Shifting from Stories to Live By to Stories to Leave By:
Early Career Teacher Attrition

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Introduction

We began this research by asking questions about the high number of teachers who leave teaching in their first five years of teaching. The literature on early career teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez & Daly, 2006; Macdonald, 1999; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) left us with wonders around the experiences of teachers who leave. The storied experiences of those who leave appear absent, for the most part, in the literature. In order to hear the stories of the experiences of early career teacher leavers we engaged in a narrative inquiry with four teachers who left teaching in their first five years. We are researchers, who are also teachers who have left classrooms. The stories of these early career leavers resonated strongly with us. As we engaged in the study, we awakened to how the early career teacher leavers' stories shifted and changed with each conversation, as the research conversations allowed them to make sense of their experiences with leaving.

A Story Fragment

We begin with a story fragment from a narrative account (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) with Natalie, one of the early career leavers that Jean worked alongside. As shown in Natalie's story fragment below, the conversations were imbued with emotion, with regret, and with tension, as her stories to live by shifted to stories to leave by (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009).

I (Jean) sit at the small table in my office across from a striking young woman. I call her Natalie. We are talking about her experience of leaving K-12 teaching after only four years. She wipes tears from her eyes and I know this is a difficult conversation for her. She tells of coming to Canada as a small child with her parents, of speaking a language other than English, of being identified early as someone who needed help, and of working with an academic tutor through her elementary and junior high school years in order to do well in school. She tells of going into the sciences when she entered university. She also tells of living within a family story in which she needs to have a career. In order to live up to, or to live out, that family story (Carr, 1986), she tells of her decision to take a dual degree, one where she could earn both a B.Sc and a B.Ed. As her stories unfold over several conversations, I come to know more and more of Natalie's experiences, her stories of her experiences of coming to teaching, and of teaching. At first she tells stories with lightness. Natalie tells a story of herself as a good teacher who knew her subject matter, was asked to participate in school and government curriculum committees, and was able to help her students learn the subject matter she loved. Natalie was given a tenured position early, a sign of the high regard of her school district. As she said,

> So one of the reasons I still kept going to work and was relatively happy was cause I loved being in the classroom. I loved the interactions there. Different things would happen every day…so different dynamic things happen and I like that. That's why I loved the classrooms. (Natalie, personal communication, February 13, 2012)

Natalie also tells of working closely with a small group of colleagues over many hours and weeks to devise an innovative approach to curriculum and how much she enjoyed this work with colleagues.

Then, as we came to know more of each other through further conversations, there are more tears as she tells of her experiences of leaving K-12 teaching. These are hard to tell stories, stories she has not told before in the smoothed over, cover story of how she left teaching to come to graduate studies. She tells of how she and her colleagues were not recognized for their innovative work but that someone else was given the credit. She describes how she was unable to even arrange an appointment to tell the recently appointed principal of the high school where she was teaching that she was resigning.

> I tried to get in to see her all week and I couldn't so finally I saw her in the hallway and I just said, "Oh by the way, I'm leaving next year". So it wasn't official, can

> I book a time with you to come and break some news to you? She said, "Oh I'm really glad that this is where you want to be, so you're going to be achieving your dreams." (Natalie, personal communication, February 13, 2012)

The story that the principal told of her, a story composed around a plotline that she was following a path to achieve her dreams, was not Natalie's story. It was one told of her, and to her, by the principal. This became Natalie's smoothed over story, a story that made it safe to leave teaching for graduate studies, a story with a plotline that she was achieving her dreams. As her stories to live by shifted to stories to leave by, she told this safe cover story. It was this plotline that shaped the first story Natalie told me. It was as we came into relationship over several conversations that deeper, silenced, riskier, and more complex stories of experience began to become apparent.

Before we leave this fragment, we want to let you know that Natalie still tells a story in which she wants to teach. Doing graduate work provides her an opportunity to continue to live a story of herself as a learner and as someone who can change the world. Only now she tells a story that she can change the world through her research and by working alongside people in policy settings. And being an academic will, she imagines, allow her to continue to teach.

As we reflect now on the stories that Natalie was living and telling, we see how difficult it was for Natalie as she tried to carve out spaces so she could be who she imagined she could be as a teacher. Perhaps the only way Natalie could find spaces to be, and become, the teacher she had imagined she would be, that is, the only way she could compose a narratively coherent story to live out, a story that made sense, was by leaving.

Framing the Literature on Early Career Teacher Attrition

While there is some disagreement about the actual percentage of teachers who leave teaching in their first five years (from 5% to 50%), "one very stable finding is that attrition is high for young teachers" (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006, p. 10). There are several large-scale studies, mostly in the US, that document the numbers and reasons why teachers leave teaching within five years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). These studies provide a means to see the phenomenon of teacher attrition, studies which allow us to see the phenomenon small in Greene's (1995) terms. However, we do not see "big", that is, we do not see the experiences of individuals who leave within these trends. Few studies focus on the experiences of individuals who left teaching (Buchanan, 2009; Rinke, 2007). This is, perhaps, why Rinke (2007) regards early career teacher attrition as a "silent crisis" (p. 3). Our inspiration for the study reported here was to bring awareness to this silence through inquiry into the lives of early career teachers as they came to teaching, taught, and left K-12 teaching within their first five years.

Natalie's story fragments raise resonances with our own stories of leaving teaching. We, Lee, Aiden and Jean, the co-authors, resonated with her stories of coming to teaching to change students' lives. We also imagined being and becoming teachers who changed students' lives. This resonance continues as Natalie tells stories of tension within the system, of not being able to live out her imagined stories of teaching (Schaefer, & Clandinin, 2011). We three also left teaching when we were unable to live out our imagined stories. As we returned to Clandinin, Downey, and Huber's (2009) work around the shifting landscapes and shifting identities of teachers we began to wonder about the stories that the participants we worked alongside were telling us. We recognized two silences: one silence is the lack of attention to the storied experiences of teachers who leave teaching; other silences live within the stories that early career teachers tell of leaving. It is to both silences that we turn our attention in this article.

"Teachers on landscapes learn how to act and think in appropriate ways, ways that are sanctioned by others positioned in the conduit" (Clandinin & Connelly 1995, p. 158). It seems that just as individuals learn how to act in appropriate ways, they also learn how to leave in appropriate ways. Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) wrote of the cover stories that teachers who leave often tell. These stories of leaving often include agreeable plotlines of departure, socially acceptable ways to leave teaching in the classroom. This notion of cover stories, stemming from Crites (1979), allows us to conceptualize the stories that teachers tell of leaving as safe cover stories; stories that conceal the more difficult stories of leaving that, as we came to see alongside our participants, are permeated with tension. The leavers we worked alongside have shown us that creating spaces for inquiry into leaving awakens 'the roar which lies on the other side of silence' (Eliot, 1874, as cited in Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009). As we worked closely with the four participants we began to hear these more complex, less comfortable stories. Natalie began to tell stories with plotlines of not being recognized for work she had done, of taking "one for the team" when she was silenced, and of becoming increasingly alone when collaboration was no longer supported.

Crites' (1979) conception of cover stories is much more nuanced than simply lying to cover up the truth. For Crites "two different renderings of experience can co-exist in a single consciousness" (p. 126), not so much "side-by-side" but rather in layers. One story is what Crites names the "real" story, an "unacceptable" or "unflattering" one we can feel but not face. The difficulty of facing the real story spawns a cover story, a "secondary growth, constantly called into play to counter and suppress the real story" (p. 126). Taken together, the two stories create a "double-storied type of self-deception" (p. 126) with the "the real story, though never avowed…the one that is actually believed and acted upon" (p. 126) and the cover story making things easier by providing an "acceptable" alibi. For us, the notion of cover stories offers an opportunity to inquire into the socially acceptable stories that teachers might tell in order to be able to leave safely as well as the

more difficult stories that may remain suppressed, covered over by cover stories. We wonder if early career teachers learn to tell cover stories about their leaving, and how these stories might cover over much harder stories, what we see as the 'roar on the other side of the silence.' We saw that as Natalie's new administrator offered her a safe cover story, that is, Natalie was leaving to pursue graduate studies. Natalie did not need to tell her administrator or anyone else the more complex and hard to tell stories. She kept those silent and the "roar" was silenced.

Coming to Terms: A Conceptual Frame

We adopted Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) narrative conceptual framework (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1999) around teacher knowledge. Teacher knowledge, conceptualized as personal practical knowledge, is knowledge "imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of a person's experiential history, both professional and personal" (Clandinin, 1985, p. 362). Personal practical knowledge, composed in, and lived out in, practice is a narrative concept of knowledge that is grounded in Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, Johnson's (1989) theories of embodied knowledge, Bateson's (1989) and Heilbrun's (1988) theories of life writing. Through further studies (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) that questioned "how the embodied, narrative, relational knowledge teachers carry autobiographically and by virtue of their formal education shapes, and is shaped by, their professional knowledge context" (p. 3), they developed a metaphoric concept of professional knowledge landscapes, composed of relationships among people, places, and things, and with both moral and intellectual qualities. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of both in- and out-of-classroom places and off the landscape places where teachers live. These off the landscape places are sometimes named personal knowledge landscapes. The stories that shape personal knowledge landscapes are sometimes partially shaped by stories on the professional knowledge landscapes. Attending closely to the "professional knowledge landscape that teachers inhabit creates epistemological dilemmas that we understand narratively in terms of secret, sacred, and cover stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4). Stories to live by, a narrative conception of identity, "speaks to the nexus of teachers' personal practical knowledge and the landscapes, [in and out of schools], past and present, on which teachers live and work" (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009, p. 141). Stories to live by are "shaped by such matters as secret teacher stories, sacred stories of schooling, and teachers' cover stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). Professional knowledge landscapes, individuals' stories to live by, are always shifting and changing. In this paper, we draw explicit attention to the interconnectedness of the personal and professional knowledge landscapes upon which individuals compose their lives, and on how teachers' imagined identities, their imagined stories to live by, shaped their experiences in ways that allowed them to stay in, or leave, teaching in schools.

From past work (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011) with two early career teachers in their first year of teaching, it became apparent that complex identity negotiations took place in and across their personal knowledge and professional knowledge landscapes. These landscapes were so interconnected that, at moments, it was impossible to separate the two. The teachers' imagined stories of teaching, as well as their imagined stories of who they would be as teachers away from the school, created tensions within their stories to live by. Further, from the work with early career teachers (Schaefer, 2013; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011) we learned that individuals enter teaching embodying stories to live by and, as part of their stories to live by, also carry forward looking stories of their imagined lives as teachers, which are part of their imagined lives as people. We draw attention to the idea that teachers are people in the midst of composing lives, both on and off professional knowledge landscapes. This view shifts the focus away from only the professional knowledge landscape, to include the personal knowledge landscape and the spaces between the professional and personal knowledge landscapes. It is in personal and professional knowledge landscapes, and in the spaces between the two, that teachers attempt to live out their imagined stories of who they are, and are becoming. We imagine the spaces between each teacher's personal and professional knowledge landscape as well as between the real and imagined stories of teaching as borderlands, spaces of disjuncture and dissonance that, while charged with possibility, can also be fertile ground for suppression, for what Crites (1979) calls cover stories that cover over secret stories.

Research Design, a Methodology, Methods: Coming alongside Participants

Using a methodology of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), we inquired into the experiences of three teachers in Alberta, a Canadian province, and one teacher in Georgia, a U.S. state, who left teaching in K-12 within their first five years. We chose narrative inquiry because

> Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

Working with narrative concepts of personal practical knowledge, teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, and teachers' stories to live by allows us to inquire into the experiences of those individuals who left the profession in their first five years. Narrative inquiry as a relational methodology allows us to study the stories that beginning teachers tell, over time, and in different situations. As a relational methodology, researchers bracket themselves into the study, that is, researchers' experience in relation with participants' experiences are under study.

Throughout the inquiry process from design to composing final research texts,

we were attentive to the three dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality and place. Lee had five 1.5 to 2 hour conversations with two participants. Jean had three 1.5 hour conversations with one participant. Aiden had five 1.5 to 3 hour conversations with his participant. Three different methods were used to compose field texts with each participant: each researcher's autobiographical narrative inquiry; transcripts of researcher-participant conversations; and timelines, artifacts, and stories of artifacts. Working from the field texts we composed a narrative account for each participant. Narrative accounts are interpretive constructions of individual experiences attentive to the three-dimensional inquiry space. These accounts were composed around what we identified as narrative threads across each participant's life. The draft narrative accounts were then negotiated with each participant in order to deepen understanding about the participant's experiences, and to continue to co-compose the narrative account.

Ethical Matters

Narrative inquiry is a relational form of inquiry and as such needs to be lived with attention to relational ethics from study design through to inviting participants to the study, composing field texts, and moving from field texts to interim and final research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013). We were attentive to this as we negotiated field texts and interim and final research texts that we co-composed with participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were promised. The names used are pseudonyms and we have negotiated the narrative accounts with the participants.

Fragments of Narrative Accounts

In the opening to this article, we shared a fragment of a narrative account with Natalie. In what follows we share three fragments of narrative accounts with other participants. Space does not allow us to include four complete narrative accounts. We carefully selected fragments to show something of each participant's imagined story of teaching, their experiences of teaching, particularly the bumps between their stories to live by and the professional and personal knowledge landscapes in which they lived and taught, and the ways they tell of shifting their stories to live by to stories to leave by. Within these shifting stories we play with Crites (1979) notion of cover stories and wonder about the roar that is silenced by safe, socially acceptable, ways of leaving.

Alis

As Alis and I (Lee) began conversations she talked about wanting a more flexible job. Before she left teaching she began a small tutoring business in her after school hours. She liked it because it was flexible. She chose how many and which students she took on, and how much to charge. Alis was in the midst of working on

a Masters degree in counseling. She talked about it "opening doors," but also said that at some point she might go back to teaching. At the time of the conversations, she was creating a Shakespeare unit for a high school English class she imagined teaching in the future At first, I wondered if Alis fit the criteria for the study, as I had imagined working with individuals who had left teaching and moved on, left it behind. This did not seem to fit Alis' experience. Further conversations revealed layers of stories, stories in which Alis created socially just classrooms that would, in some ways, change the world; stories that involved tension, emotion, struggle, and regret. Below, Alis speaks to the underpinnings of social justice that infused her imagined stories of teaching.

> I've often thought about where the hell did that come from? I think part of it I owe to my Mom and family meetings…. like a certain amount of the family budget was set aside to go to charity. And she would sort of say, OK, like as a family, what are we going to give money to? So I was reading about…learning about, you know, water and building wells in Africa, and as a young kid we were hearing that at the dinner table. (Alis, personal communication, October 24, 2011)

In these words, Alis offers a glimpse into her imagined stories of teaching, stories situated within her imagined life stories. Although Alis had wanted to be a teacher for as long as she could remember, her imagined story of teaching was of making the world a better place: "I'm going to change the world"; "I'm going to change the system"; "I'm going to change something" (Alis, personal communication, October 24, 2011). She elaborated, "I had the sense that there were people in the world that were suffering and that were unhappy and that I needed to do something about it" (Alis, personal communication, October 24, 2011).

As Alis voluntarily moved through three different teaching positions to try to find a place where she felt she could work to change people's situations, she felt she was moving farther away from the stories she had imagined.

> I actually would love for the school system to give teachers more time to do a good job and to be the teachers they want to be…I feel like if I am not teaching I should at least be trying to improve the school system from the outside… I feel like you shouldn't just sit there and participate in this broken system. Because how long can you really stay in the system? (Alis, personal communication, October 2, 2011)

Alis's words show something of what she experienced as the bumping places between her imagined stories of teaching, and her experiences of teaching. Her stories awakened me to her strong stories of social justice that she felt unable to live out. She found the dominant stories on the school landscape she was expected to live by, which she called "playing by the rules," not only hindered her ability to help, but possibly harmed students. "Playing by the rules, it genuinely scares me. What am I allowing to happen that should never happen, if I play by the rules?" (Alis, personal communication, February 2, 2011). Alis was a sought after teacher

who was offered, and took, a series of positions. She was always the one who chose to leave positions, not someone who was asked or encouraged to leave.

Alongside Alis's struggle to live out her story of teaching as creating better situations for everyone, she also struggled with how much to give to teaching, as she saw how teaching took her away from attending to life on her personal knowledge landscape.

> I think it is impossible, I genuinely think it is impossible to be a high school teacher and to be decent at your job, and have a healthy home life. I really do think it's impossible. Either you're kind of a mediocre teacher and really on top of your family life, or you're a good teacher, or a great teacher, but your family is suffering in some way. (Alis, personal communication, February 4, 2012)

In Alis's words we see the connection, and competition, between the stories that shaped her personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Being a good teacher meant sacrificing being a good person in her family and vice versa.

As we talked over five conversations, the many layers of Alis's stories of leaving teaching became more visible. While the story of leaving teaching to pursue her masters degree or to parent were stories of no regrets, of moving forward, of opening doors, I realized these might be what Crites (1979) called cover stories. As we talked, the layers of not wanting to work if she could not attend to ways to change the world in more socially just ways were stories that sat silently behind the easier to tell and easier to understand stories, stories that do not implicate us as teachers, as teacher educators, as policy makers.

Reid

Reid told his colleagues he left teaching to move to a larger city, and to travel. In smaller Canadian communities moving to a larger city is an acceptable story for younger adults. While this is part of Reid's story, I (Lee) learned there were layers behind what seemed, at least in part, to be a cover story. Learning what brought him to teaching helped us to see there was more to his story of leaving.

> From my earliest memories Uncle Mike was always one of my favorite uncles 'cause whenever you go to his house, you're throwing a ball, you got a football out, you got a baseball out…just always had that passion for sport and physical activity. So that was always similar to me, so I was always attached to Uncle Mike and knew he was a teacher. (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Reid's Uncle Mike, his favorite uncle, was a physical education and mathematics teacher. At an early age Reid connected to his uncle through movement. He spoke of other family members giving him computer games, or toys, but Uncle Mike, "he always gave things that would contribute to activity. For example, like he would give a Timex watch, a staple for every physical education teacher" (Reid, personal communication, February 2, 2011).

While Uncle Mike played a part in Reid's story to choose teaching, Reid also had positive experiences with his physical education teachers.

> Big things that I can really lean on, I had two awesome phys. ed. teachers in high school. Both these two guys were just awesome role models. I always enjoyed phys. ed. more than just because I got to play hockey, and football, and soccer, and all those games, but more though [because] I could attach myself with these guys. (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011)

Reid's attachment to these teachers gave him something solid to *lean on*, a relational form of support for a teenager. Reid considered himself an athlete and grew up with very supportive parents who enabled him to be active. But his experiences with these men stayed with Reid, forming "basically a meld of characters who drove [him] to think about that teacher idea" (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011). Although Reid spoke passionately about helping students to be active, his stories of coming to teach physical education were connected with his relationships.

Between coaching and teaching, Reid was extremely busy during his first year.

> I was probably firing off 80 to 85 hours a week at the school but I loved the coaching…It was basically every weekend, three times a week practices, so my time commitment had gone up 30 hours a week…I was kind of burnt out by the end of volleyball. (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011)

And yet he had expected this, even welcomed it. "I was kind of expected to do all this stuff. It was a good shift. It was nothing that blew me away" (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011). Although Reid seemed okay with teaching consuming all the hours in his weeks, he was cognizant of how things might be different if his situation were different.

> I didn't really have a family yet. So I wasn't in a committed relationship with anybody who was living with me. So that was better 'cause I didn't feel guilty. I'm not sure if that was ever something that came to you, but I never felt guilty being away from home and being at the school because I really had nothing else to do except for teaching and coaching which made it maybe easier for me. (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011)

For Reid the teaching schedule, his busyness, what he called being "burnt out" at the end of volleyball season, were not concerns. He was in a tenured position and was highly regarded. However, Reid knew that he wanted someday to be in a committed relationship, an important part of his imagined life story. He awakened to the difficulty of fulfilling both imagined stories in his teaching assignment. Who he was becoming on the personal knowledge landscape bumped against his imagined story of who he imagined becoming as a person.

> The big detriment to me, which you know about, was there was no one there…. There was nothing that really made me want to stay. I mean relationship is a big part about where you are and there was nothing even close to that there, just because it's a very transient town. (Reid, personal communication, November 2, 2011)

The thread of relationships again weaves back into Reid's stories. While relationships with students on the professional knowledge landscape were fulfilling, even sustaining, the lack of relationships, or even the possibility of relationships, on his personal knowledge landscape shaped Reid's story to leave by. Reid had imagined teaching in a large city. His move to this small town was imagined as a temporary move. To compose his life the way he imagined, he had to leave teaching in the small town. Reid told his story to leave by as one composed around the lack of relationships on his personal knowledge landscape. We wondered, however, about the lack of sustaining relationships with colleagues. Was Reid's story to leave by shaped by the lack of sustaining relationships on both his personal and professional knowledge landscapes? As Reid left teaching to move to a large city, he did not seek out a teaching job. Was the centrality of relationships in his stories to live by a central thread in composing his story to leave by? Was the focus on needing to be in a place where he could find relationships on his personal knowledge landscape a cover story, one that covered over the lack of sustaining relationships with colleagues on the professional knowledge landscape? We wondered if the story of leaving framed by the lack of personal relationships covered over harder to tell stories, stories that were not told or even named.

Tara

Tara and I (Aiden) met on Tuesdays at a small café that she could walk to from the home she worked in as a nanny. I had known Tara for several years, as she had cared for my daughter Maeve one day a week for over a year. She told me the first day I met her that she had been a teacher but had left to have more time to be creative, to write, and to play music. I came to know Tara is an accomplished singer songwriter who has released several albums, which in many ways made her story of leaving teaching to follow her passion acceptable and safe. Gradually Tara told me another story, one about her passion for teaching and having always seen herself as a teacher:

> …the more I've spent time with them (children) the more I realize when you are a child how greatly your identity really is shaped in what you'll become. So like it causes me to more greatly see that connection of, I was an older sibling, I was taking care of my younger sibling, and teaching them. (Tara, personal communication, January 17, 2012)

Tara arrived at my house in an old pickup truck with her guitar, ready to sing with my daughter Maeve, who sat beside Tara and strummed her little guitar, bobbing her head so that her blonde hair fell across her face, just like Tara's. Maeve's favourite song was Tara's 'We are Loved' song:

> We are loved, special, and important,
> We also have learning, changing, and growing to do,
> You get to it and I will too

> And don't forget I hope the best for you
> And you, and you, and you and you.

In our fourth conversation I learned Tara wrote the song the summer before her first year of teaching as her "class motto," that captured "the essence of what I want these kids to take away with them, to know" (Tara, personal communication January 17, 2012). As her home life growing up "was not that good" (Tara, personal communication January 17, 2012), Tara wanted her classroom to be a space of affirmation and belonging for students, an uncomplicated space of acceptance.

Tara's recollections of her first year of teaching were filled with stories of being overwhelmed and exhausted. Alongside these were stories of being supported by her principal, Dr. Martel, as well as several colleagues, all older women. One moment early in that first year stood out for Tara, and she told me the story more than once.

> The first compliment Dr. Martel ever gave m—which I will never forget—it was probably the 2nd day of school and I was like walking with my kids down the hallway or something and she just smiled real big at me and said, "The children look happy." I think for her to make that comment spoke right to my heart. Yeah that's it- I want a happy bunch of kids. I want to teach them and I want them to learn but I really want them to be happy little people. (Tara, personal communication, January 24, 2012)

Despite feeling "for about 4 years… I basically felt like some of the best, warmest, intelligent, vivacious ladies supported me as a young teacher" (Tara, personal communication January 31, 2012), Tara struggled to meet all-consuming demands of teaching, her students, and the relentlessness of the school year.

> I explain to people that like there's 180 days in the school year and when day one starts and they all come barrelling down the hallway and bust through your door and they're basically like "We're yours. You've got to deal with us every day." You know? There's something about that that like, for the next 180 days it feels like just one big long day…one big long day that you're waiting to end. (Tara, personal communication, January 31, 2012)

Tara told of giving so much to her students and teaching that it totally subsumed her to the point where she could not even recall her own emotional state during those years: "I was so in the zone that it's hard for me to even think back and gauge emotionally, was I happy? It's blasting you" (Tara, personal communication, January 24, 2012).

During the spring of Tara's third year of teaching her brother died very suddenly. Tara prefaced telling me this with "on a personal note" (Tara, personal communication, January 31, 2012), a preposition clause that shows how she demarcated the professional and the personal. This tragedy, along with the end of a long-term relationship, caused Tara to begin to wonder about "my own being, my own life, just my own life apart from being Ms. Rose" (Tara, personal communication, February

6, 2012). In the final weeks of her third year of teaching, Tara recalls wondering about her life beyond teaching, about "just what was coming next and more of becoming a person rather than just continuing with this career" (Tara, personal communication, February 6, 2012). Feeling completely drained from her third year, Tara spontaneously decided to spend the summer in New Zealand and Australia, which turned out to be "a breath of fresh air that I kind of needed and then wow, look, you know all of a sudden all this teaching inspiration starts bubbling up" (Tara, personal communication, January 31, 2012). But along with the inspiration for teaching she

> started thinking about …taking a break. So my thoughts started to go there—along with brainstorming for the next school year—kind of these parallel thought patterns. Like when might I step away from this season and this school? That might be coming up. But I'm also brainstorming and excited about what I'm going do this next year. So kind of both of those thought waves were taking place. (Tara, personal communication, February 6, 2012)

Tara returned for a 4th year, inspired and invigorated to meet her grade 1 students, with whom, because of the "looping." she would teach through Grade 2. She spoke fondly of that year, and still remembers each student. The administration recognized her as a strong teacher, selecting her for advanced training in a program called the Literacy Collaborative. However, she was already considering that when these students left her classroom, she might also leave.

Tara's principal, Dr. Martel, planned her retirement for the end of Tara's fourth year. Before Dr. Martel left, she spoke with Tara to tell her what might be in store for her under a new administration, and that she might have to leave the school to continue to be the same kind of teacher. Dr. Martel's concern was grounded in her knowledge that the district was mandating more scripted forms of teaching.

> She (Dr. Martel) gave this little metaphor. She said that I was kind of like a butterfly…that I might need to fly away, that there might be a better setting for me. I think she was like "private school or some different type of education that's happening." I think she kind of saw how the education system was heading and did kind of share that with me. Again I think a little bit as a warning of "I've let you do what you've done and it's been wonderful and beautiful. I'm leaving now. I kind of want to tell you that I don't know what this next year's going be like for you with the new administrator coming in, but I just want to put it in your ears, put it in your heart, that at some point in your life there might be a better setting for you to have these freedoms and do what you do well." (Tara, personal communication, January 31, 2012)

Dr. Martel was right about things changing under the new administration. Tara's first real interaction with the new principal let her know things would be different.

> (She) came in to observe me, and all she could be baffled by and make notes

> on are, "Why did the kids in your classroom take their shoes off? That's a fire hazard." And I got nit-picked for things like that. (Tara, personal communication, January 24, 2012)

Tara felt harassed by the new administration during her final year for teaching in ways Dr. Martel had encouraged. She wishes now that she would have told them at the beginning of the year that she was leaving so they would have left her alone and let her leave on a good note. In March Tara informed the principal in a one-line e-mail that she would not be returning. The principal never asked why.

The hardest story for Tara to tell was of the year-end luncheon to celebrate the three teachers who were leaving: Tara and two teachers who were retiring. Tara told of standing in front of her colleagues, trying to thank them and say goodbye, but feeling like she communicated far more, "the people who were listening to me give that goodbye speech, I think it was kind of revealed that my inner world was in a bit of angst, let's just put it that way" (Tara, personal communication, February 14, 2012). While Tara told her friends and colleagues the same story she initially told me about leaving teaching, that is, to have more time to be creative, this was only part of a larger and more difficult story that started to peek through at that luncheon, that still evokes a "sense of shame or embarrassment" (Tara, personal communication, February 14, 2012) for Tara.

In the conversations Tara and I (Aiden) talked sometimes as former teachers, other times as people. We wonder if it is hard for teachers to talk with each other about lives beyond teaching, about the bumping between their lives on their personal and professional knowledge landscapes. How might the separation of lives lived and told on personal knowledge landscapes from lives lived and told on professional knowledge landscapes lead to two different stories being lived and told, one about a teacher and the other about a person? How might this split or separation between Tara, the person, and Ms. Rose, the teacher, and the resulting tension between the two competing stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), contribute to Tara's looking at life beyond teaching, and for a cover story?

It has been five years since Tara has been in the classroom, but she has remained a teacher. She teaches the children for whom she is a nanny. She is also a musician, and a person. She is still searching for a venue where she can be all three at once, and has come up with the idea of starting a "Folk School" in the mountains that will allow her to be creative, to teach, and to have "more breathing time to be a human" (Tara, personal communication, February 14, 2012). Tara is working on this, but at the same time appreciated our conversations as creating "the space for telling the whole story, so I really appreciate that." (Tara, personal communication, February 7, 2012)

As she sings the last line of her *We Are Loved Song* she points at each child when she sings "And don't forget I hope the best for you, and you..." The children point at each other as they sing, too. Tara tells how one little boy ended the song by pointing at himself and singing very loudly, "AND ME!" She now sometimes

ends the song with everyone pointing at themselves and saying "And me." As we attended to Tara's smoothed over cover story of leaving teaching to pursue her music making, we wondered if this covered over the conflicts she felt between wanting the best for her students and for herself. Had she told the stories of wanting to attend to her own stories to live by might they have conflicted with stories of good teachers as giving all of themselves to teaching?

The Roar: Learning from Stories of Experience

As we read through the participants' narrative accounts and revisited the transcripts of the conversations, we came to understand more of the metaphoric roar that lives on the other side of the silence of the experiences of teachers who leave teaching early. Crites' (1979) words help us wonder about how safe stories around leaving may help, in some ways, to create cover stories to leave by, stories that silence other stories, less acceptable stories. Drawing again on Clandinin and Connelly (1995) it seems that just as our participants learned to tell acceptable stories on the school landscape, they learned to tell acceptable stories as they left the school landscape. When asked why she left, Alis initially responded "to be a mom" or "graduate school." While both are possible ways to tell her stories, they are also cover stories that silence the struggles and bumping places she experienced between composing narratively coherent stories to live by on her personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Her silence about the harder to tell more complex stories could have disrupted the professional knowledge landscape of schools.

We now wonder about Reid's stories to leave by, and what stories might have been silenced by his stories of leaving to travel and to live in a city. His story of leaving a small town to live in a city is a safe story as is his story of travelling. These are expected, acceptable stories. We wonder though if his stories to leave by are also cover stories. Knowing that Reid is not teaching in a city as he could be doing, we wonder if there are layers, other stories, covered over by these stories to leave by. As a teacher who came to teaching because of relationships and who only found sustaining relationships on his professional knowledge landscape with his students, was it too difficult to sustain his stories to live by without being sustained either on his personal knowledge landscape or by colleagues on his professional knowledge landscape? Natalie's stories of not being recognized by her principal for her excellence as a teacher and an innovator became her stories to leave by, ones covered over by the safe story of leaving to return to graduate school.

In the participants' stories of their experiences, they described their teaching lives as "hard." Certainly the long hours, physical, social, and emotional demands made teaching hard, but we began to see that stories shaped around these plotlines, stories that often reverberate in school hallways and early career attrition literature, can also act as a kind of cover story, an easy and acceptable alibi. The less acceptable stories, the ones that reside between teacher and person composing lives on

two knowledge landscapes, were harder to tell. The participants told of struggling to find ways to compose and recompose their whole lives, ones that were lived on and across personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Is Tara's story of the boy, who pointed to himself as also worthy of the best, so striking because it is rare to hear teachers make similar statements? Leaving the profession to focus on composing a better life, a more coherent life on two knowledge landscapes, is not an acceptable story, in large part because of what it might imply about the teacher and about the professional knowledge landscape. To share these harder to tell stories has the possibility of disrupting the professional knowledge landscape and disturbing those who live on it. The roar created by attending to these more complex stories may well be deafening.

From a research perspective these ideas of life composing, these narrative understandings of teachers' experiences, cannot be easily measured, cannot be accounted for, and are best dismissed and disregarded. Researchers, teacher educators, and teachers who leave, know this. Teachers who leave also know that most often, if they tell these complex, layered stories, they run the risk of being seen as deficit, as selfish, as not able to "hack it," as "not swimming but sinking." Better to tell the safe stories of less risk.

In the large-scale studies of early career teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez & Daly, 2006; Macdonald, 1999; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) it is difficult to see teachers as people composing lives. Yet attending to experiences as temporally unfolding and enfolding, as situated in place and in relationships, we came to understand the stories participants had imagined they would live were shaped by their stories in early landscapes, and by their stories lived both in and out of schools, and as inextricably linked to how they imagined they would compose their lives, including their lives in and out of schools. These ideas, often disregarded or invisible on the professional knowledge landscape, and in research, were strongly evident in the participants' stories to leave by.

We realized that creating spaces for teachers to tell their stories that include their lives as people both on and off school landscapes helped us understand more about the chasms that can open between personal and professional knowledge landscapes, between imagined and lived stories, between who each is as a person and who each is as a teacher, between cover stories and what Crites (1979) refers to as 'real stories.' Paying attention to the muted stories that resided in the disjunctures between teacher and person pushed us to consider what stories were left untold.

The all-encompassing nature of the teaching profession stems back to the one room school house where the teacher lived, slept, and taught; the personal life given up for the good of the vocation. These historical narratives create stories of "good" teachers who sacrifice their lives for their students. They also foster cover stories that are seen as "safe," that cite upward mobility, parenting, and further education as "good" and acceptable stories to leave by. These cover stories seem easier and

safer to tell than stories of struggle, of the bumping of imagined stories with stories on the professional knowledge landscape, of guilt, and of regret.

Another way to understand the cover stories that teachers tell as they leave teaching is as veritable permission slips that grant teachers permission to leave. Their stories are safe and recognizable, and therefore permissible not only for them but also for those on the professional knowledge landscape and on the personal knowledge landscape. These stories not only allow teachers to leave schools, they also leave the professional knowledge landscapes unquestioned, and therefore intact, as the stories are about the individual and not about the system. These cover over the harder to tell stories that might, if given voice, challenge the larger cultural and institutional narratives about teachers.

According to Lindeman Nelson (1995), dominant or master narratives work to frame particular groups as deficient. Just as importantly, these narratives also work to silence particular groups, people, and stories. In the case of these teachers, the harder to tell stories give way to more acceptable or permissible cover stories that do not challenge or counter the master narratives about teaching or teachers. Hearing their harder to tell stories, we wonder if they contain the seeds of a counterstory that could, if given a collective voice, call attention to and shift the crossings and relationships between teachers' personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Attending to what lives on the other side of silence, the metaphoric roar that Eliot (1874) refers to, allows us to see that the participants' imagined stories of who they would be, and become, as teachers did not just include teaching. The imagined stories included stories of being, and becoming, in social networks, in families, and in communities. And the imagined stories are stories lived in, and balanced between, personal and professional knowledge landscapes. As we reflected on the imagined stories of participants, we saw that when they were unable to live out their imagined stories in all their complexities over time, place and relationships, they felt powerless to negotiate spaces on their professional knowledge landscapes. Frequently, they left (Clandinin et al, 2012).

Research puzzles, research designs, and research texts develop out of always asking questions concerning the significance, the personal, practical, social, and theoretical justifications, of the research. In our study of the experiences of early career teachers who left teaching we respond to the 'so what?' and 'who cares?' questions by showing that the phenomenon of early career teacher attrition is very complex (Schaefer, 2012). Through inquiring into the stories early career teachers live and tell, that is, their experiences, we are beginning to open up other stories about teacher attrition that may be harder for teachers to tell and harder for policy-makers and teacher educators to hear. We argue that while cover stories may make it easier for teachers to leave teaching and, ironically, for researchers to precisely determine why teachers leave teaching, cover stories may ultimately lead to policies or "fixes" based on teachers' alibis for leaving, instead of their more complex and harder truths.

Notes

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