on weekends. Teachers who see their vocation as a calling are often torn between meeting the needs and desires of their students and those of themselves and their own families.

There is an unwritten norm amongst educators that students come first and this can become problematic as teachers struggle to find time for those other aspects of wellbeing deemed important in the myriad books on health and wellbeing such as fitness, meditation, home cooked, healthy meals, and time with friends and family. It is not easy to reconcile the desire to be an extraordinary educator as well as healthy, happy and free from those stressors that do not help one reach optimum performance levels.

Lack of time is a common complaint from teachers. While it is easy to suggest they take control of their time for personal wellbeing, it is another to actually choose to stop coaching teams, sponsoring clubs, holding before and after school sessions for extra help, or for meeting parents desperate to find ways to best support their children. Herein lies the pull between “objective” and “subjective” wellbeing. From an outsider’s perspective, the choice may be simple and obvious, but from the point of view of the insider, it is a much more complex decision-making process.
There are other situations, too, that challenge a teacher’s sense of agency. When children are bullying others or skipping classes or arriving late to every lesson, and it seems like no intervention is making any difference, teachers feel frustrated with parents and administrators who do not seem to have any influence on those students. In these cases, teachers need to examine their perceptions for they are always subjective. While it may appear to them that nothing is making a difference in those students’ lives, they cannot be sure. Perhaps it is the teacher’s welcoming smile as they enter the classroom, or her/his gentle reminder — through both her/his words, tone and actions — that everyone matters and no one deserves to be treated with unkindness, or her/his willingness to allow those students in need to see their counsellor instead of sitting through the important lecture on the topic of the day.

When a person is in distress, learning cannot easily take place. Studies have shown that the amygdala blocks the blood and oxygen needed to allow the prefrontal cortex to function at its full potential when a stressor such as fear is introduced. Students face multiple fears in their lives — fear of failure, fear of alienation, fear of disappointing their families. The same is true for teachers. When they are in a state of distress, they too, are unable to access the full potential of their brain functions. When teachers are conscious of their responses to their students instead of responding automatically based on false interpretations, often filtered through personal experience, they not only impact positively their own internal homeostasis and sense of wellbeing but also that of the entire class. By responding without purposeful thought, there is the risk of responding in a disrespectful or irritable manner that could escalate unnecessarily student reactions, and model unhealthy coping strategies to those observing. As in Ross’ (2014) analogy of the meadow, when the student who visits her or his counsellor and then returns to class feeling less distressed but is then faced with the frustration of a teacher who does not see past her or his own aspirations for the students or her or his beliefs around education, that student will easily slip back into the earlier place of disquietude.

Teachers’ sense of wellbeing clearly influences the choices made in the classroom. If they are feeling powerless within the political arena of school policy, or frustrated by the ever-growing demands of the students before them, or dissatisfied with a self-imposed need to be everything to their students, then their responses to classroom encounters will reflect those feelings if beliefs, assumptions, and expectations
remain unexamined. As Havi Carel (2008), whose research interests lie in the phenomenology of illness states,

“Wellbeing is the invisible context enabling us to pursue possibilities and engage in projects. It is the condition of possibility enabling us to follow through aims and goals, to act on our desires, to become who we are.” (p. 10)

When teachers feel an internal sense of wellbeing it allows a greater possibility for them to be the teacher and the person they want to be; it also allows their students the possibility to flourish within the ecosystem of the classroom and beyond; it opens the door to the nature and purpose of learning that goes beyond the prescribed academic curriculum. The more teachers question their beliefs and assumptions, the more openings they will find to new possibilities. First, we need to examine our own minds and then allow our students to do the same. One way to begin this process is through connection with others, for it is in the connection with others that we become aware of the thinking of the other as well as ourselves. There is a need for all beings to find a way to value themselves and to feel embedded and accepted, in the whole of which we are all a vital part. Cohen and Bai (2010) write,

“The most powerful and authentic transformative agent of teaching and leadership is not the individual teachers and leaders, but rather the relationships – the in-between space of meeting – that they create and the relational encounters they both represent and facilitate.” (p. 261)

Perhaps the reflective response cycle introduced in this thesis, which can also be viewed as an approach to mindful awareness that helps to open the door to an exploration of the self, may help teachers connect and find a more flourishing and compassionate space in which to teach their students.
Chapter 3.

Methodology

This chapter includes a description of the research methodology and an overview of how the study was conducted. Included are a description of the one-on-one coaching sessions and interview components, journal protocols and participant selection.

3.1. Aims

As I listened to the stories from teachers about their frustrations with themselves and their students, I heard their longing to better understand their own reactions as well as those of their students. It was clear to me that these teachers cared deeply about their students and wanted to enrich their experiences in school. They recognized their sense of irritation at circumstances that arose, often daily, and understood the potential implications of their emotional reactions for certain students. In my counselling office, students would report their beliefs that their teachers did not like them because of their visible frustration with a student’s tardiness, lack of attention or incomplete assignments. What those students were not able to interpret easily was the caring behind their teachers’ annoyance.

I found this discrepancy between teachers’ intentions and students’ interpretations of their teachers’ behaviours was supported in the literature on caring. Kel McDowell’s (2011) research on the perception of care among secondary students has highlighted the paradox between students’ and teachers’ perceptions of care. What he discovered in both his review of the literature on care as well as his own research findings is that teacher perceptions of caring for their students outweigh those of the students. In McDowell’s study, students did not report feeling cared for by their teachers to the degree that teachers reported caring for their students. From my own experience with teachers, I have yet to meet one who does not report feeling care for their students. Nel Noddings (1992), in her work on the ethics of care, defines a caring relationship as “a connection or encounter between two human beings — a carer and a recipient of care, or cared for” (p. 15). It is her belief that a person can only be considered to extend care if the recipient receives the care; reciprocity is essential. This might imply that it is
not necessarily what the teacher does that is important but rather how he or she goes about doing it as well as how it is interpreted by the recipient.

A key aim of the reflective response cycle explored in this study is to help teachers with the how. It strives to uncover the reasons behind teacher frustration in advance of an unwanted reaction and then allow the teacher to choose a response that is in line with that underlying reason. For example, if I am annoyed that a student is often tardy, my annoyance may stem from my fear that the student will miss out on important information and, therefore, be unsuccessful in the course. If my desire is to encourage the student to take full advantage of my lessons, then my response might be best suited to a warm welcome followed by a later conversation about the reasons behind the tardiness. From there, I can take the appropriate action: I may learn that my class is simply not as important to the student as it is to me, and then let go of my unmet expectations of a timely arrival; or, I could learn that there are good reasons for the tardiness and follow up with parents or counsellors. My aim is to give teachers the opportunity to identify their goals for their classroom; uncover unexamined assumptions and beliefs, and; offer a strategy on how to become more aware and feel more in control of responses to critical incidents in the classroom.

3.2. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research “starts from the subjective and social meaning” (Flick, 2009, p. 16) related to the object of study. Any time meaning is placed on an object by another human being, interpretation is a given. We have all acquired our own set of beliefs, experiences, and understanding of the world. We interpret the world through that filter. The researcher also comes to the research study with her or his own set of beliefs, experiences and approaches to the world. Both the subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process. Qualitative research is a “continuous process of constructing versions of reality” (p. 19). The researcher and the research participants create their own version of reality in the questioning, the telling, and the presentation of their findings. My task as researcher was to help make sense of what was reported by the participants; this relies on subjective experience regardless of how skilled the researcher and participant are at being able to “bracelet” (Husserl, 1954) their assumptions and prejudices.
For this study, a qualitative research approach was used to explore phenomena from the unique perspective of those being studied in the context of their particular circumstances. The idea that new knowledge can come from the study of experiences as understood by the self is at the foundation of qualitative research. This study sought to understand how the participants made sense of their engagement with the reflective response cycle based on their subjective interpretation of their particular situation and environment.

According to Brinkmann (2012), qualitative research is synonymous with life – there is no one correct interpretation (p. 24). In other words, qualitative research understands that one cannot separate the object, the reflective response cycle, from the subject, the participants. Using a qualitative approach, I aimed to gain a better understanding of participants’ experiences as they constructed it, through their unique interpretation of events, as well as my own interpretations based on my own experiences and informed by relevant scholarship.

Qualitative research understands that an analytical process can never be genuinely a first person account; both the participant and the researcher must construct it. As such, it was important that I, as researcher, stayed aware and mindful – to the best to my ability – of my own assumptions and unique interpretations of the described classroom events, enabled participants to construct their own meaning of their accounts, and provided them with the space needed to make sense of their own experiences. My role was to offer an interpretation based on my emergent understanding of what it meant for the participants to engage with the reflective response cycle through their interactions with the students in the classroom.

Flick (2009) recognizes that qualitative research is “the study of subjective meaning and everyday experience” (p. 12); it explores peoples’ lived experiences and all the nuances and messiness that this entails. It recognizes that real life does not happen in a laboratory where controls are put into place. As such, qualitative research is about discovery. Throughout the study, I adopted a stance of co-researcher with the participants, continually discovering nuances and complexities that emerged through their experience of engaging with the reflective response cycle.
In his book, *The Interpreted World*, Ernesto Spinelli (1989) remarks that, “as human beings, we attempt to make sense of all our experiences” (p. 1). Meaning is “implicit in our experience of reality”, and “we cannot tolerate meaninglessness” (p. 7). Reflective practice is also about trying to make sense of the world. It is through critical reflection of our values and assumptions, with the intention of growth and improvement, that we gain insight into our own “unique interpretation of the world” (p. 9). The nine participants who chose to engage with this reflective practice wanted to better understand their classroom triggers and, as stated by one, how to “not come out of a class and just feel like ‘oh my goodness, I don’t know what’s going on.’” For these reasons, a phenomenological and hermeneutic orientation was used to explore, understand, and describe participants’ lived experiences. Van Manen (2015) posits that, “pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience (children’s realities and lifeworlds). Pedagogy requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the pedagogic significance of situations and relations.” (p. 2)

As the participants reflected on their experiences in the classroom and interpreted their own and the students’ reactions, I attempted to understand it all through my unique lens, using the reflective response cycle as my guide, offering alternate perspectives and at times modes of action, so they could uncover unexplored beliefs and assumptions that were hindering their positive experiences in the classroom.

The reflective response cycle is in itself a phenomenological process for it is about what is going on in the moment. It asks participants to “ bracket” (Husserl, 1954) beliefs and assumptions to the best of their ability, to refrain from reacting in accordance with those notions, and to pause briefly, in the present moment, and choose a response that is in line with their previously stated intentions. As Spinelli (1989) so eloquently expresses:

"If each of us were willing to apply the phenomenological method to the various private and social interactions in our lives, if we were all momentarily to bracket our sedimented outlooks and beliefs in an attempt to enter each other’s frameworks of being with mutual openness and respect, we would be likely to find that highly similar elements of concern and fear underlie our separate and seemingly antagonistic actions. Under such circumstances, although the many and varied problems of the world would not be instantly resolved, we could at least begin to disassemble many of the barriers that stand in the way of such a goal.” (p. 192)
If teachers could put aside their assumptions about student misbehaviour and take the time to hear with open minds and hearts the explanation presented to them, perhaps those feelings of disrespect or anger might dissolve into compassion and mutual understanding. This is my lofty goal with the reflective response cycle explored in this study. It is a vehicle to begin the conversation and see where it may lead.

The qualitative methods used to gather data in the study included semi-structured pre- and post- reflective response cycle interviews, participant reflections and researcher feedback through weekly journal submissions, and critical incident debriefing opportunities – a critical incident refers to any challenging situation arising in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in advance of participant engagement with the reflective response cycle to gather a base-line understanding of the participants’ feelings and actions in dealing with unexpected and/or challenging incidents in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews were conducted post-practice to document participant experiences of the reflective response cycle over the four-month study. Participants’ reflective journals included documented incidents, perceptions, and feedback from the researcher that helped to inform the research as well as aid in the further development of the practice.

3.3. Ethics and Informed Consent

Simon Fraser University’s Office of Research Ethics (ORE) granted ethics approval to conduct this research. Teachers signed consent forms to participate in the study. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to maintain his or her anonymity. The three school districts provided a letter from the district to verify that they agreed to participate. Audio recordings were destroyed upon completion of transcription. Reports that relied on the data collected remained confidential, as no names (or email addresses) were used. No one other than my supervisor and I had access to the raw digital data, audio, interview recording sheets and survey digital archives.

Participants were not penalized for not agreeing to participate or withdrawing from the interview study.
There were no known benefits to participating in this research. Possible benefits included an improved classroom environment where a sustainable focus on connection could impact positively on the wellbeing of students and teachers.

This study was considered one of ‘minimal risk.’ There were no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. Teachers were simply being exposed to a novel way of looking at their stress responses and then being asked to observe any impact this new way of thinking had on their responses to unexpected and/or challenging incidents in the classroom.

3.4. Participants and the Educational Context

3.4.1. Recruitment of Participants

A total of ten teachers from three schools (two secondary schools and one elementary school) were originally recruited for the study. Nine of the ten teachers participated in the full study and are included in the analysis. Participants were recruited by either email, previous association with my work, or by word-of-mouth. Five of the original ten participants responded to an email sent out within the school at which I was working. The other five teachers had been exposed to my work in advance of the study and requested to participate. I knew two of those five who had requested participation, and the other three teachers had heard of the study through another source and were directed to me for consultation.

I had hoped the participants within each school would interact over the course of the four-month study. Therefore, I aimed to recruit at least two teachers from each of the original four schools that were selected for the study. This was possible for three of the schools. However, I was not successful in recruiting a second participant for one of the schools and the one participant from that school who had originally agreed to participate dropped out of the study shortly after the process had begun.

Three of the four original schools that agreed to take part in the study were secondary schools. The other was an elementary school. I did not believe that the age of the students was important to this study since the focus was on engaging teachers with the reflective response cycle and the study did not involve students directly. Further, this study did not seek to compare teachers; the purpose was to research the lived
experiences of each of the nine individuals in their engagement with the reflective response cycle. Recruitment had been focussed initially on secondary schools because of my past and current experience in that environment; however, when approached by an elementary school teacher colleague who wanted to participate, I saw no reason to exclude her from the study.

3.4.2. Participating Schools

The sites used for this study included two public secondary schools and one public elementary school in two British Columbia school districts. Two of the three schools were familiar to me because I was working in one of the school districts where two of the schools were located at the time of the study. I had worked in one of those schools previously, and at the time of the study I was working as a counsellor at the other.

3.5. Reflexivity of the Researcher

Reflexivity encourages the researcher to question all ‘truths’ and examine all preconceptions throughout the research process. Reflexivity “is the recognition that the product of research inevitably reflects some of the background, milieu and predilections of the researcher” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 3). Further, as Law (2004) has remarked, “our complicity in reality-making” is unavoidable (p. 153). The researcher must attend to the process, making transparent as much as possible, her or his positioning in coming to the research project. The researcher’s perspective is embedded in the findings and as such needs to be made apparent to the reader. The researcher finds the patterns of meaning within the data and presents those interpretations to the reader for scrutiny. The greater understanding the reader has of the researcher, the greater the possibility is for trustworthiness of the findings. With this understanding, I am reporting here and in my conclusion, “the known potential for, and measures taken to minimize, relevant biases” (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2014, p. 14).

In undertaking this study I was aware of my position as an inside/outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I had been a teacher in the past but was known by the study participants as a counsellor; I believed I needed to be mindful of the possibility of the teacher participants’ interpreting my feedback – particularly through the journal
dialoguing and debriefing sessions – as criticism. I was no longer situated in the trenches of the classroom and needed to be sensitive to the daily challenges they faced as classroom teachers. I made a point of coming from a place of curiosity; I did not wish to be seen as the expert but rather as a co-explorer in the use of the reflective response cycle. Therefore, when working with the teachers I used phrases such as: “I’m wondering...”; “perhaps it would help if...”; “does that make sense?” It was helpful that I had already established some credibility through either my interactions with those participants at my own school site or through recommendations from colleagues at the other two sites.

Another concern I had, as indicated in the introduction, was that participants would see this as a counselling process instead of a reflective practice. While there were aspects of the coaching sessions that required an open and non-judgmental stance as the participants explored past experiences, looking for patterns of feelings, thoughts and/or actions, I needed to remain mindful that I was doing research and not conducting a counselling interview. As Van Manen (2015) remarked, “the interview process needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place” (p. 66). During one of the coaching sessions, one of the participants began to delve deeper into the past, and I redirected the interview to the task at hand. While this felt dismissive coming from a counselling position, it was not at cross-purposes with the intent of the interview.

3.6. Data Collection and Analysis

Data gathered included audio recordings of each pre- and post- interview, one-on-one coaching session, and debriefing session, as well as weekly emailed journal entries from participants along with my responses. A post-pre survey was also employed to give participants an opportunity to assess their subjective sense of their learning. A description of each type of data collected and the approach to analysis that was used is provided in the sections that follow.

3.6.1. The Pre-Interview

A pre-interview took place with each teacher participant prior to the reflective response cycle coaching session. Each pre-interview was audio-recorded
and lasted approximately 30 minutes. It was conducted either face-to-face or by video conferencing, depending on the time constraints and family obligations of each participant. Three of the nine participants chose video conferencing for this interview. Its purpose was fourfold: 1) to gather background information and learn about the participant's journey to and interest in becoming a teacher, 2) to provide me as researcher with a baseline for how the participant handled stressful situations in the classroom (pre-reflective.response cycle) – to understand how they were able to think on their feet, 3) to allow me to better understand the challenges they were facing in the classroom in order to see if, at the end of the study, any of these had changed, and 4) to learn of their reasons for choosing to participate in the study. In order to understand better how each participant handled stressful situations in the classroom, a challenging classroom scenario was read to them followed by a series of questions based on the scenario to gain an understanding of how they would potentially handle such a situation (for the protocols for this interview see Appendix A).

The scenario and follow up questions were adapted from John Bond’s (2011) research into principals’ “reflection-in-action”. Bond was interested in principals’ thought processes in the moments before responding to an unexpected and public verbal attack. Having been a classroom teacher for many years, I was not surprised to hear a resounding “yes” when participants were asked if they had ever experienced a similar situation. While the use of the word “attack” seemed rather strong to many of them, they all recalled situations when a student had demonstrated feelings of displeasure at a comment, a directive or an experience in the classroom. The reflective.response cycle explored in the present study was interested in offering teachers an alternate strategy of reflection and intentional response when faced with those types of challenging moments.

3.6.2. Journal Entries

Over the four-month period of the study, participants were asked to email me one journal entry per week, using the prompts provided (see Appendix B). The purpose of the journal was threefold: 1) to track the participants’ processes over the four-month study, 2) to allow me to dialogue with the participants, guiding them through their process and helping them extract meaning from their experiences, and 3) to have a point of focus for the two debriefing sessions.
Not all participants were able to manage the weekly journals given time constraints and/or other personal circumstances outside the school context. Three of the participants preferred to debrief only.

3.6.3. Debriefing Sessions

Each participant was invited to debrief one or two critical incidents during the four-month period of the study. These sessions were audio-recorded. The time allotment was dependent on the participant and varied from 10 to 40 minutes based on the depth of the explanation of the incident. Debrief sessions were conducted either face-to-face or by phone, depending on the time constraints and family obligations of each participant. Three of the nine participants chose to debrief by phone. The purpose of these sessions was for me to provide guidance through their practice, which differed slightly from the journal feedback. The person-to-person connection as opposed to written feedback allowed a more personal, connected, interactive opportunity for feedback. Several participants verbalized their gratitude for these sessions and three of them relied almost solely on these, because they found completing the journal entries too time-consuming and cumbersome.

3.6.4. Post-Pre Survey

Based on the work of Hiebert, Domene, and Buchanan (2011), the post-pre survey was developed to engage participants in decisions about a series of statements that reflected their understanding of the subject matter both before (retrospectively) and after a study’s completion. It is only used after a program has been completed, hence the term post-pre. The post-pre 20-item survey developed for this study (see Appendix D) provided participants with an opportunity to further reflect on their learning of the reflective response cycle. They were asked to complete the survey in advance of the final interview. Each of the statements in the post-pre survey was developed based on the goals of the practice. The responses required participants to gauge their level of agreement with the statements provided, measured on a scale of 0-4 in which 0 represents “not true for me” and 4 represents “true for me”. An increase in score from pre- to post would indicate a positive outcome of the reflective response cycle. In addition to providing another opportunity for reflection, a secondary benefit to using the post-pre survey, as reported by Hiebert and colleagues, is that such a measure offers
greater trustworthiness and consistency in results. This is in part because participants’ self-reported data can be used to corroborate researcher-determined themes and assumptions. Although the post-pre survey uses numbers, the numbers are not used in a ‘quantifiable’ way; rather, they are used in a qualitative way to prompt reflection and to represent an individual’s sense of change over time, before and after experiencing a program or intervention. Further, in this study, the post-pre was not used to compare teachers’ experiences but to assist each participant with their own self-reflection and sense making of their experience.

3.6.5. Post-Interviews

At the end of the study, participants took part in post-interviews, which were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 45 minutes (for the protocols for this interview see Appendix C). They were conducted either face-to-face or by video conferencing, depending on the time constraints and family obligations of each participant. Two of the nine participants chose video conferencing for the final interview. The purpose of the final interview was for me to explore with the participants their experiences in engaging with the reflective response cycle and to gather feedback to inform the analysis and interpretation of the findings. The participants were first asked to identify and describe any changes they may have noticed to their reactions to unexpected and/or challenging events in the classroom. They were reminded of their responses to the critical incident scenario presented at the pre-interview. They were then asked to identify any conditions that may have constrained their use of the reflective response cycle during the study. Finally, they were asked if they could see any benefit to teaching this approach of self-reflection to their students.

3.7. Coaching Sessions

All participants were asked to take part in a one-on-one coaching session, which was audio-recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes. It was conducted either face-to-face or by video conferencing, depending on the time constraints and family obligations of each participant. Three of the nine participants chose video conferencing for the coaching session. The purpose of the coaching session was to identify life goals, explore past experiences of stress responses, and present participants with an
understanding of the reflective response cycle, both theoretically and practically. The theoretical underpinnings of the reflective practice were discussed in Chapter 2, and the response cycle was developed based on Answer Model Theory (Montgomery & Ritchey, 2008) as outlined in Chapter 1.

The one-on-one coaching session began with an opportunity for participants to reflect on their personal and professional goals, specifically directed to their classroom practice. They were asked to list the eight things they wanted most in life and the meanings they associated with each of their goals were explored and clarified through open-ended questioning, for example:

“I heard you say ‘calm down’. Is that what you like to have? Calm?”

“Is it that you would like to find a passion? Is that what you are looking for?”

“Tell me a little bit more about career?”

Participants were then asked to identify which of those goals connected best with their intentions for their classroom practice. These would serve as markers for the intention-setting portion of the reflective cycle. Beliefs, assumptions and “habits of mind” (Dewey, 1933) were also explored during the coaching session, for example:

“Where do you think that belief came from?”

“So is it feeling trapped in the meeting?...and you didn’t feel you could just walk out?”

Participants were next asked to recall two or three stressful experiences in their lives with the purpose of identifying patterns of emotions and reactions. There were several “aha” moments that came out of this process for the participants, for example:

“maybe there’s a fear of being trapped...?”

Yeah, that actually makes more sense...I do everything I can not to piss people off at work.”

“to be completely honest, has anyone ever said that to me, given me that impression? No, but I don’t know, I just get that sense, like maybe it’s just my own head...”

“yeah, I never thought of that!”
“And that’s the thing, I know that’s ingrained in how, that’s why I feel a certain way..”

With these insights, participants were invited to notice during their work with the reflective response cycle whether these familiar feelings, thoughts and actions emerged during critical incidents in the classroom.

The one-on-one coaching session concluded with an introduction to the reflective response cycle through a visual representation of the process (see Figure 2.1). First, participants were invited to set an intention for the day or the particular class in which they wanted to explore the use of the cycle. They were then directed to notice when they were triggered by unexpected and/or challenging incidents during their day, particularly in the classroom. Here, “triggered” refers to the automatic sensations in the body that arise as a response to stress. These sensations were discussed as part of the participants’ potential emotional reactions to the scenario given during the pre-interview. Once they became aware of their own particular stress responses, they were directed to locate the emotion(s) they were experiencing (e.g., anger, frustration, irritation, embarrassment, guilt, etc.). They were then asked to try and identify a personal fear that might be hidden beneath the initial emotion (e.g., fear of failure, fear of judgment, fear of loss of chaos, etc.). Armed with the identification of these fears, participants were asked to mentally question the assumptions or beliefs that could be driving them. The final phase in the process was to choose a response to the critical incident or challenging situation based on the previously set intention.

During the one-on-one coaching sessions, I took detailed notes to help with the process of exploring participant goals and uncovering patterns of feeling, thought and actions from past experiences. These notes proved extremely useful when two of the audio recordings malfunctioned, one in mid-stream and the other in its entirety; I was not aware of the malfunction of the equipment until the interview had concluded. The notes enabled me to continue with the study process.
3.8. Analytic Process

3.8.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 79). Participants’ pre- and post-reflective response cycle interviews were semi-structured, audiotaped, and transcribed. The debrief sessions were also audiotaped and transcribed. Prior to transcription all audiotapes were reviewed on three separate occasions for familiarity with the data. Once the audiotapes were transcribed, all data, including journal entries, were actively read and re-read and systematically coded, manually, for categories. A code identifies "a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst" (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 88). Patterns of meaning, or themes, among categories were then identified. A theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 82). Where codes are descriptive, themes are abstract ideas and part of the interpretation of the data by the researcher. The data set was analyzed multiple times to ensure themes were well represented. Once specific themes were identified, they were refined and then named. I also worked with my senior supervisor to clarify the assumptions and categories I was using as part of my thematic analysis process.
Chapter 4.

Findings

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents narratives of each of the ten participants in the study. The second section explains the thematic analysis used to identify patterns and themes within the data set – all data used for theme identification. The third section, the post-pre survey, offers insights into the pre and post-intervention of the reflective response cycle, documenting the participants’ self-perception of change at the end of the four-month study. The final section identifies the two questions asked during the final interview that were not used as part of the data set; these responses concern teacher practice and student engagement possibilities as well as future considerations for the reflective response cycle.

Table 4.1. Summary of data collection

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4.1. Narratives

The following narratives were derived from the pre-interview and the one-on-one coaching session, the two activities that preceded the participants’ experiences with the reflective response cycle. Their purpose was threefold:
1) The construction allowed me as researcher to delve deeply into each person’s background so as to get a clearer picture of their understanding of their own past experiences in advance of their work with the reflective response cycle. I was able to take a step back and reflect on their personal narrating of their journeys as educators, their experiences in the classroom and their decision-making in joining this study. Since a qualitative, phenomenological method of analysis was used for this study, the use of description made sense as it is considered a vital step in opening up understandings (Spinelli, 1989) and holding back on explanation or analysis. Further, as stated by Van Manen (2015),

“The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (p. 36).

Writing the narratives allowed me to “re-live” the stories so as to pull significant key ideas from the data.

2) The narratives serve to situate each of the participants for the reader. It was important to me that the reader understands each participant’s unique background, experiences, and reasons for joining the study. This will allow the reader to see how the reflective practice provided openings for growth and change as indicated later in the participants’ final interviews and post-pre survey responses.

3) The narrative structure was an easy way for me to present back to each participant the story I gleaned from his or her reflection; it afforded each an opportunity to check my understanding of their story for validation. Further, the narrative gave the participants, as well as myself, an opportunity to “re-live” their stories in order to uncover something meaningful within to assist with interpretation and understanding.

**Participant 1: Mark**

At the time of the interview, Mark had been teaching Science at the secondary school level for 25 years. He was teaching four different courses, three at the senior level. When asked what his biggest challenges were in the classroom, he said that it was the pressure of time: “My time is so tight. That’s the biggest pressure of my life…time.”
Mark had two teenagers living at home, and a two and a quarter hour commute by bike, his preferential mode of transportation. On workdays he got up at 5am in order to get ready and attend to the various affairs of the house (i.e., “putting in the laundry or getting dinner prepped”). Throughout the study, Mark was very structured with his time. He let me know exactly how much time he could dedicate to a meeting or an interview and usually scheduled these in the last portion of the hour before the bell was to ring. The stress of time seemed always on the forefront of his mind. During the coaching session, Mark identified the feeling of entrapment that emerged frequently in his life – possibly from early childhood.

Mark spoke of his desire for excellence from his students when asked to delve deeper into the time pressures at work: “I’m not going to accept substandard from what I know they can do, and I know they can do amazing things.” He articulated that his main goals in his workday were “to be working with kids towards transformation of themselves or transformation of their understanding,” in addition to doing everything he could to help them “get to their best personal, academic path.” He explained that his approach to teaching was through storytelling, and consequently, he is engaged and focused throughout the class – “[I’m] on every minute I’m in class.” More than once during our interviews, Mark talked about the importance he placed on adding value to other people’s lives by “engaging, helping them shape their self-worth.” He said that he valued his time as well as that of others and strove to make meaningful use of every minute of the day either by engaging fully with his students or researching to uncover new ways of approaching a topic. Adding value to the lives of others came up on several occasions during our interview. During a discussion on the value he places on his career, he stated that “it’s important to me; it’s something I need to invest in; it’s an aspect of my life; it’s why I do these things – that’s how I can inspire others.” This desire to be an inspiration was very strong for him.

Mark responded to the recruitment email I had sent out because he knew I would need participants and he wanted to make a contribution. He also said that while he knew he would learn new techniques to add to his current reflective practice, he was most interested in the concept of triggers and “what’s going on at the meta level.” He was interested in adding value to my work as well as enhancing his own practice and understanding of self and others.
When asked about an experience of being verbally attacked by a student, Mark relayed a challenging and somewhat traumatic event from his very early years of teaching. He said that the impact of that experience had made him “realise that I’m blessed where I am.” It also made him see the importance of relationships; “We have to do everything we can to make sure that this [relationships] is sacred, and trust in relationships.” It was clear throughout the study that Mark cared deeply about his students, their education, and their ability to reach their fullest potential.

Mark’s list, when asked during the coaching session what he wanted or valued most in life, included personal growth, happiness, passion, balance, meaning, family and friends, laughter, and love. It is not surprising that personal growth surfaced first for him. When Mark was asked to set his intention for the class that he had chosen to work with over the course of the study, based on his values list, he chose “building a caring, strong environment for learning.” He went on to explain that, “When they feel that I care about their learning then they’re going to behave differently.”

**Participant 2: Evelyn**

At the time of the interview, Evelyn worked as a part-time librarian. She had been teaching for 16 years; 14 of those she taught French, German and Outdoor Education at the secondary level, and the past two years before the study she taught at the elementary level as a teacher-librarian. She had a son in elementary school and was dealing with a challenging divorce. She was a writer, an artist and had a passion for the outdoors. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom, she said it was “on-task behaviour.” She laughed as she remarked, “I just like the rules to be set out and everyone to follow them. I don’t like it when they don’t follow them.”

Evelyn had been exposed to the ideas behind the reflective response cycle in advance of the study and requested to participate. When asked what she hoped to get out of the study, she said:

“I could possibly improve my teaching by being more aware of what triggers me in a classroom. I find when I take time, I take a deep breath when things aren’t going my way in the classroom, and I deal with things slowly and methodically that it works, but I find that it’s often so rushed and I’m trying to get things done that when there is a problem I tend to just be irritated by it; I don’t want to deal with it...I
have a job to do and I want to get the job done, and here’s something that’s impeding my progress in getting the job done [laughter].”

She said the irritation often comes when “the students who aren’t aware of how their behaviour affects others are taking away from the other students’ experience and that feels really selfish and unaware, sort of ‘who do you think you are, you’re one of many, it’s not just your classroom, it’s everyone’s classroom’.” This feeling of injustice came up frequently during our interactions. Evelyn does not consider herself a disciplinarian and could not think of a time in her career when she had sent a student to the principal’s office. She said that her way of dealing with difficult behaviours was to remove the student from the class and deal with them one-on-one. She also admitted that she is “not great at dealing with conflict” and that she often takes the student behaviours “personally”. In relaying one incident with a student, she said, “I wanted to be appreciated and I wanted to feel respected for that.” Later in the interview she said:

“When I feel anger, I feel that my needs are not being met. So I feel that in the classroom it’s so important for us to be in touch with what our own needs are because I think there are often times where people are stretched to the max, our needs are not being met. That’s a time when you lash out and say don’t push me any farther; I’m on the edge!”

When asked during the coaching session what she wanted or valued most in life, Evelyn’s list included genuine purpose/the ability to contribute, love, health, intimacy, adventure, family, friendship, food and shelter – [laughing] “I thought I should get some practical things in there.” When asked which was the one that related most to what she wanted in the classroom, she identified genuine purpose; “I think that’s a big part of my job, to be able to contribute. And probably a sense of intimacy, a sense of connection.” Evelyn set her intention as “purposeful contribution and connection.” She recognized that it would take “mental practice” given the many personal challenges she was facing at that time.

Participant 3: Catherine

At the time of the interview, Catherine had been teaching at the secondary school level for four years, and was teaching French and Planning. She said that she had “adored” high school and was told by all her teachers that she should become a teacher herself. She thought, “there’s no way I could be a teacher, I’m not patient
However, while studying Visual Arts, English Literature and French in university, she volunteered as a coach, a Girl Guide leader, and a reader for an elementary school project, and she had a change of heart. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom, she talked about student disengagement, disinterest, bullying behaviours and relationship building. She identified one particular class:

“They don’t think the course is of value, so they’re disengaged and disinterested in the course material…and also just being really mean…they bully other kids in the class, or they bully me, or they’re purposefully distracted…and I’m having a hard time building a relationship with them.”

Catherine was recruited through the email sent out in her school. She responded immediately to the call out for participants, expressing her interest in improving her teaching practice. When asked what she hoped to get out of the study, she said,

“I think just being a bit better able to process the feelings I have after some just not so good incidents happen in the classroom. I think proactively about stopping them from happening in the future, or just how to react better to them in the future.”

When she talked about her experience of being verbally attacked in the classroom, she said,

“it feels bad and you’re on the spot, because the way you react will determine how the kids will react, how the kids will handle the scenario in the future, whether they will try something like that again.”

She talked about the stress of trying to decide how to respond, what words to choose, and then how to “collect” herself after the event in order to best speak with the student on his or her own. She went on to explain her “anxious” thoughts:

“a) I worry about what I’m doing wrong to precipitate that happening in the first place and, b) how am I going to stop that happening again in the future?”

When asked during the coaching session what she wanted or valued most in life, Catherine’s list included family, a home (freedom/peace/productivity), pets (connection/comfort), purpose, travel (fun/learning/exploration), health, happiness, financial security and stability, and fulfillment (creativity). At the time of the interview, Catherine and her spouse were renting an apartment that didn’t afford the space to consider raising children or enjoying her crafts. Moreover, the yearly rental increases
were challenging. When talking about her dream of having a spacious home with a room for a library and her crafts, she reported that, “I use all my extroverted energy on my job, and when I come home I like to use my introverted energy on that.”

For her, the biggest challenge in the classroom was feeling a sense of purpose. By the end of the session, she had determined that her daily intention was to be “more connected with my students and more assertive dealing with difficult situations.” Catherine relayed a stressful event in the classroom that had occurred the previous day when a group of boys were teasing a student with developmental challenges. She described the situation:

“I was feeling really bad for the girl. I didn’t know she was being made fun of, and they were laughing at her. I was feeling bad for her; I was feeling bad for the people in the class who were also uncomfortable like I was, and I was also feeling bad about myself because I didn’t know how to handle it; I didn’t know how to address the boys and I didn’t do anything.”

When asked for the feeling, she said that she felt guilty for letting the girl down and “stewed” on it all night. Later in the interview, Catherine identified the feeling of helplessness that emerged time and again in her life, possibly from early childhood experiences. She was determined to pay attention to that feeling and question it as she worked through the reflective response cycle.

**Participant 4: Rose**

At the time of the interview, Rose was in her fourth year of teaching Theatre part-time at a secondary school. She had taught previously for two years and then stayed home for 11 years to raise her children. For her, the biggest challenges in the classroom were bringing students back to attention when they were all talking. She also shared a challenging incident she had encountered with a student who had not been listening and had questioned the importance of what was being taught. The feelings that came up for her in contemplating the event were insecurity and self-doubt. At one point during the discussion she said, “I feel small saying this.” Rose seemed to choose her words carefully, thoughtfully, during our interactions. She would take time to find the right words for the thoughts she was looking to express. When asked what other students in the room would have seen during the above incident, she replied,
They would see me trying to figure out quickly what to do...they would either nod and smile in my direction to support me or they would help the frustrated student connect to the concept that was being taught.”

Rose felt very supported by the majority of her Theatre students, knowing she could usually count on them to bring those less connected back into the group.

Rose was recruited through the email sent out in her school. She responded immediately to the call out for participants, expressing her interest in improving her teaching practice. She noted, “It [the reflective response cycle] compliments my own practices.” Rose had been delving into reflective and spiritual practices over the past several years and was interested in increasing her knowledge and understanding of self and others. She saw this practice as another way to enhance her personal and professional growth.

When asked during the coaching session what she wanted or valued most in life, Rose’s list included, time to herself to recharge (peace/contentment), a clean house (a sense of accomplishment), passion, to go to New York City (experiences), health, to raise her kids well, creativity, and to stay in love. Rose talked about valuing risk-taking through creativity and said, “Those who don’t try are the most annoying.” When students aren’t willing to take risks, she talked about her irritation. The value on Rose’s list that most related to her goals in the classroom was creativity. She talked about her desire to inspire her students so they would embrace the work and the opportunities she provided. When one of her students disparaged a field trip, she questioned her ability to inspire her students, thinking, “I suck at inspiring!” The feeling of helplessness came up for Rose as a feeling she recognized from past experiences in her life.

**Participant 5: Yvonne**

At the time of the interview, Yvonne was a fulltime Social Studies, English Language and Planning teacher. She had been teaching at the secondary school level for five years. She was drawn to teaching because of her coaching background and her positive relationships with her own high school teachers. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom, she said both authentic assessment – ensuring “every assignment I do is for a purpose, …not busy work” – and some classroom management issues. She explained the difficulties of “trying to find that balance” between supporting
the excelling students in the classroom as well as those not able to understand or manage with some of the course materials and/or classroom practices. She talked about the “bigger personalities” in the classroom who may be loud or talkative and, while she was not bothered by higher levels of noise, “there are some learners who really struggle working in a classroom environment that is louder.”

Yvonne was first introduced to the study in a casual staffroom conversation, and then she responded to the email sent out in her school. She stated, when asked what she would like to get out of the study, that she hoped to learn,

“How to better deal with students one-on-one with behaviour, and what I can do to support it, not get overwhelmed by it and kind of not come out of a class and just feel like ‘oh my goodness, I don’t know what’s going on.’ How can I not have that happen consistently and not feel drained after every time that happens?”

Yvonne shared an incident in her classroom that had occurred the previous day when a disruptive student refused her attempts at redirection and then challenged her and eventually walked out of the room. She reflected on the self-deprecating thoughts and feelings she experienced following the incident:

“What could I have done that would have not let this happen? Or, am I not doing my job properly? Is it me? Should I have been able to do something before this happened? And I feel kind of crappy about myself, thinking that I should have been able to deal with this better. Or did I not do enough? Was I too hard on the student? And thinking that now, my self-esteem is lower.”

She also said that she began to question her ability as a teacher:

“I feel like I’m not doing a great job as a teacher...are other teachers dealing with this as well, or is it just me? Maybe [it’s] my personality, the way I deal with things. And I know I sometimes come off as being really nice and sometimes I think some people think that I’m just a pushover, but I don’t necessarily see myself as that way, but I’m just friendlier with students, so I feel maybe it’s something about me. Maybe I have to be harder...then I just compare myself.”

This feeling of “not [being] good enough” emerged as a common theme in several of Yvonne’s childhood memories. From these experiences, she said, “I don’t want to make people feel that way, like not good enough, so when I’m teaching that's really important to me...I know that’s something I shape my practice around.” Other feelings she
recognized within herself in the classroom were “helplessness and loss of power” – also potentially due to her past experiences.

When asked during the coaching session what she wanted or valued most in life, Yvonne’s list included, helping support others, to be an integral part of something, love, family, connection, financial stability, career security – she had not yet secured a continuing contract with the school district for which she worked – travel, and time freedom. The value that related most to what she wanted in the classroom was connection. She talked about her desire to arrange her class so that one student in particular with whom she was struggling to engage felt connected in the class.

**Participant 6: Val**

At the time of the interview, Val was a fulltime, senior Science teacher. She had been teaching for 18 years. She was “inspired” to take up teaching as a career because of her Grade 10 teacher who seemed to love her life and her job. Val thought, “What a cool job!” Since she achieved high scores in Maths and Sciences, those were the courses she decided to study in university. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom she named fun and connection. She explained that she started teaching at a very young age and was considered the “cool” teacher – “I was really young and I was vibrant and the kids really connected.” She talked about the differences between the past and the present for her:

“It’s a double-edged sword... [During those early years], I was the ‘cool’ teacher and I really connected with them, but being a teacher and knowing how to be a teacher, I was not that solid. Now it’s flipped a little bit, not to say that the kids hate me or anything, but now I’m one of those ‘old’ teachers...and I don’t always know whether it’s my age...and they’re still the same age – my audience hasn’t changed, and so I feel like I don’t connect at that level as much with them any more.”

Val had become aware of the professional boundaries she had placed between herself and her students. She felt a distance and said, “I struggle a little bit with finding that balance again, the balance where I can connect with them at that [personal] level, but also feeling very solid in my teaching.” Val said that she had a reputation at the school of being somewhat “scary” as far as her expectations went. She said she had become more of a “university-style teacher”.

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Val was introduced to the study after a difficult interaction with a student. She thought she could benefit from the reflective response cycle and volunteered to participate. She said she hoped participating in the study would help her, “to be able to sympathize or understand kids that struggle.” She explained that the students with whom she worked were very focussed on their studies and she wasn’t often faced with students who needed help. So, “when I do, I’m stuck. I don’t know what to do.” She remembered a scenario from her past when she was teaching a remedial Science course. When the students were behaving poorly she remembered “giving them a speech, like ‘you guys don’t care about life’.” One of the students lashed out at her, saying that she didn’t know anything about them. Upon reflection, she went back to the class and apologized, and from then on, “the whole energy changed. They were just on board.” When asked what had made the difference, she said, “I genuinely showed that I cared. And I did!” She then expressed that she wanted to do more of that; “I feel that there’s something that I’m not doing there.”

Val’s list of what she wanted most in life included, having a substantial purpose, deeper connections, travel, to be excellent at something, to keep learning new things, patience, inner peace, to be better able to see other people’s points of view. Val identified a feeling of helplessness that emerged throughout her past experiences. She had that same feeling when others were not able to see her point of view, and she identified becoming impatient and angry with them. Val also talked of her angst at not yet having contributed in a meaningful way to the world. Though she volunteered her time in several places, she was in search of something more “substantial” onto which to focus her energy.

When asked which was the value that related most to what she wanted in the classroom, she said “definitely giving help, without a doubt. This is what I’m starting to lose a little bit, without a doubt. That connection, that community.” She said that while she felt she had purpose in her classroom, that of teacher, “tasked” to teach, she was missing the fun, the play.

**Participant 7: Ashley**

At the time of the interview, Ashley was a Science and Math teacher. She had been in education for 13 years, having worked both as a teacher and an academic
counsellor. Ashley had moved from the private school system to the public sector and had been a Teacher-on-Call for several years prior to working fulltime at her current school. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom, she identified relationship building: “I want to take it on myself to get to know those students as much as possible, but when you have those classes of 30 students, it’s hard.” She went on to explain that she offered her office hours as a time to try and, “build rapport…however, I’d say only a handful of those students are coming in, so I’m finding that challenging, trying to figure out strategies and ways to do that.”

Ashley named one particular class in which she wanted to focus her attention during the study which was predominantly Grade 9 boys, where several of the girls had requested a transfer to other classes: “I’ve got a lot of needy students in that class, so how can I feel as though I’m helping each and every one of them without driving myself crazy?” Due to her involvement with several school district initiatives, she was absent from her classes often enough for her to notice the impact. She talked about the challenge of building routines after an absence: “They’d revert back to their original behaviours, and trying to get that routine for that class was particularly challenging for me.”

Ashley was first introduced to the study in a casual staffroom conversation and then she responded to the email sent out in her school. She said she hoped participating in this study would improve her reflective practice because, “I don’t necessarily take the time to sit down and reflect on specifics and so with this study, emailing [journals] forces me to take on that time for reflection.” Ashley said that at the beginning of the year, particularly with the above noted class, she would take difficult behaviours personally and would have to constantly remind herself that student behaviours represent “how they’re dealing with their stresses or anger.” She said that her strategy was “really making them feel like I want to be there, and connect them to the people I can connect them to [for guidance].” She said that when students behave poorly, she feels sad for them. Her strategy for dealing with unexpected or challenging behaviours was to stay calm and use body language to signal her dissatisfaction. When talking of her challenging Grade 9 class, she explained, “I frequently just stand there and wait for silence, but it takes me longer with that particular method.” Ultimately, she would go up to the disruptive student and ask them to see her outside or, “if it’s in the moment, I’ll shout across the room, ‘okay, wait outside for me’.” She further explained that, “when I
talk to them I don’t scold them…I usually start with, ‘I’m not getting you into trouble here; this is not what this is about, but I just want to understand where you’re coming from’.”

Ashley struggled all year with that Grade 9 class, eventually seeking very specific help from the administration and counsellors. Ashley changed her style of teaching from a collaborative, group work method to a more teacher-centered focus to manage the disruptive behaviours. She explained to them,

“You guys are missing out; you’re not getting as much enriched learning as some of my other classes and you’re having to do a lot more at home because you don’t necessarily have that time in class. Then I tried putting a more positive spin on it, thinking this is actually making it worse by saying that!”

Ashley often found that she would react and then reflect later on what she had said or done.

When asked during the coaching session what she wanted or valued most in life, Ashley’s list included, happiness, work/life balance (play, creating something I am proud of), personal and professional growth, humour, healthy lifestyle, peaceful interactions, connectedness, and being helpful to others. She said the values that related most to what she wanted in the classroom were happiness, humour, peaceful interactions and connectedness. She relayed a misunderstanding that had occurred the previous week with a student and their parent. The student seemed to have misunderstood an assignment, the parent had misunderstood Ashley’s intention, and Ashley had felt misunderstood and attacked. She explained that she had felt helpless when the student “stormed out” on her when asked to redo the assignment:

“I never want a student to feel that way...so I wanted to get to the root of that; I was feeling that I was giving this student another opportunity to show that they understood [the concepts].”

Coupled with a follow up “angry”, “defensive” email from the student’s parent, Ashley said she felt that she hadn’t done her job properly and had let this individual down; she said that she also felt “down on” herself. She articulated her fear that this

“Parent would not trust in me with their child and possibly to spreading that word to other parents and students, and snowballing to the point where my rapport with other students would have been compromised.”
At the end of her teaching day, she was finally able to take the time to compose a “lengthy” email clarifying the situation; “once the parent had understood the nature of it, they were very accepting of it. We saw absolutely eye to eye.”

As a child, Ashley identified herself as a “goody two shoes" and never got into trouble. She said, “I never went through those teenage years." She said that she always enjoyed making people laugh and that she felt her relationships with her four siblings was close, though “sometimes on somewhat of a superficial level.” While very warm and friendly, she often found it challenging to articulate her feelings during our interactions when debriefing classroom incidents. She explained that thinking about and articulating her feelings was not something she was accustomed to doing.

**Participant 8: Natasha**

At the time of the interview, Natasha was a fulltime Dance teacher. She had 12 years teaching experience in the public school system and a total of 20 years teaching Dance. Her passion for teaching Dance led her to a teacher’s certification in English and History with the dream of one day teaching Dance at the secondary school level. She began teaching Dance part-time and within six years she had realized her dream – a full-time Dance program. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom, she said “Grade 8 boy energy that is all over the place.” She explained that she was looking for better strategies on how to “keep her cool.”

Natasha had been exposed to the ideas behind the reflective response cycle in advance of the study and requested to participate. She said she hoped for personal growth from participating in the study – “I would like to see how I grow along this route.” She said she hoped to learn strategies from the other teachers participating in the study as well. At least two were selected from each school and they all agreed to have their names known by the other(s) – my hope was that they would discuss their process with each other. Ultimately, this did not transpire during the course of the study, possibly due to the time constraints in a typical day of a teacher.

Natasha talked about her thought-process when responding to challenging outbursts in the dance studio:
“I wouldn’t want to be brutalized as a teacher and talked about to other people or kids, or used as a bad example of how I was that day, or have other kids not trust me because of a bad response, or losing my cool.”

She said she has learned that, “kids are kids even though we expect them sometimes to know things, and we have our adult brain on, they’re not adults, so we really have to take that into consideration.” Natasha referred to herself as having a “strong, physical personality” that at times needed to be tempered so as not to impact her students in a negative way. She said her facial expressions were often enough to end certain challenging behaviours that occurred in the classroom. She named humour/sarcasm as one behaviour-management method to which she deferred at times to temper negative comments – though she tried to be selective – ensuring they knew her well enough not to feel embarrassed by the retort. She reflected on the difference between having been a younger, inexperienced teacher and the present:

“You’re supposed to create this disparity between the teacher and the student and I was so young; I was way harder, and I come from more of a strict background, and a triple A personality, and I expected everyone to be like me.”

She said that currently,

“I hear these stories from these kids every day and they open up; I’m way better at reading the child and knowing that they have stuff that they’re carrying with them, and I’m way more sympathetic to that, and empathetic than I was before.”

When asked during the coaching session what she wanted or valued most in life, Natasha’s list included, health, financial freedom, time freedom – she was working four evenings a week as well as weekends teaching Dance, friends and family, travel/adventure, joy, an amazing marriage, opportunities to grow, and inspire others.

During our session, she described an incident where she was challenged to inspire a group who had not followed through with their assignment for which she had helped them prepare the previous class. She said that she felt disappointed and “afraid for their success:

“I want them to do well and succeed, and I want them to feel confident in themselves and know that they can try something new that’s not in the realm of what they’re naturally good at, and they take risks and it pays off, and you can grow from something that’s new; it changes you.”
So, after feeling initially “irritated” and “rattled”, Natasha took the lead, gave them some redirection and in the end, “even though it’s not perfect and what they wanted, they felt better leaving my class knowing that they didn’t let me or themselves down.” When asked which was the value that related most to what she wanted in the classroom, Natasha said it was to be an inspiration by modelling strength and independence. Natasha was forced into independence at a young age when her mother died and her father struggled to cope with the loss. She said, “I grew up fast” and her way of coping was, “head down and bulldoze through.” She said her goal was to “inspire others to attract greatness.” The desires to be present and grounded were also ongoing goals for her during the course of the study. She was dealing with some very challenging personal issues that exacerbated the disruptions in her dance studio.

**Participant 9: Debra**

At the time of the interview, Debra was a fulltime teacher at an elementary school, teaching at the intermediate level. She started off with an undergraduate degree in Human Kinetics and then completed her teacher education with a specialty in Outdoor Education, which she taught for seven years in the private school system – Grades 8 through 12. She said that the Outdoor Program in which she had participated during high school “inspired me that education could look different than the traditional way, that we could learn by doing hands-on experiential projects and learn from the earth.” She said that,

“I feel a bit compartmentalized in my classroom and dealing with what I need to produce or not produce, what learning objectives I need to get through in many different subject areas...I feel a bit stressed by the amount of content that I’m expected to get through with my class.”

She said student behaviour was her biggest challenge:

“I have busy, busy kids that have a hard time focusing and listening collectively, and when I do a hands-on or a more conversational type activity, the volume in the class gets quite loud, so their engagement sounds very loud and I almost get over stimulated and I’m sure they are too, by the volume that happens...I have a pretty high comfort zone with things looking messy and chaotic, and it just gets above my personal threshold.”
Debra had been introduced to the reflective response cycle through another participant and requested to participate herself. When asked what she hoped to get out of the study, she said,

“I’m hoping, if I give some thought as to what my triggers are, I’m hoping to be able to be reflective; and, if I’m aware maybe I can take more intention and minimize the effects those triggers have on me because I think a lot is based on my own perception of what’s going on, and my own expectations for myself, so I would like to be happier!”

When asked about a triggering situation, Debra said that she usually would take a breath to ponder what would be making the student react in such a way: “[I] try to think if there is something I did to put them on the defense.” She understood that misbehaviour is often based on miscommunication and an attempt to communicate something other than what is being said or done in the moment – “something they’re feeling inside…or something emotionally in their day, something going on at home, at recess, that I missed.” She said that she worked to stay calm and respectful, making sure everyone was “safe”, not just physically but emotionally. If she were to react in a more stern, abrupt manner, Debra said, “I self-judge pretty harshly” and then go back later to say, “whoo, I lost my cool, I feel badly I spoke that way, I lost my calm; I prefer to deal with these situations in a calmer way.” She reflected that she thought the other students in the class would be quite protective of her if a student were to direct their anger toward her in a hurtful way. She spoke of the “Model of Compassion” that she had built into her curriculum and was hopeful that “there would be enough compassion in the class to realize that in the hard parts there’s learning and that the [misbehaving] child is learning in that moment.”

Debra’s list of what she valued most in life included, health, happiness, positive relationships, time with family and friends, outdoor recreation (spiritual connection to something greater than self), to be kind/to be my best self, to be physically fit, and travel/adventure/exploration/living life to the fullest. When asked which was the value that related most to what she wanted in the classroom, Debra said “I want to have the time to look up from feeling busy and give them whatever they need – my kindness.”
Participant 10: Mary

At the time of the interview, Mary was a Math teacher at a secondary school. She said that her work as a tutor during her time at university solidified her love of teaching. When asked what her biggest challenges were in the classroom, she talked about math anxiety that shuts students down and creates barriers to risk-taking in “stressed kids.” She reported that,

“It’s really hard to connect with those kids that are scared to be there [in the math classroom]. By the end of the year they come around a little bit but there’s still deficits from previous years. Your heart bleeds for those kids.”

Mary continued with, “It’s hard because if you give them a puzzle they won’t go for it but they will sit back and not try it at all.” She considered herself a curious person, hoping to instil that sense of curiosity in her students as well.

Mary had been exposed to the ideas behind the reflective practice in advance of the study and requested to participate. When asked what she hoped to get out of the study, she said,

“I like the idea of the reflective piece and different strategies to help kids. I’m always looking for something new to try... It’s a great opportunity to connect...anything to help the kids through what is a trying time for some of these kids.”

At the end of the workshop she expressed further enthusiasm:

“I love the idea of starting the day with an intention and I am open to strategies and ideas and ways of being...I think this study is interesting to me and I am really open to these types of things because I think there’s a lot of ways that students can be helped by this and a lot of ways that I can take these strategies personally and a lot of ways that I am going to be helped by this. I’m a sponge, so bring it on.”

Mary said that in a triggering situation, she would take a curious stance – “I’m always curious,” wanting to find out what was under the disruptive incident by debriefing it either within the classroom or in a private conversation outside of the room. She said that her goal is always to protect the students from embarrassment and potential negative consequences from other students outside of the classroom, when she isn’t there to guide the behaviour. She talked of feeling obliged to do something in order to create a “safe” space for students to be in the classroom and the school. She shared a
tough situation when she had to read to the class about the death of a student in the community:

“When students cry, I feel afraid of what other kids will say or do. I don’t want them to be in a situation that will be harder for them...I don’t want kids to hurt more. I’d like them all to be bubble wrapped.”

Mary went on to explain that, “The only way I can deal with this job is to ask myself, ‘Am I doing the most I can do at this time?’” And to remind herself that, “I did the best with what I know and what I could do and give at that time.” Mary considered herself a “take action type” who is always asking the question, “What are we going to do about it?” Her mantra is, “The show must go on,” and so she puts on a brave face and moves her class forward; “It’s a persona I put on” to get through the day.

Mary’s list of what she wanted or valued most in life included, happiness, health (which had been compromised over the past two years), family (she was in the throes of trying to start a family), balance – between work, friends and family (“Too much of one thing is never a good thing for me.”), a sense of inner calm (she felt she was often juggling too many balls in the air at one time), time to pursue her passion projects/interests, love (of work, home, and family), the feeling of doing something good (a deep sense of knowing her purpose), and gratitude (“time to stop and appreciate”).

Mary was the most enthusiastic participant about getting started on the practice and seeing how it could bring her to a calmer place within. However, she did not continue with the study and we did not meet again. My understanding was that her struggles with her health and emotional state prevented her from continuing. I cannot be sure, however, since she ended all correspondence following our initial interview.

### 4.2. Thematic Analysis

My approach to thematic analysis of the data began with reviewing the recordings of the debrief sessions and final interviews many times, and reading through the journal entries and transcriptions of the recordings. As the data coalesced, and I examined and re-examined the words, phrases and chunks of meaning, repeating patterns in particular captured my attention. I then placed each extract on sticky notes and tacked them on a wall for further deliberation. My preliminary analysis was then discussed with my supervisor, which led to further clarity of the themes. As I
contemplated the meanings and implications of the data item extractions, the analysis process led me to identify two overarching themes (Connection and Growth), and thirteen themes and two subthemes (Insights – Questioning Beliefs and Teacher Identity, New Perspectives, Presence, Shifts in Practice, Open-hearted, Open-minded, Optimism, Gratefulness, Agency, Guidance, Probing and Challenging, Encouragement and Help-Seeking. I further identified five categories (Critical Reflection, Mindful Awareness, Compassion, Teacher Wellbeing and Mentorship) under which to place each of these themes and subthemes. In the following sections each of these five categories and their themes and subthemes will be explained using quotations from participants and insights from the literature review that help to interpret and deepen understanding of their meaning and significance. The two overarching themes will be discussed following these sections so as best to articulate their meaning with examples from the theme descriptions.

![Figure 4.1. Visual summary of categories](image)

Figure 4.1. Visual summary of categories
4.2.1. Critical Reflection: Insights and New Perspectives

This category includes the themes Insights and New Perspectives, gained on unexamined beliefs as the participants engaged with the coaching session followed by the reflective response cycle. Their critical lens expanded and afforded them the opportunity to look at situations “sideways” (Brookfield, 2010, p. 216) and come to a “self-conscious awareness of how we come to know what we know and an ability to appraise the accuracy of the grounds for truth that undergird assertions and practices to which we subscribe” (p. 226).

**Insights**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines insight as a “glimpse or view beneath the surface”. During the one-on-one coaching session, participants were invited to look beneath the surface of their response patterns by reflecting on stressful experiences of the past. They were looking to uncover patterns of thought and feelings that could possibly account for the way in which they were interpreting certain situations in the classroom. Five of the nine participants recognized how their interpretations could be linked to past experiences, and how these interpretations were no longer relevant to their present reality. Additionally, while engaging with the reflective response cycle, most of the participants reflected on their identity as teachers and became more clear as to who they wanted to be in the classroom.

**Questioning Beliefs**

As stated above, the majority of the participants were able to see how the past experiences they uncovered during the coaching session may have influenced current...
thought patterns or “habits of mind” (Dewey, 1933). A few found the insight transformational. As Mark reflected on an early childhood experience, he recognized that the feeling of entrapment had been a constant companion in his life. Mark expressed to me that his “biggest pressure” was time: “My time is so tight. That’s the biggest pressure of my life…time.” He uncovered the root of this feeling of pressure in a past experience in elementary school of feeling trapped. From this realization, and with the aid of the reflective response cycle, he started to pay attention to the feelings and thoughts of entrapment as they arose during his daily interactions, and then reflected on and reframed the reality of the situation. Mark could see that his stress response was activated when he “felt” trapped – in a meeting, for example – and he was unable to imagine a way out. Once he became aware of the “habit of mind”, he could plan for it. He would begin a meeting by letting the others know of his time constraints and then excuse himself when his allotted departure time arrived. Previously, he would stay for the entire meeting, stewing on his sense of entrapment and resenting the others for presumably holding him hostage.

A second past experience that Mark believed influenced his frame of mind during his interactions with students – particularly when teaching to a class in which several students were absent – was one that involved a challenging parent interaction. Mark recalled one of three “horrific parent experiences” when a parent was “attacking” him about his responsibility for the “lack of performance of their kid.” Mark reflected, “I probably haven’t shed that.” This memory came to light during one of our debrief sessions when Mark was lamenting on the “perceived injustices” of our school system whereby parents allow their children to miss school for reasons such as sporting events and extended holidays. During this discussion he was questioning his approach of “attaching my success to your [the students’] success.” Mark realized that his frustrations with his absent students were rooted in his fear that parents and the public at large expect high standards of education regardless of the time taken away by absences. This insight gave him the opportunity to rethink the fairness of his irritation toward his absentee students and reframe his responses to them. Mark recognized the hard work and effort he put into his lessons and could not be held responsible for those factors that lay outside his control. This was the “new reality” in his school – many students have myriad commitments outside the school and parent decisions do not always line up with teacher recommendations concerning academic success.
Catherine also uncovered a deep-rooted feeling during the coaching session – that of helplessness. This discovery informed her focus throughout the study – her intention was consistently to be more assertive while at the same time connecting better with her students. In one of her earlier journal entries she stated,

“I think that not being assertive makes me feel helpless...I am noticing more and more that the feeling of helplessness we discussed [during the workshop] really is the root of a lot of my negative feelings [toward myself and others].”

With the aid of the reflective response cycle, Catherine could reflect on the feelings of helplessness that may have triggered her stress response, and she was able to use this information to question her beliefs about herself and her students and decide on a more preferable response to unexpected situations. In one journal entry, Catherine wrote: “I wish I had stood my ground about not giving him [a “disorganized” student] notes he should already have. I don’t want him to rely on me.” When I asked about her decision to give him her notes, she wrote:

“I think my response did line up with my intention to be more assertive and connect with my students – I didn’t say I would continually be saving him, but I did understand that he was feeling stressed and connected with him. If I hadn’t offered a portion of my notes I think I would have felt more bad…I think I would have seen myself as neglecting the caring and connection aspect of my life goals.”

Through critical reflection, Catherine was able to find value in the response she had chosen for her student as opposed to her initial self-deprecation that she had not “stood [her] ground” with him. She was not helpless. She has identified her commitment to having her teaching strategies line up with her goals – assertiveness coupled with connection.

Rose, Val and Yvonne also uncovered the feeling of helplessness during the past experiences portion of their coaching session. The reflective response cycle gave them a structure with which to work through their thought processes, allowing them to reflect on and reframe their feelings and thoughts about an unwanted situation that arose in the classroom.
Teacher Identity

Several of the participants questioned and rethought aspects of their teacher identity through their engagement with the reflective response cycle. Val vacillated between wanting to be thought of as the young, “cool” teacher of the past, and enjoying “that preparedness” that comes with experience. She talked about the differences between the past and the present for her:

“It’s a double-edged sword... [During those early years], I was the ‘cool’ teacher and I really connected with them, but being a teacher and knowing how to be a teacher, I was not that solid. Now it’s flipped a little bit, not to say that the kids hate me or anything, but now I’m one of those ‘old’ teachers...and I don’t always know whether it’s my age...and they’re still the same age – my audience hasn’t changed, and so I feel like I don’t connect at that level as much with them any more.”

She acknowledged that she did not want to be inauthentic by feigning interest in her students’ myriad teenage passions to which she could no longer relate but still longed for “that human connection” she felt she had lost over time. She said, “I struggle a little bit with finding that balance again, the balance where I can connect with them at that [personal] level, but also feeling very solid in my teaching.” Val said that she had a reputation at the school of being somewhat “scary” as far as her expectations went. She said she had become more of a “university-style teacher”. During the coaching session and then through her reflections in the final interview, Val started to come to terms with how she wanted to present herself in the classroom:

“I am definitely trying to bring back a little of that energy...and I do, I sit there and I’m trying to think...what was that energy that I had?”

“ I think that energy was kind of pizzazzed up [when I was younger] and I think now...that’s slowly kind of calmed down.”

She came to appreciate that calmer energy she had come to know through her years of experience in the classroom.

Val continued to struggle with her fears of leaning too far in the direction of “human connection” and being seen as a push over, while at the same time not wanting “to become neutral and then cross over into that cold, like, ‘Oh she doesn’t give a shit.’” Here, she was referring to her concerns that students would take advantage of her friendliness and push her to increase their scores. She was searching for a professional
identity that she could live with. The reflective response cycle provided the structure and opportunity to uncover and then explore through practice this dilemma. The cycle is one form of coping strategy for dealing with these ever-present classroom dilemmas. There is no right answer to Val’s dilemma. She will have to feel her way through as she encounters individual students with whom she interacts and responds. With awareness, she is given the opportunity to reflect on her responses and decide if it fits with who she wants to be.

Natasha’s struggles with her identity as a teacher were also brought to light through her engagement with the reflective response cycle. By exploring her fears, she was able to define her boundaries more accurately – self-care does not mean she is less than the professional teacher she has worked hard to become. After returning from a sick day to learn from the Teacher-On-Call (TOC) that her class had not behaved well, she wrote:

“I was fearful that the TOC might be judging my class and their behaviour. Perhaps I was worried about being embarrassed… maybe guilt around not being there for her [a vulnerable student]…I was also fearful that I let them [the class] down by not being there [since there are rarely dance TOCs available].”

At the end of her reflection, Natasha wrote,” I need to be more okay with that [not always being 100%] in my teaching career on the times I am away from the class.”

Rose also considered who she wanted to be in her Drama classroom. After a difficult situation with an ill-prepared student during the final hours before the year-end performance, she wrote:

“When I woke up in the night I thought: ‘No, that’s not who I want to be. I don’t throw pencils at students and I wish that a minor mishap [of a student not bringing a pen to class] wouldn’t trigger me’.”

From there she referenced her life goals in comparison to those of her Drama curriculum:

“Are the goals perfection? Are they a pretty good show? Are they great relationships with kids and some talent explored and some learning and some excellence all baked into one delicious show?”

Rose was using the reflective response cycle as a way into critically examining her expectations for herself and her students.
Debra, too, questioned her identity as “a good teacher” and was able to reflect on her responses to students and then reframe her beliefs and expectations:

“My behaviour was abrupt with a student...my fear was that if I don’t get my work done I would not fulfill my goal of being a good teacher...when I hear this I think the most important part about being a good teacher is the relationships I create with students. The student’s fear is that he is not good enough. That is heavier than I thought it was.”

“a good teacher would have a strategy in place...we have practiced these but they are not using them and I am not enforcing these strategies.”

In both these quotes Debra first chastises herself and then reframes her initial conclusion. In the first quote, she rethinks what she means by “a good teacher” and in the second, she realizes that she actually does have a strategy in place; her frustrations were actually that she had not been making use of it. With this new insight, she was able to move ahead and reinstate her previously defined strategies for more orderly behaviour expectations.

New Perspectives

The reflective response cycle provided an opportunity for the participants to consider alternative perspectives to situations in the classroom. After a difficult confrontation with a couple of students in her Drama class, Rose reflected in her journal:

“The fear is that I stifle their creativity...But what I am trying to do is push past the limited humour and thinking into fresh ideas. Now that I write that I can see that we are LEARNING – not just learning what I intended to teach in the lesson plan. We are learning other things.”

Her frustration was that the students weren’t learning, but what she realized through the reflection process was simply that the learning they were experiencing wasn’t that which she had necessarily intended for that particular lesson. And in her final journal entry, Rose sees a challenging student in a new light:

“The important thing for me in that moment was it [a student’s anger] actually had nothing to do with what I was doing in my classroom...”

Further, in her final interview she reflects on another student she had been struggling with:
“Or maybe that [hatred he has for this class] isn’t true. Maybe he’s actually got a whole bunch of other things holding him back?”

Rose could see another explanation for the student’s surly posture in her class, one that may have had little if anything to do with her teaching or the class content.

Debra’s engagement with the reflective response cycle uncovered a teaching strategy that she recognized had not been as effective as she had hoped. She rethinks and reframes her personal responsibility for student behaviours and considers a different perspective option. In her journal entry Debra reflects,

“I become short with my responses and initiate consequences in the hopes of motivating them to change their behaviour. But instead it creates a negative cycle where I’m battling against an ocean tide...Maybe this is the piece I need to let go. Rules get broken but if I didn’t take it personally then I wouldn’t become reactive and I could roll with it more easily.”

And in her final interview, Debra looks back on her process and considers an alternate perspective to her frustrations with her students’ rambunctious behaviours over the course of the school year, specifically during the four-month study:

“I almost wondered if, in my intention to love my students, I was letting little stuff go and what I need to love my students was to set boundaries and expectations. I wonder if I lost some of my classroom management strategies in the process. I don’t think it’s detrimental, but I’m always thinking about what my part is in what’s happening in my classroom.”

Here, Debra seems to be struggling with what it means to “love” her students. It is the dilemma with which many teachers (and parents) struggle – where to draw the line between freedom and boundary setting.

Evelyn’s frustrations in the classroom stemmed primarily from her expectations of students to adhere to the “rules”: “I just like the rules to be set out and everyone to follow them. I don’t like it when they don’t follow them.” In one of her debriefing sessions she came to a new understanding when one of her students decided to take over her chair during the reading circle:

“My [other] students were obviously not affected in a negative way, they were ready to roll with it and so why wouldn’t I roll with it, because my goal and my intentions is to stay connected to the kids and to contribute, and I
contribute in the ways I help the kids learn as best they can. D coming up and sitting in my chair was not threatening either of those things.”

In her final interview, Catherine discussed her realization of the impact her intentional practice of connection had made on her teaching practice as well as the classroom environment:

“I am able to notice things a little bit more...and I don’t know that I would have had the headspace to put two and two together before but now I’m more actively thinking about how those kinds of things impact students’ behaviour and presence in the class... And I think it really was because we talked to each other [before the start of class] that he [one particularly disruptive student] was not asking for as much attention during the class as he normally would.”

And Yvonne, recalling a challenging bus ride with 30 excited Grade 9's, said,

“I was just thinking there’s no point in me being fearful. It’s usually guilt or embarrassment.”

During the coaching session, Yvonne had identified guilt and embarrassment as common feelings when triggered into a stress response. Here she uses the reflective response cycle to look at past emotions and the fear underneath. She realizes that these were not relevant to the situation she was dealing with on the bus. She reframed her thinking process and remained calm during the ride.

**Critical Reflection: Insights and New Perspectives – Commentary**

The teachers’ shifts in perspective seemed to have come from both their participation in the one-on-one coaching session as well as the reflective journal writing/debrief sessions. Both of these required their willingness to engage “wholeheartedly” (Dewey, 1933) in the process. During the coaching session they were asked to examine their personal life goals and then align them with their professional classroom practice. As Tremmel (1993) states, it takes “courage to begin to know the self” (p. 449). They all participated with seemingly genuine enthusiasm (Dewey, 1933). Even Mary, who withdrew from the study after the coaching session, was fully present and engaged during our session together. As indicated in her narrative, at the end of the coaching session she was the most enthusiastic about the study and the growth she had hoped to experience.
Also during the coaching session, the participants were asked to examine past experiences of stress to uncover possible patterns of feeling, thought, and behaviour. As Friere asserts, beliefs and actions are historically embedded and never stand in isolation. Bohm (1996) acknowledges that, since we cannot simply “cut out” some parts of our senses of self over others, “we have to go into it more deeply…we want to get to the root of it, to the base, to the source of it” (p. 57). And Greene (1995) writes:

“People must become aware of the ways they construct their realities as they live together – how they grasp the appearances of things, how and when they interrogate their lived worlds, how they acknowledge the multiple perspectives that exist for making sense of the commonsense world” (p. 65).

This was challenging work and called for a certain degree of “openmindedness” (Dewey, 1933) and trust. I offered the teachers a fresh perspective to consider in looking at habits of thought that led to stress and reaction – the link between past stresses and current thoughts and reactions. Mark, Catherine, Rose, Val and Yvonne were deeply impacted with the discovery that a particular feeling – entrapment for Mark and helplessness for the others – had followed them throughout much of their lives when faced with stressful situations. Bai (2015) writes, “much of who we are, how we are, and what we do seems to be unconscious or barely conscious” (p. x). This seemed to be an important recognition that these three teachers came to acknowledge through critical reflection. They had not been aware of the possible link between past and present with regard to their reactions.

The journals and debrief sessions gave the participants the opportunity to reflect and take “responsibility” (Dewey, 1933) for their actions. Their comments were honest appraisals of what they had understood had taken place in the classroom – from their subjective perspectives – and on reflection, what they wished they had done differently. I provided them journal prompts as guidelines: 1) Describe the incident, 2) What were the feelings that came up for you? Link it to the underlying feeling if possible, 3) What were your thoughts? 4) How did you respond to the incident?, and 5) Do you wish you had done something differently? Explain. As well, they were asked to let me know what their intention had been for that day. This structure helped the participants in what Tremmel (1993) calls “the art of paying attention, not only to what is going on around us but also within us” (p. 447). They did this both through reflection in- and on- action (Schön, 1983, 1987). With reflection-in-action they were asked to feel their body being triggered –
reacting to the challenging incident – and then question their assumptions about it, thinking consciously and critically about their thinking, and making adjustments on the job. The journals and debrief sessions were their opportunity to reflect after the fact and then possibly alter the response in future situations.

4.2.2. Mindful Awareness: Sense of Presence and Shifts in Practice

Mindful awareness, as defined and expanded on in the literature review, is the mind state of being present in one’s emotional body and thoughts so as to choose a response to an unwanted incident that is in line with an intention. All nine participants experienced shifts in understanding and practice as they developed the skill of presence while managing unexpected challenges in the classroom.

Presence

In one of our debrief sessions, Mark reflected on an incident where he had asked a student who was on her phone to leave the class: “So I looked at it afterwards and I realized it was a trigger. I could tell by my blood pressure and maybe my pulse.” While he didn’t make use of his physical reaction in the moment, he was able to reflect on it afterwards. Mark later used this information to address another student’s request to use her phone. He remembered his earlier reaction and stayed present this time, saying to the student, “You know it’s a trigger for me?” In so doing, Mark was able to pre-empt another potential stress response in relation to the distracting use of technology in the classroom.

In her final interview, Catherine stated that with her intention at the forefront of her mind, she was “able to notice things a little bit more.” She was able to be more present in the class and be prepared for opportunities for connection as well as feelings of helplessness that would creep into her mind unexpectedly.

Rose remembered an incident with a student when she said, “Oh, I’m feeling triggered by what you just said. Give me a second.” She recognized that she was, “doing the process out loud.” We talked about this form of modelling potentially helping her students recognize when they are being triggered, also.
Val’s awareness in the classroom was apparent when she explained her reaction to an incident with a student: “I thought, ‘okay, I’m going to be conscious of this before I react…I’m not going to get on the defensive.” And Ashley wrote about several moments when she was aware of staying present in her classroom: in her seventh journal entry she wrote, “As soon as I singled him out I had ‘connection, connection, connection’, pop in my head;” in her ninth journal she wrote, “I was struggling with trying to find words that would keep me connected to them”, and; in her second debrief she reported, “but I was almost ‘duh’ kind of voice and I was trying to fight that as much as I could [laughs].” Here she was realizing straight away her tone and trying not to let it seep into her responses to her students’ behaviours.

In one of her journal entries, Natasha wrote, “I saw myself unravel as it was happening. Yikes!” And Debra wrote: “I felt myself getting triggered by his tone of voice.” In a later entry she stated, “I noticed myself becoming elevated. I have noticed that my response to my students gets more abrupt when I start feeling elevated.”

**Shifts in practice**

After being triggered by the student who was on her phone during class time, Mark asked her to leave, and then he spoke with the remaining students in the class. Mark explained the difference in his approach this time:

“So the best part is, I shut up. I remembered from our other conversations sometimes I would talk and I would say too much…I waited for about 20 more seconds [after she left the room] until I calmed down and I said, ‘If I bust my butt to make interesting lessons, it’s in your best interest to engage with me’, and we kept on going…I did not drone on for three minutes.”

In his final interview, Mark reflected on an incident in class when his computer wasn’t cooperating and he could feel the tension in his body:

“And I thought, don’t get stressed…you’re modelling and you’ve got 31 kids looking at you, just model…This thing, that’s out of your control…So you can either be mad or…”

Mark shifted from a stress response to a thoughtful reframing of the situation and how he wanted to manage with the unexpected computer glitch.
In her first debrief Evelyn reported, “So I think the different behaviour on my part was being open to looking at how my students are being affected by what I consider to be an interruption.” Instead of assuming that interruptions were problematic for everyone in the class, Evelyn came to realize that such a blanket statement might not be accurate in all situations. She was willing to be more open and flexible to other possibilities, no longer using her need for rule following to interfere with her relationships in the classroom. In the final interview she reported that, “I can be more curious and go to my intention” as opposed to a “knee-jerk reaction.” She further commented that,

“Before I would hear their unexpected behaviour and I would see their body but I mostly hear them and I would react to that. But now I look at their face and I look at their eyes and I try to figure out what they’re feeling when they’re doing this unexpected behaviour… it’s a pause… taking a breath.”

“Connecting to the child’s face, connecting to how they feel and connecting to my intention… I think that will be the thing that will be lasting [from this study]… for me to expect that I’m going to journal and reflect about my teaching is maybe not as realistic but having that habit now, a different way of dealing with each situation, I think is realistic.”

“I can do it almost without thinking. I have to be quite conscious of it – when I feel the hair on the back of my neck go and I feel, you know, I’m rising to this reaction, I do have to focus and not do the, what I’ve done in the past – just react. I need to focus on a different response but it’s much easier.”

Yvonne spoke of an incident on the school bus when she reacted differently than she would have before her engagement with the reflective response cycle. She disclosed that in the past she would have reacted to her worries about the disruption and shouted at the students:

“I know there was nothing I could really do about it… I’m just not going to get up and start shouting at them [to be quiet], that’s not going to be helpful to anyone.”

And later she reported,

“I feel like I have been dealing with things differently, or at least starting from a place of thinking first before reacting and really being mindful of how I deal with situations that come up again… Since I’ve started this, I haven’t felt really negatively affected by a student… I haven’t turned it [a student reaction or behaviour] into a feeling where I’m not good enough, so it hasn’t made me feel really sad about
myself… I really don’t think I’ve felt that helplessness and loss of power since we started this study, which is really good.”

Catherine found a new way of approaching her students in order to develop that connection she set as her intention. Instead of reacting, she started to look at the situation with curiosity when she would hear a comment or see the students engaging in off-task behaviours. She began to converse with her students in conversation, to be interested in them and their lives: “I went and sat with the student who weren’t working and just talked to them.” Previously she would become irritated and feel frustrated with her course, her students and herself as a teacher. She would feel disconnected from her students. During the final interview, Catherine reported, “I am less reactionary…I know how to better handle it [an unexpected situation].” She also said that while her feelings during an incident hadn’t changed, they were "at a significantly lower level reaction, body response, but add in curiosity…So yeah, I’m still frustrated and you know those kinds of things still bother me but not as much.”

Rose also reported a significant shift in practice:

“In the practice I have spent more time to go, ‘Well, why does that trigger? Why does that matter? What’s at the root of that?’…I have that point of recognition where I go, ‘Oh look at me, I’m feeling threatened’ or ‘I feel belittled’ or whatever it is. And then a couple of times cut it off at the pass a little bit because of that knowledge… Or a couple of times I’ve said, ‘Oh I’m feeling triggered by what you just said. Give me a second.’”

In the moment of her stress response, she was able to reflect and reframe what was going on for her internally, and then choose thoughtfully a response.

In the final interview, Val reported, “I felt more empathic toward him…Like I’m curious, I’m like okay, ‘put yourself in this kid’s shoes’…As slow as it is, and I’m going to admit it is slow, I’m starting to really put that [empathy] into practice.” She referred to herself as “The new me.” She also said that since starting the study, “my tone is calmer and I’m more logical, because I’m not as emotional.” Here she is referring to her reactions as her “old me” self.

Ashley reported several changes in practice throughout the study:

“I am actually noticing that I am walking into class, greeting students at the door with the strong intention of connecting with them on a more personal level.”
“I feel like I have fewer ‘triggers’ and I am able to approach students with more of an understanding mindset.”

“I’ve been able to be more reflective in the moment, which has been amazing.”

“...just a little tap on the shoulder not necessarily shouting or singling them out.”

“It’s almost become a subconscious thought now...I say, ‘Okay, stop. Calm. How do I approach it? After the fact, or not make a big deal of it?’

“I’m doing less and less of that [pausing and waiting for the class to settle down]...I speak with an individual once I get the class working on some other activity so it’s not taking away their time and it’s not making them [the other students] wait.”

“I made a lot more of an effort to circulate around and really be connected to the students and ask how their day had been going and kind of that proactive initial connection...I am constantly thinking when I have that downtime, instead of doing the attendance, I can do that later, why don’t I use this time I have in class, I have them here, I have that time to connect with them.”

In her second journal Natasha wrote, “Today I was able to take A with a grain of salt, even though I am so tired, stressed out personally and really feeling empty”; in her third journal, she wrote about her response to her students after learning about their misbehaviour with a Teacher-On-Call: “My response is usually frustration, and coming down hard on them”, but, “I calmly asked a student I trust to let me know what happened in class”; in her fifth entry she wrote: “I let my students know I was under the weather so that they didn’t think I was being indifferent...” ; in journal six she wrote: “…quickly I am able to flip the script and get back to a more mindful teaching practice”; in journal seven she wrote, “I think before I react”; in journal 10, after a student “gave me attitude”... “I just stopped for a minute and breathed.” And, in the final interview, Natasha reported:

“What I’m used to now is the wait time for behaviour response not reaction...I almost do a self-check and think, ‘Okay, I didn’t have the best sleep, maybe I skipped breakfast, I feel like I have a lot on me...how am I going to move forward?...the answer is wait time.”

“Before I would take on that baggage [of student issues] and then it would just fester.”
Debra worked consistently throughout the study on her intention setting. She would alter her intention depending on what she had learned through her classroom experiences and critical reflections. In one journal entry she wrote:

“Instead of raising my voice and getting frustrated I remembered my intention to stay calm. I asked him to come speak with me instead of losing it.”

She later reflected,

“I think the kind of intention I have can affect my day. When my intention was to keep calm, I felt disappointed in myself when I wasn’t successful and it led to more self-judgment.”

And in two others,

“I am missing the magic that can happen at school. Magic helps fuel my motivation. My intention tomorrow is to create some magic with my class.”

“I reminded myself not to judge this student and end up being frustrated by his behaviour but rather to love [my new intention] him.”

Additionally, Debra reported other shifts in her practice, both at school and at home:

“I am working on being mindful of the way I continue to speak to my students and my children at home.”

“I can use my prefrontal cortex to talk myself down…it has allowed me to be more mindful of having some control over my reactions.”

“Thanks to the process, I can have that moment to think before I react.”

“I definitely have been able to do that [take the pause after feeling the experience in your body and then respond].”

“I’ve used that strategy [of looking for fears] when I notice other people getting triggered.”

**Mindful Awareness: Sense of Presence and Shifts in Practice – Commentary**

There is a great deal of overlap in the literature between mindful awareness and reflective practice. One must be present in order to reflect both in- and on- action. One must be open to seeing the possibilities, to recognizing emotions and thoughts, and to considering alternative action. In consideration of this overlap, so as not to repeat what
has already been examined in the critical reflection section of this chapter, I have kept this section focused exclusively on showing the participants’ efforts at being present in the classroom.

Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) define presence as,

“A state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate first step” (p. 266).

They also assert that, “in order to engage with their students they [teachers] must stay connected with themselves and recognize the parts of themselves that can short-circuit the connection” (p. 278). The quotes from the participants in this section are clear indications of their presence in the classroom as they presented it by way of either journal entry or interview. They were paying attention to the situations at hand – their own internal workings – and their intentions for the class. Several of the quotes show receptivity to the students’ disruption, allowing them to respond compassionately based on their goals. As Bohm (1996) posits, rational thought – to act on goals – “requires a nice, quiet brain” (p. 62). Being present and open to possibility demands such a brain, for if one is preoccupied with the past or the present, the chatter of thought will limit the space for the present moment.

Six of the nine participants remarked on their newfound ability to take a mindful pause once triggered by a challenging event, taking advantage of that “nice, quiet brain” (Bohm, 1996, p. 62) in order to respond with intention: Catherine, Ashley and Evelyn became more skillful at finding ways to connect with intention to their students; Catherine and Val discovered curiosity as a way of approaching misbehaviour; Ashley discovered a way to deal with her stress reactions toward her students through restorative action – she found that expressing her self-disappointment and true intentions to her students after the fact was a way of repairing relationships and connecting more deeply. She also found new ways of using her time in class to connect with her students. This was a concern for her at the start of the study as she had come from a background in career counselling where she had mostly one-on-one interactions with her students; both Natasha and Rose found ways to improve their self-care.
4.2.3. Compassion: Open-hearted and Open-minded

As defined in the literature review, compassion is an “affective state defined by a specific subjective feeling…that arises in witnessing another’s suffering and that motivates a subsequent desire to help” (Goetz et al., 2010, p.351). Goetz and colleagues further suggest that it is the ability to recognize the suffering of another, to assess their “worthiness” of compassion, and then to act on the desire to help, provided the internal or external resources are available to the witness of the suffering. The acknowledged suffering can be either that of oneself or someone else. The participants’ engagement with the reflective response cycle coupled with our dialoguing through journal entries and/or debrief sessions, afforded opportunities to explore their feelings of compassion toward their students. In addition, one participant in particular expressed a feeling of compassion for herself, forgiving herself for her undesired reactions or finding a space for self-understanding given her particular circumstances.

Open-hearted

Throughout the four months of the study, Natasha was dealing with some very challenging personal issues that may have exacerbated the challenges she faced daily in her dance studio. Her engagement with the reflective response cycle allowed her to reflect on and reframe some of the self-judgement she felt when her responses to unexpected situations did not match her desires. She reported:

Journal 6: “My type of class has closer relationships between students and them and myself so things ‘hurt’ more and I take things more personally when they act like this.”

Journal 8: “I need to know [and remind myself] that I run my class with an open heart.”

Journal 9: “I was snarky today (insert sad face).”

Journal 11: “intention: peace and acknowledging that I am pulled in too many directions right now and to take one task at a time – to not put my stressors on the kids.”

Journal 12: “it was just a bad, tired morning.”

Journal 13: “I didn’t really let it [a side comment by a teacher in the lunchroom] get under my skin as I know what emotional lens I am seeing through this week. I was proud of myself.”
Final Interview: “So I empathize with the student and I empathize with myself...by checking in with both parties, then you can move forward in a more constructive way.”

Evelyn wrote in her first journal entry about her regret in how she responded to an angry student: “I would like to tell him [even now] that our interaction caused a disconnect between us...I want to tell him that I don't want to disconnect from him ever if we have a disagreement.” And during the final interview when asked about her strategies for keeping her intention at the forefront of her mind, Evelyn said, “I think it’s actually looking at the student...that helps me see them as a little person as opposed to a disruption.”

Catherine’s compassion for one of her more challenging students is evident when she writes: “I will continue trying to connect with him like this [outside of class] in the future to see if it helps more [with his disengagement and disruptive behaviour].” In her desire to have a deeper connection with her students, Catherine started to find opportunities to speak with them before they entered the classroom. She also wrote:

“...hopefully they will be more engaged in the future [as I continue to work on my relationship with them].”

Yvonne wrote in her first journal entry of having to prepare herself in advance for a returning student so she,

“did not let the anger come through...I wanted him to see that I wanted him to be there and that I wanted to help him.”

**Open-minded**

One of Mark’s most consistent intentions was “to be working with kids towards transformation of themselves.” He was aware of their struggles, having taught for 25 years, and he was made privy to their frustrations particularly in the senior Leadership class he taught. More than once during our interviews, Mark talked about the importance he placed on adding value to other people’s lives by “engaging, helping them shape their self-worth.” Mark noted that the reflective response cycle “has reinforced the importance of working well with the crunchy ones [those students who are not easy to reach].” This came after a conversation we had concerning a student whom he had asked to leave the class when she continued to attend to her electronic device in lieu of
the lesson being taught. I offered Mark some alternative explanations for her actions and reminded him of his intention to stay connected to his students – his dismissal of the student could have triggered her stress response along with that of others in the class. Mark realized that he had been triggered by the student and assured me that he would reconnect with her the following class. By becoming mindful of his own stress response, Mark recognized the deleterious effects it could have on him as well as others. He stated in a later reflection that, “They can tell I’m stressed and then they’re going to get stressed.” He was explaining his strategy and rationale for staying calm during a frustrating episode with an uncooperative computer.

In Catherine’s final interview, she explains that she now tries to “figure out what’s going on [with her students] – to understand.”

During Yvonne’s final interview, when relaying the bus ride with a group of noisy students whom she chose not to shout at, she commented that,

“part of it was just the situation they were put in, and I think some of those kids wouldn’t necessarily act like that if they weren’t all together.”

During the workshop, Val said she hoped participating in the study would help her, “to be able to sympathize or understand kids that struggle.” She explained that the students with whom she worked were very focussed on their studies and she wasn’t often faced with students who needed help. So, “when I do, I’m stuck. I don’t know what to do.” She hoped that the reflective response cycle could help her in this regard. During her engagement with the cycle, Val revealed her sense of compassion for one of her students who was looking for a higher score on an assignment:

“I’m like, ‘Okay put yourself in this kid’s shoes. He’s a really conscientious kid. He’s, he’s probably freaking out.’”

And I said, ‘I get it, and I know you’re a smart kid. I really do. I’m going to meet you halfway.’”

“...he’s going to walk away feeling like, okay, you know, ‘I got something’ because his perception is that it’s going to make a huge difference.”

She had expressed the feeling of helplessness when others were not able to see her point of view, and she identified becoming impatient and angry with them. Her
engagement with the reflective response cycle gave her a different way to cope with student fears.

Ashley wrote:

“I spoke to him [a disruptive student whom she sent out of class] one-on-one and mentioned that from now on I will give one warning...I asked if there is a student in our class who they feel they can work well with. I mentioned that I would like to see that be a successful match and that I would be willing to give it a try...”

In our second debrief, as Ashley continued to work on speaking to disruptive students out of earshot of the others in the class, she commented: “…it wasn’t in front of the class. I’m very cognizant of that, again, not shaming in front of the class.” And in her final interview, she said,

“I think that frustration [from an unexpected event] has been alleviated because I have this clear understanding of well, no, they’re not doing it particularly to tic me off. There’s a reason behind it.”

Natasha also wrote of her feelings of compassion for her students:

Journal 4: After “coming down” on a student for disruptive behaviours, she wrote, “I am really concerned for him underneath it all...there is so much going on for him...Dance is a happy place and right now even dance isn’t happy for him. I am fearful of him not getting reached and helped.”

Journal 5: “I made the intention to let my students know that I was under the weather so that they didn’t think I was being indifferent or was ‘upset or short’ with them.”

Journal 7: After “snapping” at a student for missing a class, she wrote, “At least he showed up to class.” And, upon realizing her misdirected behaviour she continued with, “I called over D and explained. I apologized for my reaction to him... I am fearful for D as this is his experience and M is going to ruin it for him...I am fearful for M because “Why are we imposing this adult brain when they’re not there yet?”

Like the others, Debra wrote and spoke of several moments of compassion and caring for her students:

Journal 3: “The student’s fear is that he is not good enough. That is heavier than I thought it was.”
Journal 7: “I don’t know if they realize they are being disrespectful. They are just impulsive.”

Journal 11: With her new intention of love, instead of feeling frustrated within, “I asked how I could help. When he calmed down I explained how I saw what had unfolded and asked if it was different from the way he felt things had unfolded. He decided to play again and thanked the other student for joining his team.”

Final Interview: “I think a turning point for me in this process was not only when I thought about my own fears, but I thought, ‘what are they going through that is causing them to react in an unexpected way or behave in an unexpected way?’ I think there were some moments that helped me let go of expectations of my students and find a bit more compassion when I thought of their fears.”

“And it’s personal to each of us and our story as to how we react in different scenarios.”

“I’ve won one student back who was rolling his eyes [at whatever we were doing in class]. He’s coming back and sparkling a bit.” And another one, by “telling him every day, ‘I love you...So your work didn’t get done, it doesn’t change how I view you. I’m just here to help you get it done so you feel better.’ I can see him looking in my eyes and he knows it’s true.”

**Compassion: Open-hearted and Open-minded – Commentary**

The literature reveals that the desire to act with compassion comes from the ability to see the other as suffering. One needs to be wide-awake and paying attention to both one’s inner and outer worlds in order to see and understand. By delving wholeheartedly into their feelings, thoughts and beliefs, the participants were able to see their students more deeply and act perhaps with even more compassion than they may have prior to this work.

According to Goetz and colleagues (2010), one of the criteria for determining compassion is the sufferer’s deservingness of help. Evelyn spoke of her change when she started to look into the eyes of her students and see them “as a person instead of a disruption”. And Debra found that by attending to the fourth phase of the reflective response cycle, identifying one’s fears beneath the frustration towards her students – considering what their fears might be beneath their misbehaviours – she was able to find a deeper feeling of compassion for them.

Several of the participants expressed a feeling of self-compassion as they worked through the events of the day, minimizing self-judgment. They were able to
identify their limitations due to life circumstances – the individual’s ability to cope with the situation at hand (Goetz et al., 2010) – and forgive themselves for their reactions. Many spoke of returning to their students on another day to apologize for misdirected reactions while others simply recognized their choices and committed to a more mindful stance in future interactions.

From the literature, three factors that may impact the intensity of the feeling of compassion are similarity, emotional closeness and goal-relevance (Goetz et al., 2010). Natasha felt an intense feeling of compassion when she could relate personally to her students’ situations. In reflecting on lessening one student’s stress she wrote, “I [also] don’t need anyone putting any more on to me right now…I had to be human with her”; Evelyn was able to feel closer to her students by looking them in the eye; Catherine worked on closer connections by using curiosity when interacting with her students, resulting in a deeper understanding of their comments and behaviours and a less reactive state for her.

These examples exemplify Nussbaum’s (1996) definition of compassion as “a central bridge between the individual and the community” (p. 28). The participants were creating a bridge of understanding between themselves and their students. With regard to goal-relevance, participants found it easier to find compassion particularly at the start of the study, for those students who shared a passion for their subject area. This did change for some of them over the course of their use with the practice, however. They were able to see beyond their need for like-mindedness and consider what lay beneath the surface of their students’ previous dispassion.

4.2.4. Teacher Wellbeing: A Deep Awareness of Flourishing

Wellbeing as defined in the literature is the subjective experience of the individual to feel well or to flourish. The themes I have gleaned from my interpretation of the data that fit within this theme are a sense of optimism, gratefulness and agency.

Optimism

In his first journal entry following his experience in the coaching session and his first opportunities to engage with the reflective response cycle Mark wrote, “Thank you for sharing your professional insights – they are so helpful as we try to grow into the
full human beings that we strive to become.” I see a sense of optimism in these words of gratitude, that what he was being offered had the potential to enhance his teaching practice.

Halfway through the study, I asked the participants if they had any questions or concerns with regard to their use of the reflective response cycle. Catherine responded with, “The practice has definitely been helpful so far because I am actually succeeding with my intentions, and it’s making my classes run better because I have better relationships with my students.”

In her final interview, Yvonne wrote, “I think the practice has prepared me more for them [unexpected events]...I feel a little bit more prepared to deal with things in the classroom or just my mind was more grounded. Having a way to deal with it was more helpful rather than just a reaction to a situation...it has made me more confident and not anxious at all in regards to certain students creating a certain atmosphere.”

Debra expressed feelings of optimism in several journal entries:

Journal 5: “My intention was to be calm and patient today. I did it but only just. I didn’t get overly frustrated.”

Journal 6: “I was able to keep reminding them to reduce the volume without losing my cool.”

Journal 10: “I am sharing the practice with my students. I am hoping that it can help them too [emphasis mine].”

Journal 11: “Today I felt I was more successful with my [new] intention and how I feel at the end of the day...I was successful today. I will keep trying. I think I may be on the something that could help myself.”

Journal 12: “Things have been going better in class with my [new] intention. It seems to help me let go of expectations I may have for their behaviour...I am going to continue to use my intention to love my children and my students.”

“I’m not saying I was successful all the time, but I just had moments of ‘Oh, I get it!’”

Gratefulness

When Mark wrote of his redefined intention, he placed a red asterisk beside it, “to set up optimal conditions for students to reach their potential.” My interpretation of
this was that he felt excited and pleased with his wording and purpose going forward into his continued engagement with the reflective response cycle. Additionally, in one particular lesson his intention was “to reinforce the positive for those students not away,” and he talked with pride when he relayed his conversation with the students. He asked those who were in attendance why they thought the others had not showed up for the class: “For five minutes there was a very rich response; they’ve nailed the points.” The telling of this story seemed to reinforce his belief that he was living up to his intentions – the students let him know the importance and benefits of being present in class given Mark’s engaged style of teaching.

Rose wrote with enthusiasm, “I have been using all random assigned groups [as per our debrief]…and it has been working GREAT.”

Yvonne reported that, “I wasn’t super overwhelmed [by the noisy students on the bus]. I just thought ‘Okay, well, here we go…before I probably would have gotten more anxious and I didn’t.”

Val’s goal was to work on her connection with her students while maintaining a sense of authenticity to who she had become as a seasoned teacher. Her remarks in her writing and her final interview show her sense of gratitude in the progress she made from the start of the study:

Journal 2: “I felt great to be able to help him in that meaningful way.”

Final Interview: “In a way I’ve regressed. Regressed in a good way as in, I’m starting to kind of be the way that I was when I first started teaching;”

“I’m starting to really put that [empathy] into practice…which is nice.”

“That’s going to be the new path, in terms of authenticity.”

“I’m no longer the hip teacher…but I think I connect deeper.”

“I’m oddly proud of that [being that "university-type" teacher].”

Ashley expressed her feelings of wellbeing in the classroom on several occasions. In her seventh journal entry, I asked if she had tried a reparation strategy I had suggested from the incident she had recounted. Ashley responded, “Yes I did, and felt better because of it.” In our second debrief session she commented on another strategy she had tried: “It felt really good…I found that again – that connection piece…I
was really pleased…I had a little bit of a – more of a connection type of conversation with them at the beginning.” And in the final interview she commented, “I did that [connection strategy] twice this week and it made me feel really good about it…we go off on a tangent, but it’s rewarding.”

Natasha struggled with self-care throughout the study. As indicated in her narrative, she worked long hours both in and outside of the school and was dealing with challenging personal issues. Her sense of gratitude and agency were expressed often throughout the study. In seven different journal entries, she used the word “proud” to express her pleasure in how she handled various classroom situations. She also wrote about feeling “good”; [feeling] “great”; [doing] “very well today,” and; [being] “impressed” with her thoughts, feelings and actions.

In her eighth journal, Natasha wrote:

“So growth happens in my classroom from my modeling it, even though I doubt myself…I need to trust myself in my own teaching philosophy…I need to know that I run my class with an open heart.”

This understanding shows a sense of gratitude as well as empowerment and hope for it provides her with a guiding path to follow. There seems to be an underlying sense of confidence in her choice of words.

Debra’s successes were most exciting for me because of the dilemmas she faced regularly in weighing her personal need for order and calm with her deep desire to be loving and open to her students often extreme behaviours:

Journal 4: “I don’t know if saying it [my intention] out loud or sharing it [with the students] that made it come to my mind but I think it helped me stay calm today…I feel proud of myself as a teacher because I don’t like myself when I raise my voice in frustration.”

Journal 13: “…my reaction has been far less [to my triggers]…I am proud that I haven’t been as overwhelmed.”

Journal 15: Today, “it went well…I didn’t become irritated by it [the noise]…I feel better at the end of the day not having reacted myself to their behaviours. It feels good to be in control of my own emotions.”

Final Interview: “It [the reflective practice] has allowed me to be more mindful of having some control over my reactions, which helps me feel more professional and less self-loathing.”
Agency

Evelyn expressed a sense of agency in her teaching practice in the final interview:

“I have a different go-to...instead of a knee-jerk reaction, which usually comes from my emotion of being disturbed or the class isn’t going the way I want it to, or learning is being disrupted, I go instead to my intention...it feels better because I don’t...my emotion doesn’t kick in the way it used to. I can be more curious...”

Like Evelyn, Catherine also struggled with a sense of disempowerment, which she defined as a lack of assertiveness in the classroom. As her sense of internal peace and control increased through the study, so too, did her sense of wellbeing:

“It [a change in practice] enabled me to make the instruction more relevant and in turn they found it more engaging and didn’t interject as much. We also had a really productive debate.”

“Again, I’m really happy that my intention to connect with what my students are interested in helped me create a positive interaction with the whole class rather then just try to get them to stop talking while I talk.”

And in journal seven, she wrote, “I finally feel like I’m taking a sort of stand/assertive action that might have an impact in terms of my students’ attitudes [regarding tardiness].” In her final interview she commented, “I feel more prepared [to handle unexpected situations]. It doesn’t get me out of whack as much.” “It [the reflective practice framework] works!”

Yvonne shared several insights in the final interview that indicated an improved sense of wellbeing since the beginning of her work with the reflective practice:

“It has centered me on what my goals are of being a teacher and why I am here.”

“Yes [I am more grounded] instead of on edge sometimes about certain students in the class and what that can do in the classroom.”

“It’s given me more confidence to deal with situations. I haven’t felt really fearful or just sad [since beginning the practice].”

“I really don’t think I’ve felt that helplessness and loss of power since we started this study.”

Debra expressed a deep feeling of agency in the final interview when she said,
“I believe I have the control to make the life I want for myself.”

“I see I am being more reflective about where I’m at and where I want to go.”

“Anything is possible!”

**Teacher Wellbeing: A Deep Awareness of Flourishing – Commentary**

All of the participants expressed in their journal entries and/or their interviews some sense of appreciation of feeling better, more “grounded” in their teaching practice and in their classrooms as a result of their engagement with the reflective response cycle. Watson and colleagues (2012) suggest that it is the “intersubjectivity” and “interrelationality” in all human encounters (p. 223-224) that leads to a feeling of wellbeing. Our researcher/participant relationship could have enhanced their feelings of connection and wellbeing. A couple of the participants commented on feeling like they had their own personal counsellor throughout the study and another expressed her disappointment that our ongoing interaction had come to an end. Gaydarov (2014) posits that, “When the individual perceives him-/herself as a part of a supporting social space, he/she is content with the world and thus increases his/her psychological wellbeing” (p. 3). And Carel (2008) asserts that,

> “Wellbeing is the invisible context enabling us to pursue possibilities and engage in projects. It is the condition of possibility enabling us to follow through aims and goals, to act on our desires, to become who we are” (p. 10).

Perhaps it was the teachers’ improved sense of wellbeing that gave them the motivation to continue with the reflective response cycle and to pay attention to their intentions and fears.

The feelings of gratitude and agency were written, stated, or implied by all of the participants. They felt a sense of pride in their attention to their internal states, as well as to their responses to their students. As Kahneman and colleagues (1999) assert, mood and affect can readily change one’s perception of a conversation or an event. As the participants were able to feel their moods and affect fluctuate with the various disruptions typical of a classroom filled with 30 students, and then focus on their intentions for the day, they were able to choose a more appropriate course of action.
They reported feeling a deeper sense of connection to their students which supports Cohen and Bai’s (2010) comment that,

“The most powerful and authentic transformative agent of teaching and leadership is not the individual teachers and leaders, but rather the relationships – the in-between space of meeting – that they create and the relational encounters they both represent and facilitate” (p. 261).

Ashley spoke of those “in-between” spaces where she chose to connect with her students instead of taking attendance or marking assignments. And Catherine found them through her interactions with her students in the hallways before class and during the moments in class when the students were engaged in social chatter amongst themselves.

4.2.5. Mentorship

As indicated in the literature review on reflective practice, a framework for self-understanding works best when coupled with support from like-minded others who are willing to challenge and help re-frame beliefs and experiences. As a seasoned teacher and counsellor, I was able to provide the guidance, modelling, probing, challenging, and encouragement that helped the participants quite successfully move through their experiences with the reflective response cycle. Moreover, by sending email prompts on a weekly basis, I was able to hold many of them accountable for their practice.

In this section, I will highlight some of my exchanges of mentorship coupled with the participants’ responses to my thoughts and ideas. My intention is to illuminate the effectiveness of mentorship and guidance offered within their engagement with the reflective response cycle.

Guidance

1) Researcher: “So if you can feel it [the irritation] and instead of ‘put your GD phone away’ you just go over and while you are talking put your hand on her shoulder as a way of reminding her...you might have to do it a second time. We don’t know why she’s checked out.”

Mark: “Very good point. I hadn’t thought of that.”

2) Researcher: “I, too, am a fierce advocate for kids and not everyone reacts well to that. They have their own fears.”
Debra: “Ha ha! That’s right. I’m not the only one in this constant cycle. Thanks!”

3) Researcher: “As far as your reaction goes, I see no problem with raising your voice to get their attention provided that is the strategy and not to shame them through anger...If you are feeling bad about it then you will want to check out what that means to you, raising your voice.”

Debra: “Your words do resonate with me. Thanks for sharing your thoughts with me...my intention tomorrow is to connect with my students.”

4) Researcher: “It’s tough to feel energized when the energy of the class is off...perhaps you are feeling depleted? What do you need to do to personally recharge?”

5) Researcher: “I am glad that you are paying attention to “helplessness” and realizing that you are really not helpless...Students have a hard time seeing the relevancy in much that they are asked to do in the school system.” I followed with a book to consider reading on this topic.

6) Researcher: “I see that your fear is around losing the class to disruption and potential chaos. This is a very real fear for most teachers who work with grade 8s and 9s particularly...”

Ashley: “Thank for your thorough response, Marla, I truly appreciate your guidance!!!

7) Researcher: “I had a similar conversation with another teacher today around shaming. We talked about reparation after the fact.”

Ashley: “Ooo, I like that idea! I will try it out tomorrow and let you know how it goes!”

Researcher: “Did you try it?”

Ashley: “I did, and felt better because of it! Thanks for the suggestion!!!”

8) Researcher: “That was all you could have done. You cared and you offered. Our desires for them need to match their desires for themselves. We can just keep caring and offering until they accept their own part [in the situation].”

9) Researcher: “Thank you so much for your vulnerability here. I am honored to work with you and walk this journey with you...Holding a child accountable takes courage and not all parents have the courage nor belief that the child can do it on their own. It also requires relinquishing the need to be needed which is tough for some parents.”
Debra: “Your words are beautiful, reassuring and inspire me to keep doing my best. Thank you!”

**Probing and Challenging**

1) Researcher: “What does it mean to you that she was on her phone?” I kept challenging Mark for an understanding of why he was bothered that she didn’t take him up on his offer of “setting up optimal conditions for learning.”

Mark: “That’s a really good question.”

Researcher: “So is it that you are worried about perception? That we’re not doing our job as educators and that bugs you? That’s hard because you’re working so hard and then you’re not going to be seen as working that hard or doing the right thing, or doing your job and then they’re not going to see how they’re contributing to that and it’s on the teachers? Is that it?”

Mark: “Yeah. Maybe. Maybe it is that.”

2) Researcher: “If your intention is to stay connected, by doing what you did [asking her to leave the room] she was shamed publicly.”

Mark: “I agree…So I need to build back the trust and bring her back in.”

3) Researcher: “You did some mind-reading there by imagining what parents were thinking…Know your own ‘truth’ i.e. ‘my classroom is about freedom and creativity and not about tidiness and control’.”

4) Researcher: “I am wondering if connection would be a better intention for you with this particular group?”

5) Researcher: “What does it mean to you when a student breaks the rules?”

Debra: “I feel like they are disrespecting the class and me. Maybe this is the piece I need to let go?”

6) Researcher: “I am wondering if it’s true that the student having lost his notes was a reflection on your teaching? How is this a truth for you?”

Catherine: ”Thanks for helping me delve deeper.”

7) Researcher: “I am wondering if you are okay with how the class is going as far as productivity goes? I would hate for you to feel disgruntled with your class, as it won’t be sustainable. Is it enough to just make connections or do you also want to set boundaries for what needs to be handed in at the end of class?”
Catherine: “I am wondering this myself, too...what kind of consequences can I provide?”

8) Researcher: “What’s [the fear] under your frustrations with her?...The fear is that deep, internal feeling before you get to your rational, conscious thought process. It’s the part that is hardest to say out loud because it feels ugly and painful.”

Natasha: “Maybe I feel less than as I am not as well tuned to such a level of patience as other educators would be.”

9) Researcher: “Are you able to identify the fear under your frustration?...I am hoping to eliminate that feeling of guilt that feels so awful after the fact.”

10) Researcher: “So what’s under the annoyance?”

Ashley: “Well I guess I was annoyed, and then probably at myself annoyed that I couldn’t deal with it in the first place, that it had to escalate...”

Researcher: “So the fear is maybe that ‘I’m not a good classroom manager or something like that?’

Ashley: “Yeah, exactly!

11) Researcher: “Now let’s look at the truth: You are a very caring and compassionate teacher and person. You are afraid she [an angry parent] doesn’t understand this, but you have no control how anyone feels or thinks. All you can do is...”

Encouragement

1) After congratulating Mark on a parent email that read, “Thanks for creating an environment for motivation”, Mark responded to me with, “Thanks for the affirmation and for helping me with clarity of why I am at [this school].”

2) Researcher: “I love love love this. Thank you for letting me know. You are definitely onto something great.”

3) Researcher: “Don’t be too hard on yourself after only 2 months. I have been on this journey for the past 5 years and it’s still tough at times.”

4) Researcher: “You are not alone on that. It is much harder to take that pause and choose a response when elevated, there are so many variables in a classroom. The more you practice the pause, the more of a habit you will build, as you are already experiencing.”

5) Researcher: “I love your openness to look at possibilities.”
6) Researcher: “I love that you helped your student out this time; you showed compassion which is so important.”

7) Researcher: “And so, you need to remember that, like all of us, you are doing the best you can with where you are at...You can’t go wrong if you lead with the heart. Others will forgive you if they trust your deep care...if anyone is judging you, that’s about them and their own insecurities. We only judge to make ourselves feel better.”

Natasha: “This is amazing feedback. The insecurities piece of others and how that is thrown back to us the individual and of course leading with your heart!”

8) Researcher: “You are the 3rd teacher in the past 2 weeks who has had to go back and apologize for a stress response. It is such a beautiful thing when teachers can be up front and vulnerable in front of their students. It is great role modeling for handling mistakes; we are not perfect either.”

Natasha: “I totally agree. I like the apology part!”

9) Researcher: “Good for you! More of us need to remember to make amends when we feel we have said or done something we wish we had done differently. It would free us from shame and regret so we can get on with making positive connections.”

Ashley: “It did feel good, thank YOU for the encouragement to do so.”

10) Researcher: “I love it that you are connecting with your own fears...you clearly do care about the learning environment and you are taking control, in a respectful and caring way.”

Ashley: “I appreciate your kind words as I was starting to question my ability to properly manage students yesterday.”

**Help-seeking**

Several participants looked to me for advice when faced with a dilemma:

Debra: “Any insight you might have is welcomed.”

Catherine: “I don’t know what else to do.”

Catherine: “What kind of consequences can I provide?”

Val: “How do we reconcile that?”
Mentorship Outcomes

These comments were made primarily during the final interviews when participants were asked which aspects of the reflective response cycle they found most useful:

Debra: “I remember finding it challenging to determine what my fear actually was, and you helped me through that.”

Debra: “I felt like I had my own private counsellor helping me. I am like, ‘Oh, is it ending? You’re not going to be emailing me all the time?’”

Debra: “I liked your emails to remind me. They were gentle and I could respond because sometimes I would forget...having to reply to you made me accountable to do it. I don’t know if I would have done it...I think it might be necessary to have someone to be accountable to.”

Debra: “It helped when you would talk through those things [potential fears] with me. In the moment it was a little bit foreign for me to be thinking of the root cause of my fears.”

Evelyn: “…actually telling you about the scenarios in the classroom was helpful for me because it outlined for me what actually happened...I could see what I felt was working and what wasn’t.”

Catherine: “I took what you were talking about on Tuesday to heart.”

Catherine: “I think it [my success at keeping my intention at the forefront] had a lot to do with the awesome chat we had in my class on Tuesday!”

Catherine: “The feedback was super helpful because we had some really interesting conversations. I really liked that...and identifying the emotion at the start, like the past memory stuff.”

Natasha: “I love your feedback. It has been enlightening for me...This gives me insight into what my strengths are, what my weaknesses are...I get to see where I failed and how next time to approach that situation again.”

Ashley: “Thanks for these reminders [about the journal entries], I need them!”

Researcher: “Was it helpful during the reflective practice to think about what the feeling was under the frustration?”

Ashley: “Yeah, absolutely. You want to pinpoint it. You don’t want to feel like you’re frustrated for no reason, right? And so it validates it
almost and makes you aware and ask why was I feeling that way and did I need to feel that way? It takes the frustration piece out of it.”

Ashley: “when we got together in person it was definitely more beneficial for me. I don’t know if it was seeing you, and seeing you explain things to me versus reading it on email...for some reason I feel like I took on more of that response that you had given when we were in person. Again, probably coming back to that connection piece and actually seeing the emotion behind it.”

Val: “I have literally named my intention ‘Marla’. I am always thinking, ‘What would Marla do in this situation?’”

Val: “I’m so grateful that I was able to do this with you because, like I said, I never even was conscious of it...I didn’t know what had truly evolved or happened. Not on a conscious level...thinking back through my career thus far...when I was happiest...trying to make changes to get it back in some ways to where it was...going back to that place of connection.”

**Mentorship – Commentary**

While scholars of reflective inquiry believe that the process of reflection can be done in isolation, the depth and richness of the engagement in learning is heightened through interaction with another. Moreover, Zeichner and Liston (1996) and Kemmis (1985) point out that one must consider carefully with whom to interact because it is very personal work. Trust along with a willingness to offer alternative points of view for the purposes of crosschecking beliefs and assumptions are important qualities to look for in such a mentor or confidante. My training as a counsellor prepared me to offer the kinds of responses I provided to participants through journal entry comments and face-to-face interactions.

Issacs (1999) suggests four important skills for interacting with others in authentic dialogue: listening with one’s full attention, respecting the other’s point of view, suspending judgment, and voicing when other perspectives need to be offered. These are all skills one learns when training for the role of counsellor. My many years of experience as both a counsellor and a practitioner of reflection and mindful awareness made possible my ability to use these skills to help move the participants forward in their journey – their responses were often of appreciation and they continued to show vulnerability in their writing. Several of the teachers sought my advice during the course of the study, at times unrelated to the classroom focus of the study.
Tremmel (1993) teaches the skill of paying attention to student teachers in order to help them “change the way their minds work so that they are prepared for reflection” (p. 441). I also used this practice to teach the participants how to use their minds in a different way. I taught them how to focus on their body state with intention; how to consider other possibilities; how to see situations through the eyes of their students; and, how to consider not only their own feelings beneath their angst but also those of the other. Additionally, I gave them a different “go-to” as Evelyn called it. I gave them the idea of a pre-determined, goal-oriented intention on which to focus when challenging situations arise in the classroom and beyond.

4.2.6. Connection

Connection was an overarching theme that emerged from the analysis of the data. All nine participants were interested in creating deeper connections with their students despite differences in their daily intentions. Mark spoke of his desire to engage fully with his students and to add value to the lives of others. His intention was to “build a caring, strong environment for learning”; Evelyn set her intention as “purposeful contribution and connection. After a difficult interaction with a student, she wrote, “I want to tell him that I don’t want to disconnect from him even if we have a disagreement”; Catherine’s intention was to be more connected with her students. She reported that her intention “helped me create a positive interaction with the whole class.” In the final interview she reported that, “When a student reacts, I ask myself, ‘how can I, you know, make a better connection with a student or get to know them better and figure out what’s going on to not make it not happen, but to understand?’”; Rose changed her intention from creativity to honesty so as to create a more open and honest space for connection with her students. She decided to work on “One moment of connection with ONE student per day” so as to set up a realistic goal for herself; connection was the set intention for Yvonne, Val, and Ashley throughout. Yvonne reported that the reflective response cycle “has helped me to connect with students I might not necessarily connect with because I’m taking that extra time to really reflect on, ‘Okay, how can my connection with them help with connections in the classroom?’”; Val spent time with a distressed student outside of class and said that “he was very grateful for the talk and said it has helped more than talking to any other adults or friends up to that point”; Ashley started to use the “downtime” in class to connect with her students instead of taking attendance or
marking; Natasha was looking for strategies to better “keep her cool” so as to connect to her inner voice as well to her students in a more meaningful way. She started to really look into their eyes to see the pain beneath their words: “I could see in her tired heavy eyes that she was really struggling – almost on the verge of tears.” She also worked on modelling for them the behaviour and responses she was hoping to find in them: “I don’t want to be setting a poor example to my other kids as in showing my impatience.”

Debra was looking to find inner peace by locating her triggers and then responding to her students in a way that would alleviate their discomfort as well as her own. In her final interview, she said, “There is a connection, an understanding between us that I think has grown.” Connection to self is included in this theme. Participants were given the opportunity to tune into their emotions, connect with their body states as well as their thoughts in order to choose a response that was in line with their intentions. All nine participants reflected on their ability to feel a sense of discomfort and then respond with a pause, a word, or a deep breath before proceeding.

Most of the participants found a sense of connection to their life goals and all found a connection to their intentions. This inner work gave them the opportunity to delve deeply into what they wanted in life and then connect those desires to their intentions for their teaching practice:

Mark: I kept strangely calm. Decided what to do. Shut down the computer, Restart it again. They’re chatting amongst their friends. Fine. Took 3 minutes, 4 minutes. Kept my cool. Nothing I can do…but I kept my calm…I think it goes back to the intentions.”

Evelyn: “I think that the most helpful for me were the identifying the life goals. I mean as simple as that seemed, it, it was very helpful. I thought, ‘oh, well of course, this is what I’m trying to do so why wouldn’t all of my actions in the classroom point toward that or support that?’”

Yvonne: “It [the reflective response cycle] has centered me on what are my goals of being a teacher and why I am here. I love teaching but why do I love it and what can continue to help me keep that feeling of love and passion about teaching instead of getting stressed and more anxious about a situation? It’s really made me think ahead more instead of reaction…I feel like that [the life goals exercise that led to the intention] translated to my whole life too – which I really really liked.”
Natasha: "I think for me the life goals was really cool because it clearly reflected why I chose what I chose to do, and a big part of my goals were inspiration and whatnot."

4.2.7. Growth

As already indicated in many of the above quotes from the nine participants, growth was an overarching theme throughout the data set. All participants have, in some capacity, changed aspects of their teaching practice as well as their ways of thinking about unexpected events in the classroom. Mark stated that the practice has “helped me learn…it’s pushing me to new levels to think about.” He also said that,

“the study helped remind me of setting the intentions and then let that guide me...this is all about a different way of being, experiencing. Like you’re modelling and you’ve got 31 kids looking at you, just model.”

When Mark recalled the past memory activity he exclaimed,

“What an epiphany!”

Me: "When you found entrapment."

Mark: “Wow says it all...that just said it all...that one was just so interesting...so fabulous...to get that. And let’s look at all those fears over a decade and I go, ‘Oh, that explains that impact.”

In Debra’s final interview, she reported that,

“When I changed my intention to love, I had a shift and started to feel more successful...I want to look at my big goals in life. We talked about some of those in the beginning and I believe I have the control to make the life I want for myself...I see that I am being more reflective about where I’m at and where I want to go.”

This was a huge shift for Debra who was stuck and frustrated with her engagement with the reflective response cycle during much of the study. It was gratifying to see her emerge feeling hopeful, empowered and ready to take the next steps in her search for the right professional fit.

Yvonne talked about taking the practice outside of the classroom:

“It wasn’t just about school; I was also sharing that with my husband because he works in a high-stress job owning his own business and it
would sometimes affect me at home. So I would bring this up and talk about our life goals and identifying our intention for ourselves.”

She asked her husband who was angry about a work situation,

“Where is the anger coming from? Could it be something else that you could use to deal with it instead of anger, because anger doesn’t make you feel good or make me feel good? So how can we eliminate some of those feelings or to lessen the feeling of just being angry – how else could you feel to make the situation better... it has been really helpful for me. I know there is definitely room for growth for me to continue the practice, but just from knowing a bit about it and practicing it I hope to continue.”

When a person decides to teach another a skill, there is often a deepening of understanding and growth. Mark was teaching the skills to his Leadership class and Debra talked about sharing the practice not only with her students but also with colleagues. And when I asked the participants if they could see value in teaching these skills and concepts to their students, they all thought it would be a very worthwhile exercise.

4.2.8. Post-Pre Survey and Teachers’ Self-Perception of Change

The post-pre survey reflects the participants’ self-perception of change. Apart from the narratives, which were given to the participants for checking, this analysis has been primarily the work of the researcher. As such, there is often concern in qualitative research about the overall trustworthiness of the results given its subjective nature. To this end, I have used a retrospective self-assessment tool, the post-pre survey, to allow the participants to assess their own growth.

The responses for the survey were given in the form of a numeric rating on a scale of 0-4 (0 meaning not at all true for me, and 4 meaning completely true for me), and the scale was offered in relation to their self-perceptions before and after their engagement with the reflective response cycle. I tabulated the results of each question to confirm that the results of the survey indicated a fairly consistent shift from pre- to post- conditions. There was distinct evidence available in the measure to indicate that our time together did shift attitudes and increase self-confidence among the participants. Several key indicators will be discussed in the next chapter.
Table 4.3.   Self-perceptions of change

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*Questions:
1. I feel connected to my students.
2. I feel calm when I am in class.
3. I respond well to unexpected events in the classroom.
4. I do not react negatively to unexpected behaviours in the classroom.
5. I feel confident in class.
6. I enjoy my time in class.
7. I feel respected by my students.
8. I recognize when I am triggered into a stress response.
9. I can feel the stress response in my body.
10. I can identify the feeling and/or thought attached to the stress response.
11. I can delay reacting to the stressor and choose the response I prefer.
12. I have a desire to deal with those stressors.
13. I recognize when my thoughts are creating unpleasant feelings.
14. I can choose a response that aligns with my intentions and goals.
15. I see the benefit in paying attention to my body’s stress responses.
16. I have the desire to live in alignment with my goals and intentions.
17. I can relate my reactions/actions during stress to my thoughts and feelings.
18. I have optimism in being able to manage difficulty in the classroom.
19. I have confidence in being able to manage difficulty in the classroom.
20. I have a clear vision of how to cope with triggers in the classroom.

The post-pre survey was designed to assess the participants’ self-perceptions of change with regard to their feelings of connection to their students, their overall feelings in the classroom environment, and their ability to recognize and manage stress responses when triggered by unexpected and/or challenging events in the classroom. The scores
suggest that engagement with the reflective response cycle did have a positive impact on the participants. The areas in which the participants reported the greatest improvement were their ability to cope with triggers in the classroom and to choose a response that aligns with their goals and intentions. The next greatest improvements were in their ability to recognize their stress response and identify the thoughts that triggered the response. The other most notable changes came from the participants’ feelings of optimism in their ability to continue with the practice. All but one of the participants expressed a desire to deal with their stressors; this may be more of an oversight on the part of the participant since she showed great interest and willingness to manage the stressors in the classroom.

4.2.9. Additional Questions: Challenges and Benefits

Two additional questions were asked during the final interview that were not included in the data set for the thematic analysis but provided useful information. These were not included in the data set because of its focus on the experience of the participants in engaging with the reflective response cycle. These two questions were asked to help inform any future use of the cycle – how it might be made more accessible to teachers, and whether or not it could be beneficial to teach to students.

The first question asked participants to explore the constraints that made engaging with the reflective response cycle challenging. For most of them, the constraints were connected with their feelings of physical and/or mental wellbeing. This came out in the literature as a strong determinant of a positive sense of wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012; Kahneman et al., 1999; Nussbaum as cited in Watson et al., 2012; Pollard et al., 2003; Seligman, 2012). Evelyn expressed these well with her final statement: “So being fit and being healthy, being well-rested, well-fed, all these basic things are helpful; then I can be in my intention.”

Other constraints included the “bombardment” of student questions, comments and activities in a classroom of 25 to 30 students and not being able to find the space to breathe before the next group appeared at the door; student conflict with one another and the desire to protect the one who appears to be the victim in the scenario; journaling due to time constraints and, going forward, an absence of accountability; and, reverting back to familiar habits of mind when not paying attention.
The second question was on the benefit the participants could see in teaching this approach of reflection/response to their students. All expressed enthusiasm to this inquiry. Both Mark and Debra had already begun that process. Mark asked me to teach the reflective response cycle to his Leadership class, and Debra had been sharing the process in an informal way with her Grade 7 class throughout the study. She commented that she “would like to find a way to weave this concept of intention-setting in with the goal setting I am currently doing with my students.” Both Evelyn and Catherine spoke of the importance of modeling to their students. Evelyn stated that,

“I think actually the most powerful thing for kids at this age is to see us as adults doing it. I think that is where they will really internalize it and take it home.”

And both Val and Yvonne recognize the need for students to have this form of life skill, “of knowing how to react to a stressful situation. Heck, I’m an adult and I’m still learning it” (Val). Yvonne remarked that,

“Students don’t know how to deal with their emotions a lot of the time...I think it would be really helpful for some of those students to just think about where they’re coming from and grounding themselves and being a bit more reflective. I think a lot of them don’t necessarily want to react that way, but they don’t know how else to deal with it.”

I would concur and add that the same is very true for many of the adults in schools as well; we all could benefit from learning how to cope better with our emotions.
Chapter 5.

Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Findings

I began this study wondering if the reflective response cycle I had developed would benefit teachers who engaged with it over a sustained period of time, utilizing my experience with the practice and providing ongoing feedback as a way to deepen their understanding of it and encouraging their participation in the process. Based on my personal experience with it as well as anecdotal comments from others with whom I had introduced it in my counselling practice, I believed this cycle could enhance teachers' sense of wellbeing in the classroom and potentially outside the confines of the school walls. I further hoped that their engagement with the cycle would serve to deepen their relationships with their students so as to possibly enhance the classroom experience for themselves as well as for their students.

The findings revealed that the nine teacher participants did benefit from their engagement in the process of participating in the one-on-one coaching session and the reflective response cycle. I will summarize the thirteen themes (Insights and New Perspectives; Presence and Shifts in Practice; Open-hearted and Open-minded; Optimism, Gratefulness and Agency; Guidance, Probing, Encouragement and Help-seeking) through the five categories (Critical Reflection; Mindful awareness; Compassion; Teacher Wellbeing; Mentorship) under which I have assigned them. These categories emerged through my engagement with the data as well as my research into the literature. I have provided one quotation from a participant to highlight each of the thirteen themes.

Through the process of the coaching session, where they were asked to explore past experiences of stress to identify possible patterns of emotion and reactions, coupled with critical reflection of their thoughts and feelings during challenging events in the classroom, the participants gained insights and new perspectives on past beliefs. One participant stated that,
“I think that not being assertive makes me feel helpless...I am noticing more and more that the feeling of helplessness we discussed [during the coaching session] really is the root of a lot of my negative feelings [toward myself and others].”

This teacher came to question her belief of helplessness, recognizing that she was never truly helpless in any classroom situation. Another participant noted that,

“The fear is that I stifle their creativity...But what I am trying to do is push past the limited humour and thinking into fresh ideas. Now that I write that I can see that we are LEARNING – not just learning what I intended to teach in the lesson plan. We are learning other things.”

This teacher recognized through the process of critical reflection that much more was going on in her lesson than she had intended – her perspective had shifted through her journal entry reflection.

Through the mindful awareness skills that were part of the reflective response cycle, the participants became more present and as a result experienced shifts in their teaching practices. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) define presence as,

“A state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate first step” (p. 266).

One of the participants remarked that,

“I noticed myself becoming elevated. I have noticed that my response to my students gets more abrupt when I start feeling elevated.”

Through her “alert awareness” this teacher began to notice not only her stress response but also the impact it was having on her responses to her students. Another teacher noticed that her practice with the cycle had started to become somewhat automatic, shifting with ease her response to critical incidents in the classroom:

“It’s almost become a subconscious thought now...I say, ‘Okay, stop. Calm. How do I approach it? After the fact, or not make a big deal of it?’”

The teacher participants located deeper feelings of compassion for themselves and their students as indicated through the themes open-hearted and open-minded, as they engaged with the five phases of the reflective response cycle. One participant stated that,
“I think a turning point for me in this process was not only when I thought about my own fears, but I thought, ‘what are they going through that is causing them to react in an unexpected way or behave in an unexpected way?’ I think there were some moments that helped me let go of expectation of my students and find a bit more compassion when I thought of their fears.”

Through her own exploration of fears beneath the surface and feelings of frustration, she was able to extend the practice to imagining what might be going on beneath the surface of her students’ behaviours, opening her heart to a deeper feeling of compassion for them. And another participant opened her mind to other possibilities of understanding and responding to her student’s behaviour and request for evaluation reconsideration. Prior to her engagement in the study, this teacher found that she would react strongly when students challenged her evaluation processes. She said that she would feel that they were being overly confrontational and asking her to compromise her standards – she teaches a high-level academic science program. In the following quote she reveals her reconsideration of past beliefs and practice:

“I’m like, ‘Okay put yourself in this kid’s shoes. He’s a really conscientious kid. He’s, he’s probably freaking out. And I said, ‘I get it, and I know you’re a smart kid. I really do. I’m going to meet you halfway.’”

Under the category “wellbeing” are the themes “optimism”, “gratefulness” and “agency”, all of which are deemed important aspects of one’s subjective experience of wellbeing within the literature. The following three quotes seem to embody all three of these themes within each of them:

“I feel a little bit more prepared to deal with things in the classroom or just my mind was more grounded...it has made me more confident and not anxious at all in regards to certain students creating a certain atmosphere.”

“It has centered me on what my goals are of being a teacher and why I am here.”

“I really don’t think I’ve felt that helplessness and loss of power since we started this study.”

All of the participants expressed in their journal entries and/or their interviews some sense of appreciation of feeling better, more “grounded”, in their teaching practice and in their classrooms as a result of their engagement with the reflective response cycle.
The final category within this study is “mentorship”. The themes within this category highlight the influence of my role as both researcher and counsellor on the research process. When I began this study I had hoped that I could teach the participants the reflective response cycle and then let them put it into practice without the need for much interaction from me. What I found, however, was that my mentorship (my Guidance, Probing and Challenging, and Encouragement) greatly influenced their ability to maintain the practice as well as gain insights and perspectives on their thoughts and feelings as well as their students’ behaviours. While I focused my interactions during the study on my role as a researcher, I could not avoid the influence of my counselling training coming through in my comments, particularly during the one-on-one coaching sessions and in my responses to the participants’ journal entries and our debrief sessions. The method of engaging with the reflective response cycle became a way of engaging with this process for both the teachers and me; we all learned deeper ways of understanding its phases and their efficacy.

I did attempt to focus my work on being a researcher, however. During one of the coaching sessions I noticed that the participant was going into her past experiences in a deeper way than I had intended for the purposes of this study and I intervened, pulling her out of her intense memory to focus on her goals and intentions. While this would feel dismissive from a counselling perspective, it was appropriate from that of a researcher – she had not signed up for a counselling session and it would have been unethical to continue as such. I was also mindful of my responses to the participants’ relaying of critical incidents. I focused my responses on their expressed intentions and did not ask them to delve too deeply into their thought processes based on past experiences. For example, when I offered the following guidance to one of the participants, I did not ask her to offer me her explanation but merely asked her to consider her motivation:

“As far as your reaction goes, I see no problem with raising your voice to get their attention provided that is the strategy and not to shame them through anger...If you are feeling bad about it then you will want to check out what that means to you, raising your voice.”

And in my probing and challenging, I did not ask for details but let the participant think about her process:

“I am wondering if it’s true that the student having lost his notes was a reflection on your teaching? How is this a truth for you?”
As postulated by Brinkmann (2012), qualitative research is synonymous with life; it understands that one cannot separate the object, the reflective response cycle, from the subjects, the participants and the researcher. I am a counsellor and as such, I played an integral role in the participants’ meaning making. It was through my unique reflections and responses to their experiences in the classroom that they uncovered at least some of what they came to learn and grow through their engagement with the reflective practice.

The two overarching themes that emerged through the above themes were Connection (to self, others and purpose/intention) and Growth (personal and professional). All nine participants were interested in creating deeper connections with their students despite differences in their daily intentions. Most of the participants found a sense of connection to their life goals and all found a connection to their intentions. This inner work gave them the opportunity to delve deeply into what they wanted in life and then connect those desires to their intentions for their teaching practice. In gathering and analyzing the data from the study, I used both participant quotes as well as a qualitative, post-pre survey to provide a structured self-assessment tool and ensure the participants’ own understanding of change was represented in the study. The post-pre revealed that all of the participants at the start of the study felt a certain degree of connection to their students. As the study progressed and several sought to improve their student-teacher relationship, they experienced how the relationship could, in many instances, improve. As McDowell’s (2011) research points out, feeling misunderstood, excluded, and unheard or disbelieved, are common “relational barriers” to the student-teacher relationship. These barriers were addressed inadvertently through the teachers’ engagement with the reflective response cycle as they sought to better understand and connect with their students:

“Connecting to the child’s face, connecting to how they feel and connecting to my intention… I think that will be the thing that will be lasting [from this study].”

And the following shows this participant’s growth through her realization that connection to her students has a direct correlation to her identity as a teacher:

“My behaviour was abrupt with a student...my fear was that if I don’t get my work done I would not fulfill my goal of being a good teacher...when I hear this I think the most important part about being a good teacher is the relationships I create with students.”
Further, within the theme of growth are the following participant comments. The first exemplifies a sense of growth that goes beyond the confines of the classroom.

“[The practice has] helped me learn…it’s pushing me to new levels to think about.”

Several teachers commented during the course of the study how they were able to use the phases of the reflective response cycle in their interactions with others in their lives, those outside their professional lives as teachers in the school.

This quote highlights the participant’s professional growth through her engagement with the reflective practice:

“I am able to notice things a little bit more...and I don’t know that I would have had the headspace to put two and two together before but now I’m more actively thinking about how those kinds of things impact students’ behaviour and presence in the class.”

5.2. Strengths of Qualitative Research in this Study

One of the strengths of qualitative research is that issues can be examined in detail and in depth. Interviews, for example, are not restricted to specific questions and therefore can be guided/redirected by the researcher in real time. Open-ended questioning during the workshop allowed me to ask probing questions in order to uncover participants’ life goals. Participants were first asked to list their eight goals. I was then able to ask them to dig deeper into the meaning of their lists to uncover their subjective understanding of the descriptive words they had written. The result was a truer reflection of the participants’ thinking and understanding – I was not left to interpret their meaning on my own. This was also apparent with the journal entries and the debrief sessions. I was able to dialogue with participants in order to probe for a better understanding of their meaning when relaying critical incidents that arose in the classroom.

Another strength of qualitative research is that it allows the research framework and direction to be quickly revised as new information emerges. With one of the participants, I realized that the workshop was taking her into more of a counselling session than an interview and I was able to modify my questioning so as not to repeat
this experience with the interviews that proceeded. Further, after the first couple of journal entries were submitted, I realized that guiding questions would be useful for the participants and I was able to add them as part of the research framework. Several participants remarked on their reduced feelings of anxiety to the added task of weekly journal entries with the added template in which to fill in easily. These guiding questions also enabled them to focus on the reflective response cycle so as to get the most out of their engagement with it. In addition, I was able to revise the final interview questions, adding information that emerged as the study progressed. At the outset of the study I had not thought to consider the challenges of putting into practice the reflective response cycle as it pertained to the participants' frame of mind during the course of the day – both inside and outside the classroom walls. This information provided rich data for future considerations when putting into practice the reflective response cycle.

Furthermore, halfway through the study, I connected with the participants to find out if they had any questions, concerns or confusions with the cycle. I asked, “Has the practice been helpful to you so far? If yes, in what way? If no, what is missing?” This allowed them to express their frustrations with some of the skills – one participant was having a hard time with the fear identification – and provide me with useful feedback. In addition, I had asked how they had chosen to keep their intentions at the forefront of their minds. From their responses I was able to help them with strategies as well as pass along to the other participants those strategies that were working for some of them.

The data based on human experience that is obtained with qualitative research is powerful and sometimes more compelling than quantitative data. The data collected for this study was based on in the moment, personal experiences with the reflective response cycle. The participants were able to express their frustrations and their successes as they happened throughout the four-month study. The participants often wrote their journal entries or requested a debriefing shortly after a critical incident occurred. This provided a richness to the experience for both them and myself as we were able to either work through the difficulty on the same day, providing an opportunity to go back the next class and repair a disconnection, or we could celebrate the success in the moment, rewarding the participant for their mindful awareness and compassion.
The breadth of the data set allowed me to present a holistic experience of the participants’ engagement with the reflective response cycle. Through the journaling and debrief sessions, participants were able to express in their own words their frustrations and successes as they experienced them from week to week over the four-month study. In addition, these two activities gave them access to my guidance and modelling so as to help them move forward with and often more deeply into the practice and its potentiality. The participants were also given the opportunity to look back on their learning and assess for themselves how they were impacted by the practice; this was the benefit of the post-pre survey, which despite involving the use of numbers was also considered a qualitative representation of participants’ understanding of their own perception of change. In other words, the numbers were representational rather than providing actual numerical values.

While there was a visual guide for the participants to follow, they were able to present each week whatever was happening in their classrooms and their lives. This gave them autonomy to explore the issues important to them at the time of writing or debriefing. I reinforced the skills of the reflective response cycle for the classroom each week, but we also discussed wider ranging topics. Several participants shared experiences outside of the classroom and asked for guidance.

I gave the participants the narrative I had constructed based on their pre-interviews and coaching experience. They were asked to verify my understanding of what they had reported. These interviews had been audiotaped and backed up with extensive notes to help me achieve accuracy.

I provided the post-pre survey several days before their final interview so the experience was still fresh in their minds. This allowed them the opportunity to reflect more accurately on what they had learned from the process. I had asked them by email to be as honest as they could in their responses so as to provide me with constructive feedback for program improvement; I made it clear that I was not looking for accolades.

5.3. Limitations of Qualitative Research in this Study

In examining the findings, it seems clear that the participants grew from the experience. While for some, the growth seemed more dramatic, it is not possible to
ascertain from this study if the learning continued to have an impact over time. As the literature indicates, the ongoing practice is very important if one wishes to truly change a habit of mind. It was not possible within the context of this study to follow the participants for a longer period of time, which would be valuable to the research question being explored in this study.

A limitation of qualitative research is that the findings cannot be generalized – data usually are collected from a few cases or individuals. With qualitative research, the researcher and the research participants create their own version of reality in the questioning, the telling, and the presentation of their findings. The researcher’s task is to help make sense of what is reported by the participant, which is necessarily based on subjective experience. This study is subjective for several reasons: 1) the intent was to see if this particular reflective response cycle could have a positive impact on these nine teachers in particular school settings, 2) the data is based solely on the participants’ self-reported points of view, 3) my own subjectivity as the developer of the reflective response cycle and in wanting it to be effective for the participants is a factor, and 4) this form of analysis is naturally subjective since it requires the researcher to choose the data chunks on which to focus for theme selection and labelling. While checks were put in place as indicated in the strengths section of this chapter, there are several factors that could get in the way of trustworthiness. These include recruitment selection; participant-researcher alliances; the time of the year; and, participant mood at the time of the post-pre survey. I have broken these down in the following sections.

5.3.1. Recruitment Selection

Recruitment was done through self-selection. Therefore, one might deduce that those who volunteered were more motivated than would be the case if the participants were pre-selected. True reflective practice, of course, cannot be imposed on an unmotivated person as we have seen with students in the classroom as well as with pre-service teachers, as indicated in much of the literature on student teacher models of reflection. What is produced is often formulaic, lacking depth, and completed in the final hours before the assignment is due to be turned in for assessment. The literature further questions the use of assessment for reflective practice activities for it may inhibit honesty and depth of thought. Moreover, as indicated with the post-pre survey, most of the self-selecting participants indicated a fairly strong feeling of connection to their students in
advance of the study. This could also indicate the high motivation level and mindset of the group of participants.

Another limitation to the participant recruitment is that I knew all but two of the teachers who continued with the study. In fact, someone who was least familiar with my work as a counsellor recruited the participant who left the study shortly after the workshop. The potential impact of these connections is discussed below.

5.3.2. Participant-Researcher Alliances

With the five participants who worked at the same school, our alliance could have had an impact on the data collected. My role as a counsellor, often working with these teachers’ students, could have influenced their feedback. They may have feared judgement from me. Also, since counsellors in secondary schools work closely with administrators, there could have been fears around indiscretion on my part. While the teachers’ journal entries and debriefings showed a great deal of vulnerability, one could never be certain of subjective disclosures.

Three of the participants were previous colleagues. A desire to be seen in a positive light could also have influenced their decisions on what and how to share with me. One of the teachers was a colleague of another and her decisions could also have been influenced by fears of indiscretion on my part. She may have worried that I would say something about her reflections to her friend and fellow colleague.

5.3.3. Time of Year

This study was conducted from November to March. Both winter and spring breaks took place during this time. These are often challenging times for teachers as students can be particularly rambunctious right before an extended holiday, and teachers can feel the drain of a long term ahead. There were also two reporting times within the scope of the four months which can leave teachers feeling pressed for time and short on patience given the extra workload of report cards. Debra specifically reported her feelings of exhaustion, lack of patience and dissatisfaction with her ability to effectively use the reflective practice during these times. She also commented on her relief and positive feelings once she had completed her report cards:
“My intention [the day of the reported challenging incident] was to get my report cards in. Ha ha, not my best...I really feel a lot better this week with my reports off my plate. When I feel the burden of needing to complete them I have a shorter fuse and feel more reactive. I feel more like myself this week.”

The time of the study also had an impact on the two Fine Arts teachers who had their major performances to work on during much of the time period. For Natasha, it was her mental health that was affected, and for Rose, it was more a lack of time to fit in her journal entries and/or debrief opportunities. Rose did, however, report that while burdened by time constraints, she did not experience any triggers during most of the time of her students’ major theatre performance. She was pleased to report that it had gone exceedingly smoothly that year.

5.3.4. Participant Mood

Participant mood could have affected any of the data but since the post-pre survey was static in nature, its results may have been most impacted by mood. One can never be sure what might drive one rating over another; if a participant were feeling low, he or she might also rate the effects of the reflective response cycle as low.

5.4. Reflexivity

I was very aware of my training as a counsellor during the data-collecting portion of this study. Its advantages were that I was able to probe deeply for understanding and meaning when presented with past beliefs and experiences during the coaching session, as well as challenging beliefs about student, parent and teacher behaviours when responding to journal entries and face-to-face incident debriefs. With the one teacher, Mary, who ended her participation shortly after the coaching session, I struggled with the feeling that she may have found the work she did and the pain she uncovered too much. We had conducted the interview and coaching session in one session by way of video conferencing due to time constraints on her part. That was the first time that we had “met” face-to-face and she was very open in her exploration of the stressors getting in the way of her connections with her students. She was very tearful during our discussion, and she let me know how much she disliked crying, especially in front of others. After that experience, I was much better prepared to move conversation with the other participants back to a more researcher-type probing. At one point during the
workshop Val was beginning to go deeper than I thought useful for our purposes and I redirected her.

The coaching session does lend itself to a counselling-type of interaction. It asks teachers to explore values and past experiences of stress that could bring up unfinished and/or challenging issues. It was important to me that I keep all aspects of the reflective response cycle at a researcher-participant level and not let myself fall into the role of counsellor. The participants had not signed up for counselling and I did not want to infringe on their privacy. I suspect that may have happened in the above case, particularly because of the absence of having built a solid foundation of trust in advance of the work. Mary knew very little about me when we connected by video conferencing.

Participants offered a couple of suggestions to improve the process during their final interview. One that stood out was that I did not give the participants a written copy of the process we followed during the workshop. This may have been helpful for them to have on hand. Debra thought that, “maybe if I’d kept track of that [the life goals and past reactions to triggers], maybe it would have given me more strength.” Debra often felt depleted and a lack of success as she struggled to find strategies to lesson her feelings of “sensory overload” in her very active Grade 7 classroom of rambunctious students.

Additionally, some of the teachers initially struggled with the idea of finding the fear under their feelings of irritation with their students. Since this was a new concept for some of them, one participant suggested that it would have been useful to see a list of potential fears to help them identify more easily whatever they were feeling at the time of the incident. I had not thought to offer my notes to them nor did I think to ask them to come to the session prepared to take notes. Fortunately they all worked through the process in their own ways and were provided with my feedback along the way so as to eventually hone their skills.

As indicated in the findings chapter, I had asked during the final interview about the constraints the participants had felt inhibited their ability to fully engage with the reflective response cycle. Time was a key factor for all of them. Most felt that the journaling was something that was an addition to their already busy days and most were not able to manage the weekly request. While they saw journaling as an effective method for reflection, they did not anticipate continuing this practice after the study. Most
preferred the critical incident debriefings – the face-to-face or phone interactions. They did however find the practice useful and hoped to continue with it, recognizing that practice was the key. Evelyn reflected,

“For me to expect that I’m going to journal and reflect about my teaching is maybe not as realistic but having that habit now, a different way of dealing with each situation, I think is realistic.”

For me this indicated that the reflective response cycle works best in combination with practitioner motivation and commitment to an ongoing practice as well as support from at least one other person who is able to help guide them along the way.

When I began this research, I had hoped to offer a practice that, once learned through the coaching session, could be practiced independently, without the guidance of a mentor such as myself. While pleased with the benefits I was able to offer with my experience and counselling skills, I was disappointed to discover that my role was more important than I had initially thought. This is reflected in the writings of all three scholars, Dewey, Schön, and Freire, whom I address in the review of the literature on reflective inquiry, as well as those of the others who have followed. Carol Rodgers (2002), in speaking to the difference between deciding for or by oneself states that, “No teacher outgrows the need for others’ perspectives, experience and support – not if they are interested in being what Dewey calls life-long students of teaching” (p. 857). This is not to say that I am the only one able to provide the necessary support to practitioners. It is only to recognize the importance of training others in the “art of mindfulness” (Tremmel, 1993) so that they can go on to act as peer-to-peer mentors in the future. As Debra pointed out, having the accountability to another would help maintain the practice. Several participants expressed their gratitude of the reminders for journal entries I sent out weekly.

5.5. Future Directions

Long-term perspectives would be beneficial to evaluate the extent to which the reflective response cycle skills are retained, sustained, and further developed by practitioners over time. As already stated on several occasions, practice is the way to create habits. It is easy to fall back into comfortable patterns if one is not mindful on a regular, daily, moment-by-moment basis. My years of experience as a counsellor have
proven this to be true. Change does not come easily for most of us and a high degree of motivation is crucial once the skills and resources are made available.

As indicated in the literature on social and emotional competencies, teachers set the tone in the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Moreover, strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of [teachers and] students (Hamré et al., 2012). Some of the characteristics that enable such competencies are high self and social awareness, pro social values and goals, as well as the ability to manage emotions (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Jennings and Greenberg found that “teachers with inadequate skills in these areas are at risk of developing a callous, cynical attitude toward students, parents, and colleagues [and] are less likely to demonstrate sympathy and caring to their students” (p. 498). They suggest that when “depersonalization” occurs, feelings of alienation and disconnection are likely to follow, and the overall sense of wellbeing in the classroom will be adversely affected.

There is certainly a need for teachers to learn – as they demand of their students – how to cope with and manage emotions and behaviours in the classroom. It is as difficult for teachers as it is for students. This was made clear by the teachers’ reflections throughout the study. Debra spoke of her feelings of heaviness in paying attention to her triggers. She often felt burdened by the awareness of them and at times longed to return to her previous state of not knowing. What provided some relief was a change of intention, of seeing the world through a different lens. Langer (1989) asserts that, “One reason mindfulness may seem effortful is because of the pain of negative thoughts. When thoughts are uncomfortable, people often struggle to erase them” (p. 199). She suggests that it is the state of being stuck in old perspectives that creates the pain and the effort. With a change in perspective, comes release.

The reflective response cycle was clearly a new approach for the ten teachers who volunteered for the study. And, all nine who followed through with the four-month study found it useful and worthy of passing on to their students. This tells me that there is a need and a desire for some form of reflective response training in education. Teachers do not want to end their school day feeling the burden of guilt that many of the participants spoke about after an unintended reaction toward a challenging student. The teachers who participated in this study wanted to improve their connection with their
students. I have worked with hundreds of teachers for more than 30 years and I know of very few who would want otherwise. They simply do not have the tools to help them get started. Most are not interested in adding onto their already jam-packed days nor are they willing to take more time away from their families and personal lives for after school or weekend workshops or retreats. As one participant noted at the end of the study:

“I can do it almost without thinking. I have to be quite conscious of it – when I feel the hair on the back of my neck go and I feel, you know, I’m rising to this reaction, I do have to focus and not do the, what I’ve done in the past – just react. I need to focus on a different response but it’s much easier.”

Perhaps this reflective response cycle coupled with ongoing support in the form of weekly check-ins by way of email, texts or phone calls might provide motivated teachers with the opportunity to put mindful awareness and reflection into practice.

5.6. Final Thoughts

As a practicing school counsellor, I am passionate about enhancing the quality of life for the students and teachers in the classroom. While much of the attention in schools is focussed on the wellbeing of students, I see a vital need for the same attention and resources to be allocated to the adults in the building. In schools, we try to find the best strategies to work within the spaces available in the students’ busy lives to help them find success and meaning in their learning and experiences; we need to do the same for the teachers. This study indicated that there is a call to notice the internal struggles the adults face within our school walls. We need to find spaces within the busy days of teachers to guide and support them. The work begins with the adults.

The reflective response cycle offers a new contribution to the field of reflective practice for teachers. It provides teachers with a valuable process to maintain focus on the goals of their classroom practice and to monitor their own reactions in any situation. It has the potential to 1) help educators (teachers, administrators, counsellors, others) feel more in control of their responses to challenging situations, 2) offer educators an alternate strategy of reflection and intentional response when faced with challenging situations, and 3) help each of us learn to connect with one another in ways that enhance and sustain our relationships.
References


Boyd, D. The place of location oneself(ves)/myself(ves) in doing philosophy of education. *PES Yearbook 1997.*


Appendix A.

Teacher Pre Interview Protocol

1. Name

2. Background information: route to becoming a teacher; teaching areas

3. Biggest challenges in the classroom currently?

4. Knowing what you do about this study, what would you like to get out of your participation in it?

5. Scenario: Picture yourself in front of the class when a student unexpectedly attacks you verbally. There is a sudden silence and you can feel all eyes in the room turn to you.
   a. Have you experienced a similar situation during a class?
   b. Describe your first thoughts following the described verbal attack.
   c. How would this make you feel? Describe your emotional reaction.
   d. What factors and/or issues would you be considering?
   e. What would students see you doing in the moments following the ambush?
   f. What actions would you consider? Explain why.
   g. How would you determine what to do?
   h. How would students react in such a situation?
   i. Would student climate be affected by such an event?
   j. How would you bring the episode to a close?
Appendix B.

Teacher Journal Prompts

1. Describe the incident
2. What were the feelings that came up?
3. What were your thoughts?
4. How did you respond to the incident?
5. Do you wish you had done something differently? If yes, explain.
Appendix C.

Teacher Post Interview Protocol

1. Has there been any change in your reaction to unexpected and/or challenging events in the classroom? If yes, how would you describe this change?

2. Thinking back to your responses to the scenario in the pre-interview, have any of them changed given your exposure to this approach to self-reflection?

3. Could you see a benefit to teaching this approach of self-reflection to your students?
Appendix D.

Post-Pre Survey

Name: ________________________________

In answering these questions, we would like you to compare yourself now with before you learned about the reflective practice framework (RPF).

Knowing what you know now, how would you rate yourself before the project, and how would you rate yourself now?

Please use a two-step process:

(a) decide whether the statement is “not true for me” or “true for me”

(b) circle the rating that most applies

(0) not at all true for me
(1) not very true for me
(2) sort of true for me
(3) mostly true for me
(4) very true for me
Thinking about the reflective practice framework, and knowing what you know now, how would you rate yourself before the project and how would you rate yourself now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before the RPF</th>
<th></th>
<th>Now</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>True for me</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>True for me</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I feel connected to my students.

2. I feel calm when I am in class.

3. I respond well to unexpected events in the classroom.

4. I do not react negatively to unexpected behaviours in the classroom.

5. I feel confident in class.

6. I enjoy my time in class.

7. I feel respected by my students.
Thinking about the reflective practice framework, and knowing what you know now, how would you rate yourself before the project and how would you rate yourself now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before RPF</th>
<th>Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not true for me</td>
<td>True for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I recognize when I <strong>am triggered</strong> into a stress response.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I can feel the stress response in my body.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I can identify the feeling and/or thought attached to the stress response.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I can delay reacting to the stressor and choose the response I prefer.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I have a desire to deal with those stressors.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I recognize when my thoughts are creating unpleasant feelings.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I can choose a response to that aligns with my intentions and goals.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I see the benefit in paying attention to my body's stress responses.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I have the desire to live in alignment with my goals and intentions.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I can relate my reactions/actions during stress to my thoughts and feelings.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I have optimism in being able to manage difficulty in the classroom.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I have confidence in being able to manage difficulty in the classroom.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I have a clear vision of how to cope with triggers in the classroom.</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
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</table>
Appendix E.

Letter of Info to Teachers and Consent

Principal Investigator
Marla McLellan
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University

Supervisor
Susan O’Neill, PhD
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University

Dear Teacher,

You have been asked to participate in this study that aims to address wellbeing in the classroom. You are invited to participate because you teach at a school where we have been given permission to conduct the study. We would like to ask you questions about your sense of wellbeing in the classroom before and after the study is completed. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in this research.

Why is this study being done?
Research indicates that a key concept associated with strong and supportive teacher-student relationships is connection and strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of students. This study aims to enhance person-to-person connection in the classroom through the development of a reflective practice framework.

How will you be involved this study?
The study involves providing a 15-minute audio-recorded pre-interview followed by a 45-minute audio-recorded workshop for teachers who volunteer to participate on practices associated with the reflective practice framework. The workshop will take place at a time and location of the teachers’ choice. Following the workshop, teachers will be asked to try out the strategies in their classroom and keep a journal of reflections on their experience. The researcher will also ask teachers to do an audio-recorded debrief of 2 journal entries, one in the first month of the study and the second in the third month to document examples of the strategies being used in practice. At the end of the 4-month study, teachers will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which should take no more than 15 minutes about their experience of
Appendix F.

Letter of Info to Principals

Principal Investigator  Supervisor
Marla McLellan, PhD student  Dr. Susan O’Neill, Supervisor
Faculty of Education, SFU  Faculty of Education, SFU

Dear Principal,

You are being asked to participate in a study into mental health and wellbeing in the classroom. The purpose of the study is to develop an evidence-based approach to improving teacher and student mental health and wellbeing in the classroom through a reflective practice framework. We have obtained approval from your School District to conduct this research project and with your permission, we would like to contact 2-3 teachers at your school to participate in this research as described below.

Why is this study being done?
Research indicates that strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of students. This study aims to enhance person-to-person connection in the classroom through the development of the framework.

How will teachers be involved in this study?
The study involves providing a 15-minute audio-recorded pre-interview followed by a 45-minute audio-recorded workshop for teachers who volunteer to participate. The pre-interview and workshop will take place at a time and location of the teachers’ choice. Following the workshop, teachers will be asked to try out the strategies in their classroom and keep a journal of reflections on their experience. The researcher will also audio-record 2 debrief sessions per teacher to document examples of the strategies being used in practice. At the end of the 4-month study teachers will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which should take no more than 15 minutes about their experience of implementing the reflective practice and to participate in a 30-minute audio-recorded post interview.

What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?
This study has been designated as ‘Minimal Risk’ as there are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You may not benefit directly from participating in this study. What we learn from this study may provide benefits to others in the future, including having a positive impact on
improving social emotional competence and reducing teacher and student stress in the classroom.

**How will participants’ information be kept confidential?**

Steps will be taken to de-identify the data. Participants’ names will be on the questionnaires and field notes so that their names can be matched to the consent forms. After data collection, each teacher will be assigned a unique identifier number and pseudonym. Teachers’ names will be stored separately in a locked file drawer in a locked SFU office and not linked to any audio or digital data files or documents used for analysis. All data will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the special identifier number/pseudonym. Reports that rely on the data collected will maintain confidentiality, as no names (or email addresses) will be used.

No one other than the PI and supervisor will have access to the raw digital and audio data, interview recording sheets and survey digital archives. These will be stored on a password protected secure encrypted Canadian server and back-up drives will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure office at SFU Burnaby campus, for three years. Audio recordings will be destroyed upon completion of transcription.

**What are the rights of participants?**

Participation by teachers in this study is completely voluntary and any teacher may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks to participating in this study. Your school will be provided with a copy of the results of the research after the study is completed.

**Whom do participants contact for questions?**

If you have any questions about this research study, or you would like a copy of the results or further information now or at a later date, please contact Marla McLellan and/or Dr. Susan O’Neill (thesis supervisor). If you have any concerns or complaints about your child’s rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact Dr. Jeff Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics [File number: 2016s0651].

Thank you very much for considering this request. We will follow up this letter with a telephone call to ask about your interest in taking part in the research. Alternatively, you can contact Marla McLellan.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*
Appendix G.

Teacher Recruitment Email

Hello – In early November I will begin data collection for my doctoral work at SFU. The focus of my study is on a particular form of reflective inquiry. In short, I have developed a process of reflection that I would like to have teachers experience and then provide feedback on its use in their classrooms. If you are interested in the topic of reflective practice, this study may be of interest to you. The time commitment is minimal as most of it is simply doing what you are already doing in your everyday teaching practice. I would be honoured to include some of you in my study and would happily explain things in more detail with you should you be interested.