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### **A Narrative Inquiry Into the Impact of Chronic Within-Year Teacher Turnover on Students**

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF CHRONIC  
WITHIN-YEAR TEACHER TURNOVER ON STUDENTS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Sara Ashley Myers

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Teacher Education  
Educational Studies

May 2022

This dissertation by Sara Ashley Myers

Entitled *A Narrative Inquiry Into the Impact of Chronic Within-Year Teacher Turnover on Students*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, School of Teacher Education, Educational Studies Program

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

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Accepted by the Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

Myers, Sara Ashley. *A narrative inquiry into the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover on students*. Published Doctor of Education dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2022.

This dissertation explored the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover through the narratives of students who have experienced it. A three-part series of interviews were used to capture these lived stories, in addition to artifact collection and creation, by focusing on the perceptions of events through time and the impact of said events on students' beliefs and understandings of teacher-student relationships. Participants included three junior students who had experienced within-year teacher turnover chronically, with three instances or more in their school career. The data collected from these series of interviews and collection of artifacts were analyzed and restoryed alongside participants using the conventions of narrative inquiry. Rather than shared as one story in multiple parts, each participant's story was shared individually, braided together through any commonalities of theme in order to better explore the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover on students. Findings included that across these narratives all students experienced positive or negative emotions and that all participants experienced academic or relational challenges due to their encounters of within-year teacher turnover. The implications of this work attend to systems of support in the face of within-year teacher turnover and more generally to teacher-student relationships.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work made me appreciate the significance of sunrises and sunsets. Sunrises mark new beginnings while sunsets denote closure. This dissertation, and the finality it brings with it is both the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. As it comes to its close, I cannot help but think about where this journey began. For me it was a seemingly innocuous Facebook Ad from my alma mater about their extended campus program: now offering an Ed.D in educational studies. Who knew so much could become of one click? That click led to an invitation for an informational meeting at UNC's extended campus in Lowry, where I would meet Dr. Christine McConnell, Dr. Derek Gottlieb, and future doctoral cohort member Chris DeRemer. I left that initial meeting with hesitation. I was interested in the degree to help solve problems that I was seeing in education, but I knew what an investment of time, energy, and expense it would be to pursue. I cannot accurately pinpoint what it was that convinced me to apply, but I did and was accepted into the program. The sun had risen, and I was on my way.

Throughout this program, I have grown more and more grateful for all of the classes, and instructors, and the lessons. There have been a few people that I have to acknowledge because of their importance to my growth. Dr. McConnell's approaches to the teaching and learning dynamic as well as her attention to care have encouraged me. Looking back, it was evident from that first interaction, but it has been a source of inspiration throughout this journey. Thank you, Dr. McConnell for reminding me of the joy and creativity not only in my teaching process, but in my emergent role as an educational researcher. There were points in these last four years where I wanted to quit, and in those moments you were there with an encouraging email, or phone call,

or the just right lesson for the moment within a class I was taking with you. You, and the rest of my dissertation committee, have encouraged me to think in different ways and tackle problems from different vantage points.

In my second year, I became a graduate assistant and was hesitant about what that role would look like. It turns out that hesitation was misplaced as I discovered that working alongside Dr. Brian Rose allowed for chances to become a better researcher. I never had Dr. Rose as an instructor, but he has taught me the attention to detail that goes into research. Thank you for the experience to learn from your example in exploring the important topic of negotiation in teaching and learning. Our conversations have been the experience I needed to more fully appreciate the work I completed within this dissertation.

Dr. Jeraldine Kraver was my English Education professor during my undergraduate work at the University of Northern Colorado. She inspired me then to use the written word to effect change as a teacher; she inspired me in this dissertation to consider words even more carefully and to use their poignancy to make a stronger point. Thank you for being willing to challenge my thinking and give me other perspectives to consider. Thank you as well to Dr. Christine Kyser. I was hesitant about including the letter artifact in this work. It was your insight to the potential of that component that encouraged me to include it within the design of this work. Thank you for seeing potential where I could only see hesitation.

As the sun is setting on this journey, I can also look back on those people who stayed with and supported me. Thank you to my small but wonderful circle who let me share about this process. You have been sounding boards and inspiration for me. Thank you to Bobby; your patience and belief in me kept me going. Thank you to my sisters and brother-in-law, Janell,

Trisha, and Matt. Each of you has been there with an encouraging comment, much-needed check-in, or piece of tough-love advice.

I will never be able to express through words that depth of gratitude and love I have for my parents, John and Joan. Throughout my entire life they have instilled in me a strong work ethic and strong sense of care. My mother has dedicated every day of her life to the care of others, typically putting herself last. Even in retirement, she works and gives to others. I could not have made it through this process without her presence or her care. Thank you, mom.

This work surrounds the topic of leaving and finalities. Sunsets. The most difficult sunset I have ever faced in my life was in July of 2021 when my family lost my father to blood cancer. I lost all motivation for this work, in part knowing that he would never see me complete this dissertation or graduate with my doctorate. That still seems cruel, given that my father was the one who taught me the most about perseverance. I carry you with me, always. Give her the real thing.

Finally, to my boys, Jackson and Barrett, you are my sunsets and sunrises and everything in between. You carried me through this work, even through all the hours of work and late nights of writing. You kept me going. This work is for you. I hope that you have teachers that reflect the best of the stories captured in this research. I hope that your teachers bring out the best of you and treat you with the care you deserve. I hope that you see that life is education and that yours are bright and beautiful. Barrett, I love you here, here, and here, and all around the world. Jackson, I love you times a thousand; I love you times a million; I love you times infinity plus one plus one plus one.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This first chapter of this Doctoral Research Project serves as an overview of the issue to be addressed as well as an overview of the background for the use of narrative inquiry as the methodology for this research. This chapter highlights the importance of the issue of teacher turnover, both from across the established literature and also through my personal experience with it as part of my positionality. Furthermore, chapter one provides the necessary background and terminology critical to this research, the research questions, as well as an explanation of the methodology utilized. This research utilized narrative inquiry to examine the experiences of secondary school students who have been impacted by chronic teacher turnover.

#### **The Teacher Turnover Issue**

Teaching and learning are heavily connected and interpersonal dynamics. Students form connections, both positive and negative, with their teachers and vice versa. Teaching and learning are highly relational acts and are vastly complicated by the numerous factors constantly at play (Eisner, 1988). Teachers are often cited as the most influential in-school variable related to student achievement (Education Commission of the States, n.d.). All factors considered, the most effective teaching is predicated on positive relationship-building between teachers and students (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Gallagher & Mayer, 2006). Because of this relational component of teaching, the profession is more complicated than others in large and small ways. It is often observed that even having to use a sick day is difficult because creating plans for a substitute might be more work and more complicated than if a

teacher had just gone in sick. This is because teachers have to inform others about the content to be covered and, typically, how the classroom and the people within that classroom should be treated via expectations and norms. This is also exacerbated by focusing on achievement scores directly tied to teacher evaluations. There is an impetus to ensure that every minute of every day is academically rigorous so that students perform well on achievement tests and that teachers can then be assessed as having done their job. Leaving for a day is difficult, but what about when teachers decide to quit entirely?

What happens when a teacher leaves within the school year? It is an important question to ask because currently teacher attrition makes up approximately 90% of the teaching shortage, which means a shortage of roughly 125,000 teaching positions across the United States each year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Espinoza et al., 2018; Sutcher et al., 2016). In many other fields, when an employee leaves, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the work can move forward with little more than a hiccup or a slight arrhythmia.

When a teacher leaves, especially within the course of the school year, it can wear significantly on the numerous mechanisms of a school. Substitutes have to be brought in to fill the vacancy, and if they cannot be found, then other teachers or school staff have to take on the responsibilities of the teacher who has left in conjunction with their typical roles. The job has to post as soon as possible and replacement candidates have to apply and be interviewed and screened. Hopefully, the vacated position is appealing enough that there are applicants. Hopefully, those applicants are highly qualified. “In a perfect world, when teachers leave, there would be ample opportunity for an incoming teacher to read lesson plans, observe classroom interactions, and ask questions of the departing teachers and students” (Id-Deen, 2016, p. 142). Someone has to figure out what the teacher was teaching or where they left off in lessons.

Curriculum materials and pacing guides have to be consulted: what lesson was last taught? What was the most recent in-class assessment result? What are the students supposed to be learning? Once those aspects are dealt with, someone might take the time to realize that young, impressionable people have been left in the wake of a situation that is entirely out of their hands and that they also have needs that should be addressed beyond the academic. Ideally, that particular step would have been at the forefront of administrators' and other staff's minds, but who can accurately account for what happens when a teacher leaves?

This particular type of narrative is happening all too often. The teacher attrition rate, the number of teachers who leave the profession, has grown from 5.1% in 1992 when data first became available to 8.4% in 2008 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019) and has held steady since. However, when the number of teachers who also leave schools to work in another is added, which is also 8% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019), then the issue of teacher turnover becomes even more concerning. According to Espinoza et al. (2018), this is exacerbated for students in schools designated as low-income or urban as teacher turnover and attrition happen with more frequency at those locations (Hanushek et al., 2004; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Students, who are already experiencing setbacks that their more affluent counterparts do not, have to bear the burden of inconsistency in staffing.

This work started as an ambitious attempt to explore a possible solution to teacher turnover in urban and low-income schools. As a teacher who has witnessed the severity of this problem first-hand, it has become meaningful to me to see if there might be a way to alleviate teacher turnover and the numerous impacts on a school or educational system. Through research, it has become apparent that there is an abundance of work both past and current on that topic. In the attempt to mitigate the arguable crisis that is teacher shortage and attrition are numerous

hypotheses that range from the proactive by addressing teacher preparation programs and interview/ hiring practices (Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014) to the reactive by examining how schools can create more positive and fulfilling environments for teachers (Santoro, 2018). While this is a worthy cause, it seems that there are many minds working on this issue while another stakeholder in the equation goes with little notice or regard: students.

Some research has been conducted to expose the impact on students when there is high teacher turnover. Those findings take a more quantitative approach, exploring dips and correlations in student achievement, namely comparing test scores to high teacher turnover rates (Redding, 2017). This information has been important, but the answers did not match the faces that had driven me to this specific field as I explored further. Though the amount of stress placed on teachers in respect to the conversation of teacher turnover is concerning, it is more disheartening to think of the students who face the constant loss of those they are supposed to have relationships with. Some cohorts of students I have worked with in the past have had consistent, or chronic, teacher turnover issues. Working within a middle school, there are some students I have known who never had a consistent math teacher in three years of education. What drives my research is discovering what goes on in the mind of a child that has had such an educational experience. Is it similar to trauma, in that it is sustained stress over time (Novak, 2018)? Is it viewed as normal and nondisruptive? How does it impact their relationships with teachers? How does it impact such a child's perception of schooling in general and their role in a school?

It seems self-evident that student test scores drop if students do not have consistency in teachers (Redding & Henry, 2019); however, what is lacking is what this experience feels like for the individual child. At the root of this work is a concern around the child who experiences

such chronic turnover with their teachers, and to what extent that adverse and atypical experience has an impact on the student experience of school and relationships with teachers. Current research tracks the more readily measurable, such as gains or losses in test scores, but there seems to be a dearth of qualitative information around the emotional and psychological impacts on students who find themselves in chronic teacher turnover situations.

While the overwhelming majority of literature surrounding teacher turnover focuses on the school level or teacher level concerns, very little captures the student experience. As teaching and learning are heavily relational, it would seem like a missed opportunity to not understand what students experience when teachers leave. One study conducted by Id-Deen (2016) that attempts to expand on this very notion showcases the variety of perspectives students might hold about teacher turnover and depicts a wide range of emotional responses. Another study, specifically focusing on band students by Kloss (2013), builds on this notion that students develop a diverse spectrum of reactions to teacher turnover from vague indifference to abandoning school programs, such as music in the case of this particular research as a result. An individual student's experience and response to teacher turnover, especially chronic teacher turnover, warrant further pursuit in order to more fully understand the impact of this phenomenon on the school system.

### **My Story of Turnover**

The issue of teacher turnover is one that is very personal. As a teacher who has served in the same public school district for 14 years, I have experienced the organizational impact when teachers leave en masse and chronically. Especially when teacher turnover occurs within the school year, it can become burdensome to other staff to help provide resources to those who fill in the vacated position or to fill the role of substitute themselves. These classrooms where teachers



have left are revolving doors for substitutes and staff to be placeholders until someone else comes along. From a teacher's perspective, this sort of organizational dysfunction adds to an already stressful workload. However, the emotional response from students who experience this upset to their learning is even more concerning. Though this happens frequently, this experience of chronic teacher turnover is actually quite personal.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest positioning as a preliminary step in orienting any narrative work. To be able to truly appreciate the inquiry of narrative and restorying, “we as inquirers need to pay close attention to who we are in the inquiry and to understand that we, ourselves, are part of the storied landscapes we are studying” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 25). In order to understand the stories of those who have also experienced the impact of chronic teacher attrition, it is apropos to recognize how it has impacted my story of teaching.

I began teaching in the fall of 2008, and from that very first year, I witnessed what chronic teacher turnover can do to a school. Because this phenomenon has surrounded me from my first years in teaching, I developed a mindset that it is commonplace- that every school experiences high staff turnover rates. In fact, by my second and third years, it was more often than not treated with a level of joking indifference. “We’re three down, and it’s only September...it’s going to be another double-digit year”. My colleagues and I would keep track of who “didn’t make it” and would take bets on how many teachers would not be returning the following year. We would often compare this attrition to sailors abandoning a sinking ship. It was, and remains for many schools in the United States, a chronic problem with no clear answer or solution.

What became an even bigger joke was the aftermath of within-year turnover when the problem of how to fill vacant positions arose. In my district, and specifically in the schools I

have taught, some positions were unfillable for either long-term replacements or even daily subs because of the content to be taught, or the location of the school, or the age of the students. Because of this, teachers were asked to cover a class on their plan period, or emergency substitute, which was determined by an alphabetical rotation. Below is an example of an excerpt from a Master Agreement between a teachers union and one of the larger school districts in the Denver Metro area where this current study was conducted describing substitutes and class coverage:

The district shall continue to make every effort to furnish substitutes for absent teachers. Each teacher shall prepare and keep available written directions for a substitute. When a substitute is not available and a teacher provides coverage, that teacher shall be compensated at the rate of \$30 per hour. Compensation shall be paid on a pro-rata basis when teachers substitute for split class coverage. Each building shall design a plan to address the situation in which a classroom teacher or specialist is absent and a substitute is unavailable. The plan shall be published to staff members. The goal of the plan is to share the burden caused by the absence equitably and to maximize student instruction. The building's Leadership Team shall guide the development and annual review of the plan. The principal shall retain the final responsibility for assigning teachers when a substitute is unavailable. (Aurora Public Schools, n.d.)

It is an irritating practice on several levels. While some daily school schedules I have worked afforded me two planning periods in a day, I only had one at some locations. There were too many days to count where I would teach all day, save for my thirty-minute lunch. When a teacher has to cover for another teacher, sometimes there are lesson plans to follow, and

sometimes there are just teacher editions of a textbook. When a teacher has to emergency sub, they cover the class, and often it would be for a content they weren't highly qualified or familiar with. A teacher would be trying to teach a lesson and attempt to work with students who would be showcasing some of their worst behavior. In addition, that teacher would also have to figure out time outside of the duty day to grade their own students' work and plan for their own future lessons. It is a highly interruptive yet necessary practice when within-year turnover is an issue at a school. When it's a chronic situation, it becomes common practice to hide in the classroom or ignore the phone when the principal's secretary would call to get someone assigned to cover a class for the day.

While it might not be so terrible to have to do this every once in a while, at one school I worked at it became typical to have to do this once or twice a week. It's an exhausting strain on the entire school system. Not only would I experience what it is to be a teacher who stays and works with the aftermath of chronic teacher within-year turnover, but my story would also shift to becoming a teacher who would leave.

As a teacher who stayed, I have many examples covering for teachers who leave within the school year. One year, a teacher left in January whose position had to be filled by an endless cycle of substitutes and any available staff members. These students were left without a consistent teacher and had to endure the constant rotation of substitutes, administration, and other staff. After a month of that situation, and knowing some of the students in the class, I tried to sub in their classroom as much as I could, but when there was only one plan period in a day, it became nearly impossible to constantly give up and be able to be efficient for my assigned students. After a few weeks of covering a class period and recognizing more of the students in the class, I got to know a few of them in depth. I would ask them how they were doing with the

situation. An exasperated shrug; an irritated eye roll were standard replies. Even the most common and seemingly benign response of being used to teachers leaving is a sad statement in and of itself. They had become numb to this frustrating situation. On the further spectrum were students who were glad their teacher had left and felt a sense of pride and accomplishment in their perception that they had somehow caused the teacher to leave. However, the most emotional response was from a little girl who never participated in class or asked questions. She would sit quietly in her chair each lesson and look for all the world as if she wished to be invisible. One day, when she seemed particularly sad, I asked how she was doing. She replied in a voice soft and raspy from not being used: "Did the teacher leave because of me?". When I asked her why she would ever think that, she replied that so many of her teachers had left in the middle of the year, that it seemed, to her, that she must have something to do with it. I reassured her that her teachers had not left because of her, that they had left for other reasons, and tried to ease her worry. She went back to her morose and unresponsive state.

That particular situation lasted through the end of the year; those students never got a consistent math teacher to finish seventh grade with them.

The trend of frequent teacher turnover and abrupt departures continued. There is ample literature surrounding teacher turnover, especially chronic teacher turnover, that contends the lack of administrative support in causing teachers to leave schools (Santoro, 2018). This, at least in my perception, is what was occurring at my previous school. Teachers would leave because they did not feel supported professionally or from a classroom management standpoint. It was only a matter of time before the stress correlated with lack of administrator support forced me to make a difficult decision about staying or leaving. There was an intense clash in values and agendas between the administration and the high school teaching staff at a school where I

previously taught. Eventually, in an effort to mitigate concerns, the principal provided some ultimatums for teachers. Either I could stay and move out of the grade level I had taught for three years to one I had little to no experience in, as well as be inundated with administrator demands, or I could leave the school.

It is necessary to mention that I loved my school and my position. I had wanted to teach high school ever since my first year, and this was the school that hired me for a 9th-grade English position. I got to loop up to 10th grade with my 9th graders. Every school has its issues, but I had come to love the students and all of their idiosyncrasies. I was leading student council, and I was a class sponsor. It felt like I was connected to these students and this school community. Leaving would mean I would have to leave my students, whom I had taught as freshman, during their senior year of high school. These were students who would jokingly call me mom. These were students who would find their way into my classroom when they were supposed to be in another. These were students who would sneak in during lunchtime just to have an isolated space. These were students who would bring me stories of their joys and celebrations and their tears and despair. These were my kids.

But I also had my own family to think about, and the continual stress from working at that school site was exhausting; I barely had enough energy at the end of each school day to stay awake to attend to my own children. After much internal agony and debate, I decided to apply at a different school in the district, and when I got the position, I knew it was time to tell my students.

A group of girls whom I had advised over their high school years was the first students I told. For me, there is a heavy feeling that develops in my chest, like a leaden plate, when I have to face some sort of conflict. I carried that weight for weeks before I knew it was time to let them

know. We were talking in the hallway one day in May about their summer plans, and I knew the right thing to do was to tell them. There was a brief, heavy moment of dead silence after I informed them I would be moving to a new school. They started crying when they learned that I wouldn't be back next year. One girl stormed off, seemingly in anger. Most of them had questions: Why was I leaving them? Couldn't I stay to see them graduate? Who would be replacing me? Some questions I could answer, some I couldn't. I didn't reveal any of the conflicts with the administration, as my students would undoubtedly want to raise some kind of fight with them. I did my best to reassure them that it was a personal matter and I was doing something in the best interest of my two young sons. But I knew the news hurt; for them, it was another chapter in their stories of having teachers leave.

My experience of leaving is not singular. On her teaching blog, educator Angela Watson shares about deciding to quit her position within the school year and how her students reacted:

I thought they'd be devastated, but most of the kids barely blinked when I told them Friday would be my last day. Part of their nonchalance was because of their young age, but I realized with a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that they were so used to losing teachers and other important adults in their lives on just a moment's notice that this was par for the course. (Watson, 2012)

For students like Watson's, adults leaving is an unfortunate reality that most students have found ways to cope with, both productively and non-productively. While these stories live anecdotally in some studies (Id-Deen, 2016; Kloss, 2013), there is a distinct lack of how chronic within-year teacher turnover impacts students on a relational and emotional level.

### **Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study**

Achievement results may be measurable and highly valued by districts, state departments, federal agencies, and other stakeholders, but there are other methods of evaluating the impact of chronic teacher turnover. The in-depth reports by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) and the research conducted by Gibbons et al. (2021) as well as Ronfeldt et al. (2013) highlight that teacher turnover impacts student achievement scores negatively. Work conducted by Id-Deen (2016) and Kloss (2013) suggests a lack of research that showcases the other ways teacher attrition may impact students, and both call for further exploration from a student perspective. More specifically, there is a need to investigate the ways in which students may internalize scenarios when teachers leave their positions.

Schools which serve low-income students are especially pressed to find a sense of stability in their teaching staff, as research suggests that those students are more dependent on their teachers (Downey et al., 2008; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

The purpose of this research will be to explore, through narrative inquiry, the experiences students encounter concerning chronic teacher turnover. The questions which will guide that research inquiry, or research puzzle (Clandinin et al., 2016), are:

- Q1 How do students who have encountered chronic within-year teacher turnover describe their educational experiences?
- Q2 In what ways have those experiences influenced their beliefs about teacher-student relationships?

### **Methodology and Rationale**

When considering the highly nuanced practices of teaching and learning, especially when attempting to make observations of the relational component therein more closely, it is imperative to consider a methodology that can consider the multifaceted nature of such a

dynamic. Narrative inquiry can be described simply as “the study of experience understood narratively” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 15). Founded by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, this methodology aims to use a process of restorying to understand experiences better. Narrative inquiry lends itself to research work within schools, as it encourages a keen reflection on the spatial, temporal, and social contexts wherein such experiences occur and treats research as a highly relational act. Though this particular research focused on student experiences, various stakeholders from teachers, future and current, and administrators and district level personnel might benefit from this work to better understand the total weight of the problem of teacher turnover in schools.

This study aimed to explore the experiences of students who have been impacted by chronic within-year teacher turnover. Although this impact has been explored via more quantitative means, the focus has been on measurable outcomes such as standardized test scores in relation to the phenomena. The use of narrative inquiry allowed students to voice their experiences of what happens and what it feels like to be impacted by within-year teacher turnover on a chronic level. The co-creation of these narratives served dual purposes: 1) to provide insight into the student stories of what happens when teachers leave a classroom within the year and 2) to empower the voices of students who are often negatively impacted by the phenomena. The process of restorying as a part of narrative inquiry allowed for stories not only to be told and recorded but also to be processed (Daiute, 2014) in a manner that helps to understand the experience from a sense of before and after. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) write, “narratives are the form of representation that describes the human experience as it unfolds through time” (p. 40). Namely, having student participants consider theirs as an insightful



perspective into classroom relationships prior to a teacher leaving and then the aftermath of what follows allowed for another way to process this type of event or experience.

### **Key Terms**

Throughout this study, the key terms listed and defined below were used and require an understanding in order to delineate.

**Teacher Turnover.** This phenomenon is when “teachers leave their teaching positions each year through either attrition (departure from employment) or migration (moving to a different school)” (Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Robinson, 2018, p. 271) and can be either voluntary or involuntary.

**Teacher Attrition.** This form of teacher turnover refers to a teacher’s “departure from employment” (Robinson, 2018, p. 271) or specifically to “those who leave the occupation of teaching altogether” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 503).

**Teacher Migration.** Distinct from teacher attrition, this refers to the form of teacher turnover for “those who transfer or move to different teaching jobs in other schools” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 503).

**Annual Turnover.** This type of turnover is measured by “the loss of teachers from one year to the next” (Holme et al., 2018, p. 63).

**Within-Year Turnover.** This type of turnover is recognized as any time a teacher leaves a position within the school year, whether for another position, transfers to another school (within or outside of current district), or completely quits the teaching profession.

**Chronic Instability.** This term is a way of labeling schools that “are constantly experiencing churn, or schools with high rates of turnover each year for a certain band of years” (Holme et al., 2018, p. 64).

**High Turnover.** When including both attrition and migration as turnover, and when measuring turnover as “the number of teachers that didn’t return to a school in a year as a percentage of the total number of teachers at the school the prior year”, high turnover is a rate of 30% or more (Holme et al., 2018, p. 63-64).

**Low Turnover.** When including both attrition and migration as turnover, and when measuring turnover as “the number of teachers that didn’t return to a school in a year as a percentage of the total number of teachers at the school the prior year”, low turnover is a rate of 10% or less (Holme et al., 2018, p. 63-64).

### **Researcher Statement**

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggest that “narrative inquirers recognize that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in relationship with each other and that both parties will learn and change in the encounter” (p. 9). Given this, it was especially important to recognize my own positionality at the commencement of this research to reflect more accurately on the growth or changes I noticed through this narrative inquiry journey. As described previously, I am a teacher who has not only witnessed, from a collegial standpoint, the aftermath of chronic teacher turnover, both end of year and within year, but also as a teacher who has made the decision to leave a teaching position at both times of the school year. This first-hand account has been what attaches me so closely to the subject matter, and especially to the ability to have provided a platform to give voice to the students impacted by this phenomenon via narrative inquiry.

The creation of a space for these voices within this inquiry led to findings that have personal, social, and practical justifications (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Though each participant’s story revealed personal truths about chronic experiences of within-year teacher

turnover, examining for commonalities led to findings that will develop the extant literature that surrounds this topic. The first finding was that throughout all of the encounters there was no sense of neutrality; all participants felt either positively or negatively in each of their experiences. The next finding was that students all experienced both relational and academic challenges in light of their encounters of within-year teacher turnover. The final finding was that the context of the experience when teachers left mattered significantly to all of the student participants.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This chapter has provided an introduction or overview of this study, including the research questions, statement of the problem, and purpose. Chapter II serves as a review of pertinent literature relating to the significance of teacher turnover in relation to impacts on the school system. Within Chapter III, I elaborate on the methodology of this proposed research. It will include narrative inquiry as a qualitative research method, selection and description of participants and site, methods of data collection, analysis of data, and reflection on trustworthiness and validity. In Chapter IV, I share the narratives of the three selected participants. Chapter V elaborates on the analysis and restorying process for the collected narratives, including emergent patterns. In addition, Chapter V concludes the dissertation and is a space for reflection on the overall work, a chance to present conclusions, recommendations for future research, and implications for how these data will be used to address the ongoing issue of chronic teacher turnover.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

The issue of teacher turnover is a widely researched topic; it includes many components and moving parts that need to be understood in order to move forward with any kind of inquiry pertaining to the problem. The research questions that guided this narrative inquiry work are based on experiences and perceptions of the schooling system:

- Q1 How do students who have encountered chronic within-year teacher turnover describe their educational experiences?
- Q2 In what ways have those experiences influenced their beliefs about teacher-student relationships?

The former necessitated a working knowledge of teacher turnover and attrition, including different types, causes, and costs, to better interpret the phenomenon. The second question required an understanding of those teacher-student relationships as they were described across the literature. Understanding these elements facilitated being able to work with the three dimensions of narrative inquiry: temporality, space, and sociality (Clandinin et al., 2016).

In this literature review chapter, I reviewed the pertinent literature relating to teacher turnover, such as predominant causes, costs, and types. In addition, I explored the concept of teacher-student relationships through both an ethic of care, social-emotional learning, and attachment theory.

## **Organization of the Literature Review**

In order to design this study, I needed to be fully aware of the issue of teacher turnover, as well as the significance of teacher-student relationships. Through this research, I was able to more closely examine and recognize the elements of experiences related to chronic within-year teacher turnover students have had. I had many iterations of research phrasing that included “teacher turnover”, “costs of teacher turnover”, “experiences of teacher turnover and attrition” in order to develop this review of the literature. Although the sources utilized primarily included research journal articles and dissertations which have explored similar topics, I also found and read books that went more in-depth with unique topics. Though turnover and teacher-student relationships are broad topics, the search was refined to more accurately reflect the examination of chronic within-year teacher turnover and teacher-student relationships at the secondary level.

### **Teacher Turnover**

Like any other profession, teaching is subject to turnover as employees decide to quit, get promotions, move, or retire. While disruptive and inconvenient to all professions as turnover may be, as this pertains to teachers and students, turnover can prove crippling not only to a classroom full of students but also to entire schools and districts. This is a widely researched subject with many moving parts and factors to consider. It is thus best to preempt any discussion of teacher turnover with some crucial distinctions which have emerged within the literature. Teacher turnover is the umbrella term covering different types of teachers who leave. Those who have held teaching positions and leave the profession, voluntarily or involuntarily, contribute to teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001). Those who teach but decide to move from one school to another, or another district, contribute to what Ingersoll refers to as teacher migration.

Prior to Ingersoll's (2001) work, teacher turnover was primarily viewed as when teachers left the field entirely; current research has revealed that teachers who move from one school to another also play an important role in teacher turnover. Teacher turnover, which can be defined as the phenomenon of teachers leaving their position or a school either to move to another school or to quit the profession entirely, is a field mired in individual as well as organizational factors. As will be discussed, some factors are unique to educational systems and the experienced teachers have within those systems. There are some external factors, such as the larger economy. According to Aldeman et al. (2021), there is a "cyclical relationship between the private sector labor market and teacher attrition: when unemployment rates are low, teachers are more likely to leave the profession, and vice versa" (p. 1). Though that speaks to historical observations, it remains unclear how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the future economy and, in turn, teacher turnover rates. One report conducted between October 2019 and October 2020 found that as the economy in the United States was spiraling, teacher turnover had decreased (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021).

It should be noted that teacher migration may have impacts on an individual school or district but does not necessarily decrease the overall supply of teachers, which has been a primary concern of teacher turnover historically and why teacher migration has not always been studied to such a degree as teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001). Again, in light of the increased strain that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on all systems, especially schools, it remains unknown how the pressures and additional responsibilities will impact teacher attrition rates. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has been decreasing over the past decade and the impact of COVID-19 on schools and teachers will most certainly add to that trend.

The pressing issue of being able to staff classrooms with highly qualified teachers has been ongoing since the 1980s (Darling-Hammond, 1985) and has continued to be a concern. Teachers are leaving the profession at higher rates than ever before (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019) with the national attrition rate being 16% annually when including both teachers who leave the profession and leave a school site for another. This turnover accounts for 90% of the teacher shortage in the United States. While contemporary educational theory posits that much of that turnover is directly related to retirement, other research has concluded this is not the case (Ingersoll, 2001). Of current turnover rates, only  $\frac{1}{3}$  is attributable to retirements (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). These statistics may vary according to the region; it is still a sizable concern for the educational system if the trend of teacher shortage continues. Starr (2020), in his introduction for the PDK Poll, alludes to the notion that “we may have a real crisis on our hands if, as is likely, a large number of experienced teachers opt to not return to the classroom” (p. 3). If not carefully examined, schools face the task of not merely trying to find teachers of high quality but to find anyone willing to step into a role that has been both vilified and lauded to a sweeping degree in the past year alone in light of the global pandemic caused by COVID 19.

### **Contributing Factors**

Any policy to help with this issue worth pursuing would need to consider the factors which are most widely attributed to teacher turnover. While teacher turnover is higher in specific regions and in high poverty schools, it is essential to note that “the data show that inadequate support from school administration, student discipline problems, limited faculty input into school decision-making, and to a lesser extent, low salaries, are all associated with higher rates of turnover, after controlling for the characteristics of both teachers and schools” (Ingersoll, 2001,

p. 501). There are consistent factors leading to teacher turnover beyond common traits of teachers or students.

It is also important to note that this literature review was written during the time of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Teacher shortages and teacher turnover have been exacerbated in part by the situation. This review attempted to reveal what has contributed to teacher turnover historically and which factors might be unique to teaching during COVID-19 (Steiner & Woo, 2021; Zamarro et al., 2021).

In a policy brief created for Virginia's Teacher Retention Summit, Veronica Katz (2018) synthesizes the literature to delineate four main categories regarding causes for teacher attrition: 1) teacher attributes, 2) student attributes, 3) school attributes, and 4) compensation. Teacher attributes focus on the characteristics of teachers themselves, which have been commonly linked to non-retirement teacher turnover and include such insight as younger and older teachers are more likely to leave than their middle-aged or established counterparts (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2001). Furthermore, teachers who enter via alternative certification programs, such as Teach for America (TFA), tend to turnover at higher rates than those who graduated through traditional programs and certifications (Boyd et al., 2005; Kane et al., 2008). Student attributes highlights the trend that schools with higher percentages of students who are at-risk tend to have higher teacher turnover (Allensworth et al., 2009; Boyd et al., 2005; Katz, 2018), but further investigation reveals that is usually school and working conditions associated with schools such as those rather than students themselves that lead to attrition. "Teachers who leave high-poverty schools are not fleeing their students. Rather, they are fleeing the poor working conditions that make it difficult for them to teach and for their students to learn" (Simon & Johnson, 2015, p. 1). As Ingersoll (2001) further explains, "empirical research has sought to explain teacher turnover



as a function of the characteristics of individual teachers. Researchers have rarely focused on explaining teacher turnover as a function of schools” (p. 502-503). Despite the trend of teacher turnover being most pronounced in high-poverty schools, it is imperative to keep at the forefront of this concern that the data show teachers are leaving not because of their students but because of lack of support.

This is one condition that the COVID-19 global pandemic has magnified. Since March of 2020, teachers, students, and the entire educational system have adapted. In the past two years, teachers have had to tackle virtual and hybrid learning, social distancing, and mask ordinances on top of their typical workloads. Carver-Thomas et al. (2021) cite that the lack of support to address the considerations listed above and the basic requirements of being a teacher is negatively impacting the teacher workforce. Teachers have to do even more with less support and structure in place. While the pandemic is a brief moment in history, it has brought to light cracks in the school system, which, if they continue to go unchecked, could lead to historical teacher turnover rates (Starr, 2020).

The following two characteristics, school attributes and compensation, arguably hold the most promise for policy change concerning teacher turnover. Widely cited across the literature on this subject, working conditions constitute a significant factor in why teachers voluntarily leave the profession or an individual school. School attributes include physical and material resources such as the school building itself and safe conditions therein, including access to classroom materials and updated technology (Simon & Johnson, 2015). However, this has also been used as an umbrella term that encompasses administrators' received quality and support (Boyd et al., 2011). An inability to support teachers with professional development, student

discipline, or opportunities for teacher voice and agency within schools is a common factor contributing to teacher turnover.

Additionally, a perceived lack of compensation for teachers is marked as a critical reason why teachers, especially those with higher examination scores and qualifications, leave the profession entirely. When considering the level of education, experience, and additional factors that impact a teacher's earnings, teachers make 21.4% less than nonteaching peers (Allegretto & Mishel, 2019; García & Weiss, 2020a). There is some evidence to suggest that tying compensation to evaluation and performance has mixed results concerning success with teacher retention (James & Wyckoff, 2020). Especially in light of the stresses placed upon educators throughout the COVID 19 global pandemic, being under-compensated for work is a significant reason for leaving. According to Diliberti et al. (2021), 20 percent of teachers left the profession because their salaries did not warrant the risks and stress of teaching.

The concept of teachers leaving the profession is one mired in intersecting cause and effect (i.e., do teachers leave because achievement scores are low in a school, or are achievement scores low in a school because so many teachers leave it?). The dissatisfactions which lead to teacher turnover are further complicated by a notion raised by Santoro (2018) in her *book Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay*. While the phenomenon known as *burnout* might be widely recognized, or the idea that some become too overwhelmed by the tasks of their jobs to continue, Santoro argues that teachers might be leaving the profession because of *demoralization*.

Undoubtedly, burnout is a problem that needs to be addressed, especially as the demands on teachers' time increase, their responsibilities expand, and the needs of students intensify. However, for many experienced educators, burnout does not

capture the *moral source* of their dissatisfaction. We need a new concept to more accurately recognize and address this distinct form of teacher distress that can lead to isolation, despair, transfer to other schools, and leave the profession entirely. This new concept is called demoralization. (Santoro, 2018, p. 43)

The premise of this book is that the distinction between burnout and demoralization lies in the moral center of the work rather than the intensity of the work itself. It is an essential delineation as, too often, teacher turnover is attributed to the former and is considered a teacher's problem or deficit (Ingersoll, 2001). The notion that teachers leave because they can no longer allow themselves to go against their conscience or what they believe to be best for students is important not only to the work of addressing teacher turnover and retention but also as an acknowledgment that teachers care deeply about their professional values and their students.

### **Costs of Teacher Turnover**

While it would be conjecture to anticipate what a teacher shortage looks like in the future, it was possible to look at current literature to examine the costs of teacher turnover from achievement and pecuniary standpoints and consider why teacher attrition matters. “High rates of teacher turnover are of concern not only because they may be an outcome indicating underlying problems in how well schools function, but also because they can be disruptive, in and of themselves, for the quality of school community and performance” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 505). Teacher turnover, encompassing fully whether it is end-of-year or within-year or if teachers leave the profession entirely or move to another school, has been correlated to reductions in student achievement for math and English Language Arts (ELA) (Boyd et al., 2005; Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). When teachers leave, students demonstrate said loss through scores on high-stakes testing; this issue is exacerbated when a school experiences chronic teacher turnover

over the course of years (Holme et al., 2018). These losses are stated to stem from two consequences of teacher turnover, “(1) changes in the composition of teaching effectiveness and (2) the disruptive effect on teachers who remain and their students” (James & Wyckoff, 2020, p. 1). This considerable problem is made worse for students who are considered at-risk or schools designated as low-performing (Watlington et al., 2010). Teacher turnover has costs in the form of achievement, but also monetarily.

Although it is difficult to figure out exactly how much teacher attrition costs, some estimates state it could be close to 4.9 billion a year between teachers who leave schools entirely and those who transfer or move to other schools (Watlington et al., 2010). According to another study conducted in Broward County School District in Florida, the cost of replacing a singular teacher is estimated to be \$12,652 (Watlington et al., 2010). Some projections state that a school district might spend an amount comparable to a teacher’s entire yearly salary in costs, especially when a teacher leaves within the school year (Synar, 2010). Even from a quantitative standpoint, teacher turnover costs are high and warrant further research into how this pervasive issue might be mitigated.

### **Benefits of Turnover**

Some literature suggests that teacher turnover can actually be a productive, if not a healthy, phenomenon for schools (Holme et al., 2018). Most research coalesces the benefits of teacher turnover from an organizational standpoint by reducing stagnancy or the idea that turnover helps remove underperforming teachers from schools (Marinell & Coca, 2013). As Dell’Angelo and Richardson (2019) elaborate in their work, “our aim is not to suggest that teachers should remain in classrooms at all costs or that teacher preparation programs can control for the varied circumstances that lead teachers to pursue other opportunities” (p. 175). Some

level of turnover is regarded as healthy. As unfortunate as it seems, not everyone who trains to be a teacher should remain in teaching. With the focus on hiring and retaining high-quality educators as a strategy toward increasing standardized test scores, one perceived benefit found in the literature of teacher turnover is that it works much in the way of Darwinism: it serves to weed out those teachers who might not actually be best suited to the classroom. This cause of turnover, whether voluntary or involuntary, speaks to the heavy focus on efficacy within the teaching profession and highlights the tremendous strain of teaching, which can only truly be appreciated and understood in practicum. Nonrenewals, which happen primarily at the end of the school year, typically occur after an evaluation period wherein the teacher's performance does not align with the criteria for teacher effectiveness (Redding, 2017). These involuntary departures are more common for younger teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

While there is some argument to be made for ensuring that teachers are in positions where they and their students can be successful, it becomes clear that the issue of teacher turnover, generally, is impacting schools negatively. This being the case, it becomes even more crucial to look more carefully at which teachers are typically leaving and which teachers are staying in positions.

### **Who Leaves and Who Stays**

Although it is difficult to assess the precise reasons any teacher leaves the position, there are some trends across the literature regarding characteristics of teachers that are more common amongst those who leave. Age plays a vital role in teacher turnover. "Researchers have consistently found that younger teachers have very high rates of departure" (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 502). In their first few years of teaching, teachers are more likely to voluntarily leave (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Sutcher et al., 2016). This information has led to reflection on teacher preparation

programs to see what can be done to address current situations that allow these conditions to go unchecked.

Alternatively certified teachers are up to 25% more likely to leave, whereas other works show that teachers in alternate programs are more successful and effective (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). One study by Freedman and Appleman (2008) out of The University of California at Berkeley showed that a program developed explicitly toward preparing teachers to work in urban and linguistically diverse schools had some success in teacher retention compared to national percentages. Other programs tout success with teacher retention and student achievement when teacher candidates from specialized preparation programs are hired (Kane et al., 2008).

In reviewing the literature, categories of teachers who leave and who stay even in the midst of school environments that encourage teacher attrition have warranted some attention. Specific patterns emerge as to the type of teacher that is likely to leave. Researchers have gone to lengths to prescribe various labels to the different types of teachers, such as Duncan-Andrade's (2007) concept of "Gangstas", "Wankstas", and "Ridas" to the more commonly referenced "Movers", "Stayers", and "Leavers" (Freedman & Appleman, 2008). Each of these categories looks at the reasons some teachers choose to stay in their positions, despite more challenging conditions, and the primary reasons why teachers leave. While the reasons which cause teachers to leave a position either within a year or at the end of a school year have been discussed above, the reasons teachers stay are overall more closely linked to teacher motivations generally but teacher-student relationships specifically.

## Teacher-Student Relationships

The literature on relationships in teaching is vast, and across all of it is the message that the bonds between teacher and student are important for various reasons. Roorda et al. (2011) clarify that teacher-student relationships (TSRs) are highly impactful upon not only students but also teachers and schools. The intention to develop good relationships has been correlated with better achievement scores (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Toste et al., 2014) and better results on a social and emotional level for both teachers and students (Al Nasser et al., 2014; Cooper & Minness, 2014). Social and emotional learning (SEL), which has gained footing in the educational system, is not a one-sided, student-facing only approach. Rooted in the holistic approaches of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Rudolf Steiner, SEL has grown through the work of James Comer (1980) and examines the connection between home and school lives (McConnell et al., 2020). A full implementation of SEL within a school system also honors the teachers as intrinsically important due to the highly relational nature of teaching social and emotional skills. Schonert-Reichl (2017) asserts that when teachers are dysregulated on a social and emotional level, their relationships with students are also negatively impacted. Echoing the ideas outlined previously, research shows that stress caused by lack of structure, support, or overexertion are significant contributors to teacher turnover and attrition (Barnes et al., 2007; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). From a social and emotional standpoint, strains on teachers are arguably strains on teacher-student relationships, which is at the heart of SEL and sound teaching (Martinsone & Vilcina, 2017). As The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2019) defines SEL, cultivating positive relationships is a key component to managing and understanding emotions. This awareness of the importance of the social and emotional aspects of the teaching and learning dynamic undergird any discussion of the relational component. The

time and energy put into developing good, or positive, relationships between teachers and students pay out in various dividends for all stakeholders.

One way to define this relationship between teachers and students is through an ethic of care. Within the scope of Nel Noddings' (2016) Care Ethics, the concept of care can be recognized as the transactional relationship between a caregiver and someone, or a group of people, who are being cared for. According to the Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy, it is defined as "grounded in an ontology of relatedness and spells out what it means to treat people morally" (Katz, 2014, p. 580). This theory clearly distinguishes between caring *about* someone or something and caring *for* someone or something. To care about another person or thing is to take a more passive stance; it is more of an acknowledgment. To care for another person or thing is to be active in the practice of care, attentive to needs, and engaged in dialogue or some form of reciprocal practice with the other. As Noddings states, "Caring-for requires the establishment of relation" (Public Voice Salon, 2018). Nel Noddings suggests that teachers often act as caregivers to create caring relationships between themselves and their students within care theory. Although she notes that caregiving relationships are not always equal, "both parties contribute to the establishment and maintenance of caring" (Noddings, 2012, p. 772). This relationship is very much a transactional cycle that needs to be maintained by both in the care relationship. As simple as that may seem, the concept of fulfilling needs is actually far more nuanced and complicated, even in the ideal circumstances for teachers and students. Trying to anticipate the needs of another requires paying attention and a suspension of self and judgment (Noddings, 2015). In addition, it requires time and continuity. Noddings even suggests that in an ideal school, teachers should loop or continue teaching from one grade to the next with their students to maintain a sense of continuity of relation and care.



The logical argument meant to be developed here is that relationships are beneficial for both teachers and students on many levels, and teachers act as caregivers, which requires energy and time to develop. If both of those are true, then the issue of teacher turnover, especially chronic turnover, or chronic within-year turnover, becomes an increasingly worrisome issue. “Repeated turnover thwarts the kind of continuity needed to build sustained, trustful relationships among teachers, students, and families” (Simon & Johnson, 2015, p. 5). When students experience high levels of turnover, the literature suggests their learning is negatively impacted via test scores and suggests that their perceptions of schools and teachers specifically may be more damaging.

### **Attachment Theory**

Discussions of SEL open up discussions of teacher-student relationships beyond the academic to the benefits of the dynamic on a social and emotional level. Care ethics focuses most closely on the relational aspect between caregiver and cared-for. Building on both concepts, Attachment Theory explains how the formation of attachment bonds impacts individuals from early developmental stages. John Bowlby (1969) first developed attachment theory in light of his work within a school for delinquent boys and hypothesized a link between delinquent behaviors and problematic childhoods. “Attachment theory describes the significant experiences of the infant from birth in the context of a relationship with a significant other” (Geddes, 2017, p. 38). Primarily, attention is given to attachment theory when trying to understand how children form bonds with their parents or primary caregiver from infancy. Typically children demonstrate one of four types of attachment: secure, insecure/ avoidant, insecure/ resistant, and insecure/ disorganized-disoriented (Ainsworth, 1978). These various types of attachment may manifest in different behaviors and capabilities when the child has to be away from the primary caregiver,

such as attending school. According to the work of Bergin and Bergin (2009), “security of attachment predicts academic achievements” (p.145), which is why attachment theory has typically been an area of concern for educators. Like much of educational psychology, understanding attachment theory can prove invaluable in understanding individual students and their academic needs, but also the ways in which a student may relate to other adults in their lives, such as teachers. “Children’s previous relational models with adults may guide their interactions with teachers” (Sabol & Pianta, 2012, p. 214). Rose and Gilbert (2017) explain the notion of Attachment Aware Schools (AAS), founded on the notion that educators should be acutely aware of student attachment types and have resources and strategies to work with the various attachment styles to better understand help with individual academic needs. Robert Pianta and Michael Steinberg (1992) found that teacher awareness of student attachment types is especially important in the primary grades for academics and cultivating teacher-child relationships.

While the parent or direct caregiver is typically considered a child’s primary source of attachment, there is an argument to be made for other adults, such as teachers, as being a *secondary attachment figure* for students (Rose & Gilbert, 2017). The work conducted by Koomen and Hoeksma (2003) reveals kindergarteners utilizing their teachers as a secure base and haven, similar to the ways in which infants return to their mothers. Furthermore, the literature supports that there are clear parallels between the parent-child relationship and the teacher-child relationship (Howes & Ritchie, 1999). The results from one study examining teacher-student attachment found that the attachment students form with their teacher impacts student attitudes toward school and learning (Krstić, 2015). As Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) earlier elucidated, children's interactions and relationships with adults and their peers

drive their learning. Though the literature around student attachment to teachers has been primarily studied in early childhood (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Myers & Pianta, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2020), it can be argued that older, secondary students also potentially form attachment bonds with their teacher, and said relationships can be instrumental not only to academic needs but also feelings and perceptions about schooling.

As previously mentioned, there are not only numerous reasons for which teachers leave their positions but also costs associated with the phenomenon. One cost that cannot be overlooked is what happens to students when the attachment created vis a vis the teacher-student relationship is chronically disrupted. Through this review of literature, I have provided an overview of teacher turnover and attrition and more specific theories that guide this research, including care ethic and attachment theory. This study allowed for a voice that has not been as present in the literature, the student voice, to find a space to create narratives surrounding chronic within-year teacher turnover. The means of doing so, through understanding these experiences with stories and the act of restorying, are described in the following chapter that elaborates on the particular use of narrative inquiry as the methodology.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Although there are many ways to record experiences, both quantitatively and qualitatively, none can be said to as robustly capture stories as well as narrative inquiry allows. Indeed, even the notion of capturing stories may be the wrong language, as narrative inquiry is an interactive process of re-experiencing and restorying experiences (Clandinin et al., 2016). By utilizing this particular methodology, I engaged in dialogue and thoughtful reflection with students about the experiences surrounding the phenomenon of teacher turnover. The purpose of this study was to co-create narratives alongside students who have experienced within-year teacher turnover chronically.

This chapter is organized by first explaining narrative inquiry, then elaborating on the rationale that will support this methodology as most appropriate to answer the research questions, and then exploring the research context that provides a sense of justification. The bulk of this chapter includes the methodology of the study, including participants, data collection, and analysis. Finally, this chapter concludes with thoughts pertinent to trustworthiness, credibility, limitations, and conclusions.

#### **Narrative Inquiry**

Though comparatively new, narrative inquiry has gained popularity as a methodology for educational research as well as the field of social science since 2000 (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Connelly and Clandinin are credited with establishing the conventions of narrative inquiry

as a methodology; their work has transformed the use of storytelling within research to the meticulous process of making stories and the art of restorying.

Distinct from narrative analysis, narrative inquiry is a “study of experience as story” and can be used to capture experiences as well as participant reflection (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 375). Polkinghorne (1996) differentiates the two by distinguishing narrative inquiry as “studies whose data consist of actions, events, and happenings, but whose analysis produces stories” (p.6). Daiute (2014) further situates narrative as a social process, and the context as “an ecology--a system of setting, institutions, physical environments, formal and informal social relations, and events” (p. 4) and “are a dynamic means for relating to others and for problem-solving” (p. 6). Narratives are not only a retelling of an experience but a way for participants and researchers to interact with their own understanding and positionality of the context (Daiute, 2014). Some examples of various contexts could include the familial, cultural, social, or institutional (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) As this research seeks answers to questions around a particular event that occurs within a social and institutional context, the use of stories and narrative inquiry can allow participants, as well as myself as a researcher, a means of reflection and introspection. Such reflection would not only be for us as individuals but how these stories might belong to an understanding of the larger context (Creswell, 2012). “Stories, in the current idiom, are a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experiences of the world are made personally meaningful” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 375). The use of narrative inquiry as well as the general nature of this study will be guided by the need for participants to find their voice and stance through reflection and inquiry into the nature of chronic within-year teacher turnover.

In order to more fully contextualize experiences and how to study, analyze, and restory them, it is also essential to acknowledge the ways in which John Dewey's work around experience has undergirded narrative inquiry. Dewey's (1963) theory of experience, in which he names *interaction* and *continuity* as two criteria for experience, are intrinsically linked to the use of dimensions of temporality, space, and sociality (Clandinin et al., 2016) within narrative inquiry. The former, interaction, refers to the notion that people live in a series of situations and interactions between people and the spaces around them. The latter, continuity, is rooted in the idea that an experience is connected to past experiences as well as present and future ones (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). An experience, and a narrative about said experience, is not merely a snapshot of time. This is what sets narrative inquiry apart from other methodologies. It is not the mere reporting of an incident or a story or the use of a story as a data point, but rather it is the ways in which stories are reconstructed and the analysis therein to reveal the experience as a multifaceted and layered construct of not only events, but who participants were, are, and might be as people.

### **Rationale for Methodology**

Throughout the literature review, the argument that developed was a need to examine the massively turbulent issue of teacher turnover via a largely unnoticed perspective: the student experience. While the impact of teacher turnover has been explored quantitatively (Redding, 2017), there remains a dearth of research pertaining to less measurable impacts of the phenomenon, such as what it means to experience it through students' eyes. As more clearly stated by Creswell and Poth (2016), "we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants of the study" (p. 45). To honor the more

individual voices of students, this work necessitated a qualitative approach and, as will be explained, a narrative inquiry methodology.

Because teacher turnover, even chronic within-year turnover, is unfortunately so common, it would be difficult to define a bounded case (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although many qualitative methods exist to provide insight into teacher turnover, none fit the overall conceptual framework and the research questions themselves and narrative inquiry. A case study would allow for in-depth exploration but would not be appropriate. Ethnography would be a useful methodology if the research questions focused on a more specific, or yet again, more clearly defined population of students impacted by the phenomenon. Finally, grounded theory would be best if the purpose of the work were to ascertain a theory related to the research. In order to develop a robust theory, the stakeholders, teachers, and students would most likely need to be considered as participants. As this work will be concerned most specifically with the student perspective, one methodology stands out to provide the means for understanding more fully these experiences: narrative inquiry.

The use of narrative inquiry was especially apropos considering the focus on students as the ones with experiences and for myself as a researcher who listened to their stories and brought my own experiences to the inquiry process. As Johnson and Christensen (2020) point out, “researchers also engage in narrative inquiry into their own lived and told stories as part of the process of coming alongside participants” (p. 406). As a teacher carrying out this research, the method of narrative inquiry allowed for a transactional process and collaboration that allowed the ability to see into the mental processes of students. As Mishler (1995) states, “We, too, are storytellers and through our concepts and methods—our research strategies, data samples,

transcription procedures, specifications of narrative units and structures, and interpretive perspectives—we construct the story and its meaning” (p.117).

From an ethical standpoint, this benefit of narrative inquiry is often described by its transactional nature, a suspension of judgment (Hansen, 2007; Noddings, 2015) which allows for a space free from critique or criticism. A key component of narrative inquiry is the welcoming of subjectivity within the restorying process, and thus, said suspension of judgment becomes crucial. Cultivating a relationship between researcher and participants was necessary to ensure that transaction space could exist throughout the study. Speaking as a teacher who has witnessed how students experience within-year turnover and as a teacher who has had to leave her teaching position both at the end of the year and within the year, I have had the positionality which helped draw out details and aspects of this phenomenon.

Especially positioned as a teacher, knowing the school system and ecology of the location was crucial for working alongside participants and conducting ethical research. “When researchers imagine the possible range of interacting factors facing potential participants--such as expectations and taboos--the research design can be all the more sensitive to what participants might share, or not, in relation to the questions of interest (Daiute, 2014, p. 6). Being a teacher and researcher who is not only familiar with the system which causes teachers to leave, but also having experienced firsthand the manner in which some students have reacted, helped in the ethical formation of questions to ask participants but also in the selection of such student participants who would be comfortable in engaging in the narrative process.

### **Research Context**

Noticing a lack of attention to the issue of chronic within-year teacher turnover and how it impacts students on a personal level drove the initial justification for this work. As already



established within the literature review, teacher turnover is costly for the school system, both in terms of money and resources. In addition, it has been demonstrated the importance of teacher-student relationships on the well-being of student experiences in school. While both of these constructs exist, little research has been conducted exploring how teacher-student relationships are impacted by teacher turnover or how students experience chronic within-year teacher turnover.

Beyond general purposes of justification is the need to justify this inquiry with various lenses toward a significant purpose of what Clandinin et al. (2016) refer to as the *so what* and *who cares*. “These questions draw us toward the need to justify our narrative inquiries in three ways: the personal, the practical, and social/ theoretical justifications” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 29). I have earlier referenced the personal lens as illustrated in earlier positioning of my own experiences connected to teacher turnover. This lens was also explored through the personal aspect of each participants’ experience of chronic within-year teacher turnover. In order to broaden the scope of this work, or the practical justification, it was necessary to consider how other consumers, such as teachers, administrators, and school stakeholders, might use the information from this study to inform their work and their vision for schools. As teacher turnover and teacher shortages are a significant problem, as established in the review of the literature and especially in light of the COVID-19 global pandemic, viewing the stories told through this study through their practical application, whether that be through the mere sharing and revealing of these stories or through more pointed professional development around teacher turnover, is crucial in justifying this work. Finally, utilizing the lens of the social/theoretical required turning back to the work of Nel Noddings care theory and Attachment Theory to build on the knowledge base of teacher-student relationships in schools. As this is a growing field with an abundance of

research surrounding it, the addition of this study, with the focus on the cultivation of student voices and revelation of their experiences, will add considerably to this popular field of study.

### **Participants**

Glesne (2016) asserts that selecting participants for qualitative research is not as much concerned with populations large enough for meaningful random sampling or to make generalizations. “A researcher cannot include every possible relevant stakeholder, but identifying some likely to have similar perspectives and some likely to have different perspectives on this issue is the most important criterion” (Daiute, 2014, p. 14). Furthermore, as Creswell (2012) recommends for research design, it was essential to find participants who were a good representative of the population.

The research questions that guided this particular work sought experiences of students impacted by chronic within-year teacher turnover. The impetus behind the research questions was to explore impact of any kind, positive or negative or none at all. However, due to the time-consuming nature of narrative inquiry, a selection of three students as participants was a number that was able to provide ample data to answer the research questions, but not too much to overwhelm a singular researcher (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, due to the heavily transactional and collaborative nature of narrative inquiry, limiting this work to a smaller group of participants was necessary.

Initially, the site that was going to be selected was going to be one in which there were high levels of chronic within-year teacher turnover. Holme et al. (2018) define high levels as 30% and chronic over the course of seven or more years. However, upon reflection of the purpose of this study and access to sites, the site selected was one housed in a district that had high levels of teacher turnover in general. The feeder schools, both middle and elementary, for

this particular site had high teacher turnover. This allowed for the ability to find students who had chronic (three or more) experiences of within-year turnover. In addition to meeting this criterion, the site is where I have worked for the past five years. Although the district does not keep official records of specific amounts of within-year turnover, having worked for the district and the school site has afforded me the information about various feeder schools and approximate understandings of within-year and end-of-year teacher turnover. Utilizing these informal means of information gathering helped to build an understanding of the context surrounding the experiences of teacher turnover, which might not have been available to a researcher without such a long-term connection to the district or site. In addition, selecting a site that I have personal knowledge of assisted in finding participants and scheduling interviews at the convenience of the participants. Furthermore, this ease of access was beneficial to understanding the site and students more holistically.

Having at least three instances allowed for multiple points of comparison within each student's experiences and across all the narratives when considering potential patterns. The research questions focused on experiences across a student's school career rather than at a singular school.

Furthermore, my personal knowledge of the district as a whole and the site specifically served helpful in helping to restory experiences through the temporal, spatial, and social dimensions (Clandinin et al., 2016). Having had a working knowledge of the district's history and having had an awareness of the ecology of many sites therein provided ample background context for site selection. It also allowed for the entry point to access participants. Utilizing professional relationships and my connection to student groups, I used snowballing to find participants who met the following criteria: 1) Juniors or Seniors in high school and 2) have three

or more experiences of within-year teacher turnover throughout their school history. Sometimes those experiences may have occurred over several years or within a singular year. Each instance of teachers leaving within-year had so many variables, so having a participant who had experienced this phenomenon even within a singular year provided invaluable information. The former consideration allowed the inclusion of participants who could speak with more mature insight into the impact of chronic teacher turnover on their perceptions. The latter ensured that the participants could provide multiple examples of chronic teacher turnover. Having at least three instances allowed for multiple points of comparison within each student's experiences and across all the narratives when considering potential patterns. The research questions focused on experiences across a student's school career rather than at a singular school.

In the end, three participants were selected based on the following process. Concerning recruitment, I chose to utilize a resource and access point to students who could speak specifically about relationships. The activity I sponsor at the school site is Link Crew, which was appropriate for the study as these were students who were not only leaders in the school but also had a strong awareness of relationships between students and their school as well as students and teachers. As part of becoming a Link Crew Leader, they received ongoing training on being more relationship-aware and cultivating connections from students, specifically freshmen, to their school and their teachers. I reached out to these students through email using their district-created and maintained email accounts to let them know the study's purpose, design, and research questions and have them contact me directly if they were willing to participate. Using the criteria stated above, I was initially hoping to find a pool of students who would be willing to participate, based on the understanding of the district as one which had high teacher turnover rates across elementary, middle, and high school levels. However, I did not have any potential

participants reach out to me after this initial step, so I expanded the selection process. I expanded the pool to all Juniors and Seniors by emailing 11th and 12th-grade teachers. I conveyed the information about the study and asked teachers to communicate, either in-class, email, or posting on their classroom sites, how to contact me if students were interested.

It should be noted that the disruption caused to education and typical school systems by the COVID 19 virus, so these instances of within-year teacher turnover were sought outside of the 2020/2021 school year as a means of selection for participants. That particular school year was fraught with novel challenges for school systems in general and, for this selected site, required the formation of teaching practices and relationships not typical to schools. For example, the site selected utilized 100% virtual learning during the 2020/2021 school year for the first semester and a hybrid model for the second semester. Instruction and teacher-student relationships would have functioned very differently, and thus, any instance of within-year turnover during that school year was not considered or discussed for the purposes of this study. Once I had students who met the criteria mentioned above, I attended to the consent and assent procedures. As these students were all minors, extra steps and provisions were taken to ensure that their parents/guardians could be informed about that work and that extra care would be taken to minimize any of the potential risks to them, even if it was low to none. First, informed consent letters were distributed and explained to the parents/ guardians through email in light of COVID guidelines, and letters of assent were distributed and explained to the students in person and individually. This explanation included that I wished to collect data relating to the research questions, that participation was voluntary, and that there were no consequences for refusing to participate. Next, I discussed the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and the outline of what participants would be asked to do. Then, following the format provided on the

informed consent forms for this study, the potential participants were informed of the risks and benefits of the study and the lengths to which I would go to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. I then stressed again that participation was voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences for non-participation. Finally, the possible participants were informed of how they could withdraw consent should they choose to. As the participants were minors, special care was taken to make sure they felt comfortable with all aspects of their role in the study.

Three participants, all Juniors, were consented and assented, and interviews were scheduled individually. The first participant was John, and he was a Junior who learned about the study within his concurrent enrollment English class. John had spent the first part of his school career in Florida public schools, then moved to Colorado in the 7th grade. Sterling was the second participant and was also a Junior. She was a member of Link Crew and first heard about the study there, then heard it again in her AP Language class. She has spent the entirety of her school career in the same school district. The final participant to enroll was Harris; he was the only Senior. He had always lived in Colorado but attended schools in various districts across his school career. I knew two of these participants either as former students or through my work with Link Crew, and this knowledge was insightful for the narrative work together.

Creswell and Poth (2016) allude to the importance of access to information and materials when conducting qualitative research. This, paired with the highly collaborative nature of narrative inquiry, necessitated the cultivation of a trusting relationship within the work; inasmuch relationships take time and focus, it was necessary to keep this study to a smaller number of participants. With all of this in mind, three participants were selected to provide interviews and collaborate on the restorying process based on the previously outlined criteria.

In addition to three student, I was acutely aware of my positionality as a teacher and a researcher who would be working alongside these participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the time of writing this dissertation and conducting this study, I was going through the process of being a teacher who left within the school year. In writing about this phenomenon, I was struck with the ways in which I stayed with students and the transition into leaving them as their teacher. This perspective, woven or braided with the experiences of students who have chronic experience with this, provided not only more robust data to understand the phenomenon but was also pertinent in the data analysis as it moved from the personal to the practical justification for the work (Clandinin et al., 2016). This also created a sense of synergy between myself as researcher and student participants, which was imperative for this work.

Through the course of narrative inquiry in general, it is crucial for the researcher and participants to work closely alongside each other and to gather a significant amount of information about each other. This work must be done ethically in all research, especially with human participants. Due to the fact that I worked with minors, the minimization of risks to them was of paramount importance. Because of this, in order to conduct research in an ethical manner, it was imperative to maintain the privacy of participants. In order to assure confidentiality, the participants were given self-selected pseudonyms during the narrative process, as well as any school sites or districts that were named during the interviews. From an ethical standpoint, anonymity was crucial to ensuring that participants were free from potential risks that were associated with research. Little to no risks existed for participants in this study. In addition to this protocol, I sought approval through the university's review board and through the district where the research occurred, which required obtaining permission from the principal.

As Clandinin et al. (2016) suggest that a *living with* and *living alongside* participants means becoming engrossed in their lives and environments, and since the nature of the research questions were concerned with situations originating in schools, interviews were conducted at the school site selected. Furthermore, as this work focused on teacher turnover and stories of staying and leaving, special care was taken with participants in collaborating to restory the work, check-ins after the interviews were completed, and follow-ups to ensure their experiences within the narrative inquiry relationship were well supported.

Communicating with school counselors to ensure access to additional help and resources was done prior to interviews with participants. The counseling staff was not given names of participants, but an email was sent which conveyed the overall purpose and context of the work, recruitment procedures, and interview questions. I included that participants would be made aware of the opportunity to reach out to their counselor if there were any emotional discomfort from sharing their experiences. None of the participants disclosed to me needing this additional measure throughout the study.

As a final note on ethics and anonymity, the names of teachers and sites involved were also changed to ensure that participants' confidentiality was maintained and the stories of teachers who had left.

### **Data Collection and Research Texts**

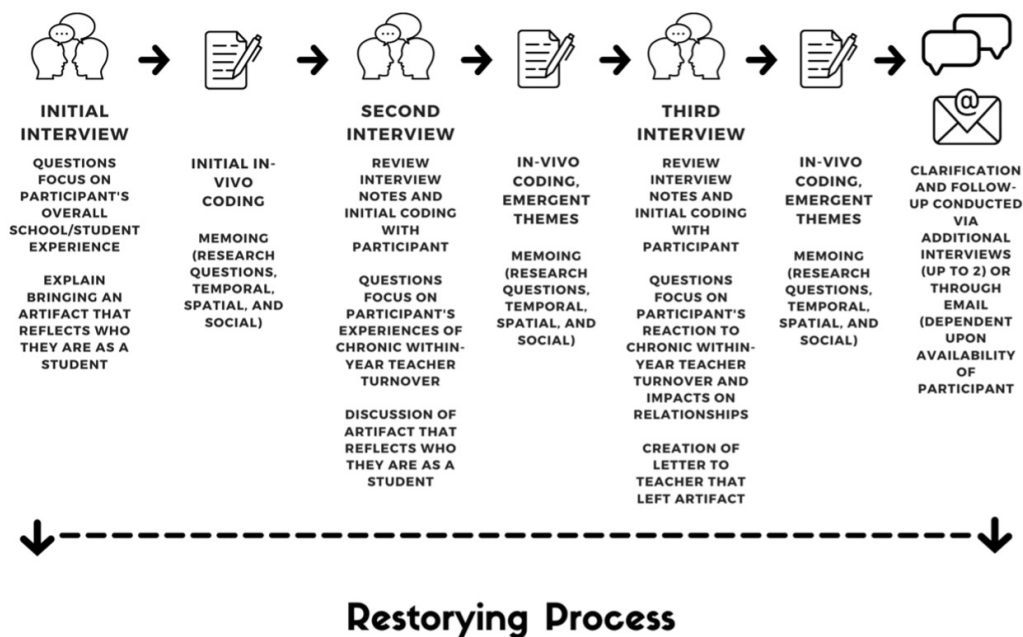
Narrative inquiry is about finding the truth in a story, not about looking at a story to find a truth. Because of this, a combination of semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. A practice interview series was conducted to determine interview questions and organization to better connect to the proposed research questions. Through the practice interview session, I was able to order questions that would help to understand the participant as a student



holistically, then move to experiences of within-year teacher turnover, and then move to an understanding of teacher-student relationships in the context of having these experiences. The practice interview built an understanding of how critical it was to position these students within their own sense of being a student. Furthermore, that understanding led to questions about within-year turnover and teacher-student relationships, but it also helped provide a reflection on how to order the questions to develop a sense of relationship and trust between participant and researcher.

Student participants were invited to three interviews, one that focused on the first research question about the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover. This first interview was used to establish a sense of voice within the interview series: “it is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner’s story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story.” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). That initial encounter focused on who the student was, as a person and as a student, and developed a sense of trust through sharing more general information. The second interview was spent collaborating on transcripts of the first interview for accuracy and interpretation and focused on the chronic experiences of teacher within-year turnover.

Figure 1

*Data Collection Process*

The third interview was quasi-observational, as participants were asked to discuss an artifact that they created, a letter to an individual teacher, or open letter to teachers who had left. Hatch (2002) defines *artifacts* as “objects that participants use in the everyday activity of the contexts under examination” (p. 117). Artifacts were also collected to help create a more robust narrative around who the participants were as people and students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants were asked to bring in a relevant artifact associated with their school experience, which could have included assignments (printed or online), pictures, teacher feedback, or social media posts related to this topic (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). While the individual artifacts will be explored later, they ranged from stuffed animals to awards/achievements.

The timeline in Table 1. includes a sense of when these data were collected and in what order, but also the pertinent focus for each important event.

**Table 1***Data Collection Timeline*

Encounter	Data Collected	Foci
Recruitment	None	Overview of research questions and intentions relayed to potential participants. Potential participants given consent and assent forms. Follow up with potential participants via email for scheduling interviews.
Initial Interview	-Field notes -Interview	Introduction to the student participant. Review of support resources.
Second Interview	-Field notes -Interview -Participant selected artifact	Collaborative time to reflect on previous interview and transcripts. Experience(s) of within-year teacher turnover (before and after teachers left) Reflection on artifacts. Review of support resources.
Third Interview	-Field notes -Interview -Participant created letter to teacher(s)	Collaborative time to reflect on previous interview and transcripts. Experience(s) of within-year teacher turnover (before and after teachers left) Reflection on artifacts. Review of support resources.

Narrative inquiry, but also care theory, stresses a sense of transaction. Especially when working with students and children, it was important to be attentive and present during interviews, seek clarity, and paraphrase/ summarize information to ensure that the experience unfolded in a manner that did not pose a risk to the participants. In this sense, participants had access to the transcribed interviews so they could elaborate on their own stories and provide additional notes as the restorying process happened. The collaboration was necessary so that we, the participant and I, could experience the experience together and so that their voices were

carried out not only in the words being said but also in how those words were interpreted for meaning.

From the beginning to the end of data collection for this study, care was taken to ensure that these student participants felt comfortable and empowered in what they were sharing and how they felt and reacted to this process. Not only were students reminded of their ability to skip questions or pass on sharing if something were uncomfortable, but also of the additional resources of counselors. To my knowledge, none of the participants needed to utilize that support based on conversations with each participant and based on conversations with the counselors. However, I did express that neither the participants nor the counselors were required to tell me if anyone did utilize that resource. In the attempt to minimalize risk, I made it clear that should participants seek out a counselor to discuss any negative emotions about their experiences of within-year teacher turnover, it would in no way impact their participation in this study.

### **Field Texts**

Different forms of research might rely upon different definitions of field work or even define what the field is. To better understand the nature of this inquiry, defining the *field* as “the ongoing conversations with participants in which participants tell stories or the living alongside participants in a particular place or places” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p.409). For the purposes of this study, the primary data collected were the transcripts from interviews, field notes, letters created by participants which focus on teacher turnover, journals I kept during my experience of staying and leaving, and memos. The interviews were transcribed and shared with students so that they could also feel empowered to elaborate on points made throughout the interviews and consider how stories were taking shape. These transcripts served as powerful ways for their voices to manifest and reflect more deeply on their experiences. As Clandinin and

Connelly (2000) point out regarding field texts, “the positioning of field texts within the three dimensional space is complex as one locates field texts along the three dimensions”(p.117). More specifically, the ability to examine the temporal dimension as student participants reflected back on their experiences as far back as elementary school became a powerful reflective tool. In reviewing the transcripts, the participants had the ability to reexamine their experiences and would often pose the question “Is this what I actually experienced, or is this my current interpretation of past events?”. It allowed for what is more commonly seen in narrative inquiry as part of the *back and forth* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) necessary when exploring past experiences.

This level of reflection and honesty could not have been achieved without careful consideration of the interview space. Due to the nature of the inquiry, observations were not an appropriate means of data collection as the phenomenon of within-year teacher turnover cannot be planned for. That being said, it was crucial to utilize interviews as the primary data collection method. Although Clandinin and Connelly (2000) do acknowledge the level of inequity inherent to most interviews (i.e., the research is the one asking the set questions and the participant is the one answering), they also suggest the importance of purposeful planning of the interview conditions. As a researcher and a teacher at the school site, I paid careful attention to ways to provide a sense of equality in the dynamic. Measures were taken, such as constantly reminding them that they could choose not to answer a question if it made them uncomfortable, seeking their preference on interview location at the school site, or giving them a choice to respond out loud or through writing. All chose to interview in my classroom, which was furnished with comfortable chairs and natural lighting, in addition to comfort items like fidget toys, extra paper, or pencils for doodling or sketching. Each participant stated that having the ability to move

during the interviews made them feel more comfortable. Since interviews are a field text and crucial to gaining insight into participant experiences, being able to dismantle that level of inequality in some manner was beneficial to all parties.

Participants learned of my overall purposes for this work through my brief sharing of my own story, including the fact that I was a teacher who had left within the school year. It was appropriate at this point to acknowledge what Johnson and Christensen (2020) refer to as *being in the midst*: “when lives come together in an inquiry relationship, they find themselves in the midst of many midsts”(p.408). I needed to seek out an understanding of the three dimensions of where each participant was in time, place, and social position and share with them where I was. I shared with them that I was keeping a journal of that experience, knowing that it was important to keep track of the thoughts and moves I made. I did not go into detail or show them direct entries from this journal but found that this first way of connecting with participants helped them feel more at ease with this researcher/participant relationship and empowered them. They asked me questions about my choice to leave, which would turn back to more reflection and detail about their own experiences.

Each interview was structured based on set questions that had been developed in a practice interview session. Once each participant sent my options for scheduling their interview time, I responded back with an appointment reminder which included the questions they would be asked so that they could look at them in advance. During the interview, a Zoom meeting was started on my password-protected computer with the camera turned off. Participants were notified of this, and I asked them if it would be okay to record the interview. The use of the Zoom meeting was to obtain auto-generated audio transcripts of the interview for future reflection, coding, and restorying. For each interview, I also gave the participants a hard copy of

the questions, with enough space to write answers if they felt more comfortable or draw if they needed to fidget. I also had a copy of the questions where I took written notes during their interviews to keep track of salient ideas that arose.

As Clandinin et al. (2016) would remind: “with the relational ontology of narrative inquiry it is more appropriate to refer to co-composing of field texts than of composing field texts” (p.119). With this in mind, the first interview always ended with a chance for participants to add anything they thought my questions did not cover. The second and third interviews began with a brief summary of salient points from the previous interview, any initial coding that might have occurred, and any other clarifications. Participants were eager to make any corrections necessary or discuss those points for accuracy.

There were additional field texts that I composed more on my own; however, conversations with participants did impact the reflective nature of these texts. My notes of the interviews and the memos created, and my journal were kept in separate files from the transcripts of the interviews. After interviewing and gaining points of clarification from participants, I would revisit previous memos and notes and make sure to include these additions to relay more accurate accounts. For example, one participant corrected when I sought clarification around the grade he had an experience of within-year teacher turnover. He had first said it was 6th grade at a new school but then corrected to state it was in 4th grade at his elementary school. As the concepts of the spatial and temporal dimensions factored into my reflections when I had memoed about that experience, it became necessary to go back and revisit the differences therein. This example highlights the role of using the social dimension throughout the collection of these stories and the ongoing analysis. Creswell (2012) refers to the social dimension as *interaction* which refers to “...an individual’s feelings, hopes, reactions, and dispositions as

well as the social interaction to include other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view” (p. 509). Different grade levels often denote different developmental levels and heightened awareness of environments and contexts. Paying attention to these spaces within the stories was crucial for understanding what was happening not only within each story but around each as well.

After each interview was completed, I reviewed all field texts, starting with transcriptions, and used In-Vivo coding. Creswell (2012) suggests a three-part process for analyzing the data from narrative inquiry in order to craft a story with the participants. Stage one included conducting the interviews and transcribing, stage two included identifying key elements and coding for themes and characteristics, and stage three included sequencing the story based on codes and how the researcher has interpreted the story (Creswell, 2012). For this work, after each interview, the narratives were transcribed and initially analyzed with In Vivo coding to highlight pertinent themes that were developed (Saldaña, 2016). This was significant to the research as there was an emphasis on empowering the student voice and offsetting my hand as a researcher in speaking for students. Using their own language and elevating it helped with trustworthiness and ensured participants were empowered to share their narratives and the restorying process. The initial codes generated there were used subsequently on field notes and my journal for emergent themes. These were shared with participants at the start of the second and third interviews to ensure the co-composition of these texts and codes and accuracy. At the end of the final interview, I was even more intentional about seeking any additional information or details that the participant felt I might have missed or not asked about. I also gave each participant a means of following up with them: either another interview or communication via email. All choose for the follow-up to occur via email due to busy schedules.



The artifacts that participants brought or created during the study were also important field texts that created a bridge between the personal nature of these shared experiences and the social relevancy. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define artifacts as something that “marks a special memory in our time, a memory around which we construct stories” (p.114). The first artifact that the participant brought in or shared about was a symbol or representation of who they were as a student. It created a chance for connection by getting to know the participant as a person through the stories they had created around these artifacts and a sense of empowerment for the participant as a chance to choose what represents them. The other artifact was one they created; it was some kind of letter to a teacher, or teachers, who had left expressing something they wished to tell them. Letter is a broad term, as students were given agency to decide the medium of the letter. This followed Eisner’s idea of honoring multiple modes of representation rather than limiting to a conventional written letter. Thus it created an opportunity for further expression. One participant created a recording, another wrote a speech, and another composed a traditional letter. The contents of these field texts and their part in the overall narratives will be discussed in Chapter IV.

One of the participants expressed concern over *remembering correctly* at the onset of this work; he was afraid that he would not have much to say about experiences from long ago or that his memory would be faulty. In that sentiment is a fundamental that guided the co-composition of these field texts and echoes Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) assertion: “field texts allow for growth and change rather than fixing relations between fact and idea”(p.95). Creswell (2012) further alludes to the ethical concern of the concept of truth within narrative research, specifically that participants’ narratives might be subject to the influence of traumas, fear of reprisal, or faulty memory. Concerning traumas and fault memory, it was crucial for me as a

researcher to establish a strong connection with participants and a firm sense of non-judgmental collaboration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Noddings, 1984). The iterative process between sharing, coding, individual, and shared reflection allowed for a more fluid sense of movement from the temporal sense of present to past experiences. This layered reflection set the foundation for developing interim research texts or narratives.

### **Interim Research Texts**

One reason for limiting the number of participants in narrative inquiry is the time-consuming nature of collecting the field texts and the amount of data generated through interviews and other field texts. Once the interviews were complete and any follow-up questions had been answered, I began the process of moving from field texts to interim research texts or narratives. At this stage in the narrative inquiry process, I had to make myself more aware of my role not as a collector of stories but experiencing these experiences still alongside my participants. Because this transition is not straightforward or linear, this period was marked by a strong sense of reflection and acute awareness of the three dimensions of narrative inquiry. It became useful to utilize metaphors to interpret and analyze; one of the most common references in narrative inquiry is imagining threads and weaving (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). During this stage, I began to see the various threads emerging, binding with similar, and delineating from others. This stage also became a chance to begin the braiding process amongst all the texts, including my own.

The initial codes and emergent themes that had been checked and clarified by participants during interviews would become threads that would be used to answer the research questions of this work. These threads, once examined, would be fortified by their iteration across the field texts and as they started to shape into narratives. At this point, it was tempting to shape these

narratives more chronologically, but reflection through memoing and sharing with a colleague as a thought partner helped bring back the critical nature of the three dimensions of narrative inquiry: the temporal, the spatial, and the social. Without considering these dimensions, the initial threads were thin and brittle.

At this stage, Denzin's (1989, 2014) biographical approach was referenced as a means of not only looking at the strands and threads more critically with the three dimensions of narrative inquiry but also the ongoing questioning of how the threads were created and by and for whom. These threads and the initial narratives that were emerging had to be analyzed chronologically and with the research questions around the impact on each participant at the heart of the inquiry and interpretation. For example, John's experiences, if retold simply chronologically, would show encounters of within-year teacher turnover in his 2nd, 4th, and 6th grades. Should the narrative follow chronologically what occurs, or should it bear the import of the significance of these events and the impact it had on John's past self and his future reflective self? What should dictate how the threads were woven, natural sequencing, or significance? Bochner (2000) suggests: "to extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived" (p.270). As I reflected upon these threads and stories alongside participants, we agreed that the impact's significance was better understood and interpreted when considering a more critical biographic approach. While some stories, such as Harris', did hold the temporal and chronological as a binding force for the threads, the other two participants' narratives followed the former account.

This use of the research question as a means to initially weave the threads of these narratives served as an opportunity to reflect on whose voices were being heard in the interim field texts. The purpose of this study was to highlight and empower student voices which have

been largely unheard in the extant literature on teacher turnover. This impetus drove reflection upon the voice that carried through the emergent threads. As Denzin (2014) suggests, “language and speech do not mirror experience; rather, they create representations of experience” (p. 37). Especially working with minors who were also students, it was crucial to keep in mind a sense of restraint in not superimposing my conclusions over theirs. Narrative inquiry required the collaborative process of both participant and researcher diving for details and detailed description without pushing an agenda. “As researchers move from field texts and to co-composing or negotiating interim and final research texts, relational ethics become even more sharply defined, as each move must be carefully and respectfully negotiated” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 411). It was a tenuous process of seeking clarification and asking about details around these experiences without pushing too hard to make these experiences more or less impactful for the participants. I had to rely on the relationship cultivated through this project to keep negotiating that fine line while also keeping the interpretations made during the creation of interim field texts as 1) collaborative and 2) reflective as possible.

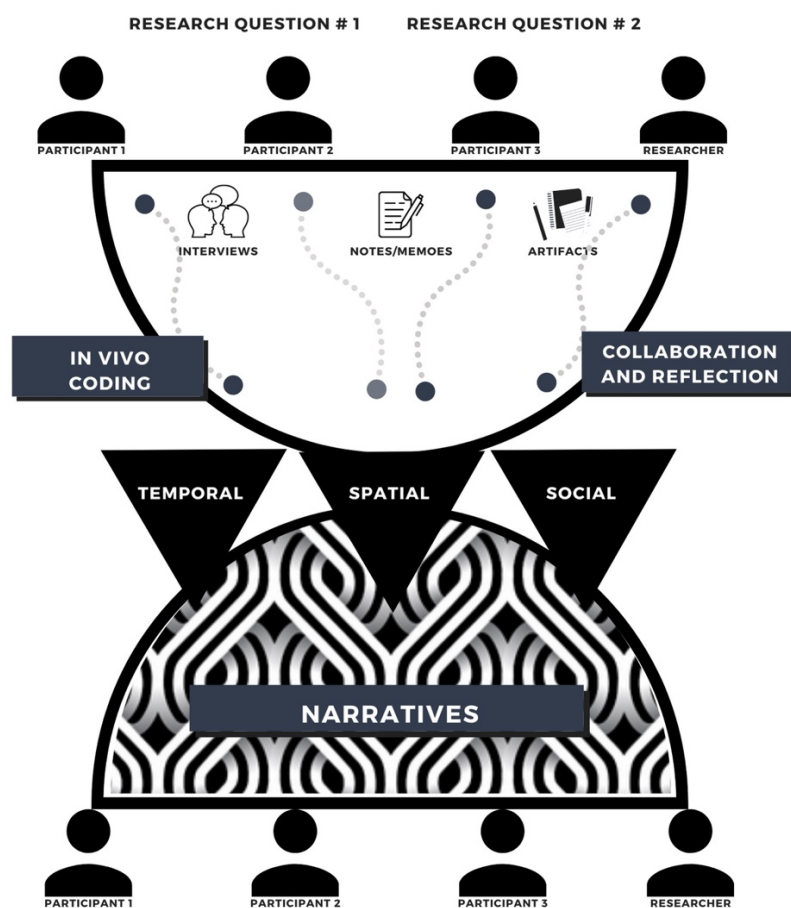
### **Final Research Texts**

What sets narrative inquiry apart from other qualitative methodologies is the use of stories, but even more so the meticulous analysis of shared stories through the restorying process. This process is often described as nonlinear, mainly due to the *back and forth* throughout data collection and analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As mentioned, there are numerous approaches to restorying, and for the purposes of this research, Denzin’s (1989) biographical approach was utilized in addition to the restorying process outlined by Clandinin et al. (2016), Creswell (2012), and Johnson and Christensen (2020). These approaches best allowed the ability to restory the narratives as episodes of leaving and staying of teachers within the larger structure

of these participants' overall relationships with teachers. Using these approaches also allowed my role as researcher and a teacher who has left within the school year to be braided alongside their stories and draw out points of comparison and contrast from the teacher's perspective to the student's perspective.

When it was time to move from the interpretations and analysis of the interim research texts to the final research texts, another tension was placed upon the collaboration. There was a slight shift in the relationship between the participants, individually, and myself. Not only was there a high focus on reflection and in valuing that the participant voice, the student voice, was accurately represented, but this stage also marked a shift in awareness that these stories would be shared. "When researchers move from the interim research texts to final research texts, both researchers and participants become acutely aware that texts will be visible to public audiences" (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 410). Some hesitations came through at this point, and it was an opportunity to remind these student participants of the ethical considerations, such as assigning pseudonyms to each of them, school sites mentioned, and teachers. Their identities would be protected. Narrative inquiry's focus on a relational ontology requires attention to these stories as personal for the participants involved and something that will have a public audience. However, I also suggested to anyone nervous about their story being singled out and identified some strategies from Johnson and Christensen (2020), such as fictionalizing and blurring times and places. Once participants reviewed drafts of the final narratives, this step proved unnecessary as they found that their identities could not be discovered. However, another consideration arose in the form of the research value of the narratives.

Figure 2

*Restorying Process*

At this point, there were many conversations between myself and participants that went back to the heart of narrative inquiry. There are no wrong or right stories, no wrong or right ways of remembering. The stories, the shared experiences, were what they were. Neither good nor bad. Two of the participants again expressed worry at the process of creating a final narrative and whether they had remembered enough or had been detailed enough in our collaborative reflection. One of the participants worried that they had not been able to do enough or that their experiences were not filled with action or excitement. It became a point to remind them that the stories shared and reflected upon are subject to time, space, and social nuances; the stories were

what they were. The point of using narrative inquiry for this research was not to generalize all students who had ever experienced within-year teacher turnover but to allow these experiences a place in the literature where the student voice could speak to the issue more holistically rather than through a student achievement lens.

Taking the threads of the emergent themes from the interim research texts, this became the stage to begin weaving, or braiding, more purposefully all of the texts to restory or create a more robust narrative. At this juncture, however, was another opportunity to reflect on the three dimensions of narrative inquiry and see if there was an opportunity to ground what was emerging in any of the established literature or if it were appropriate. Some questions that guided the work of this portion of the narrative inquiry were: 1) Does this echo the extant teacher voices around this issue? 2) Does this push back against the current research? 3) Does this fill in gaps from current research on when teachers leave within the year? Initial findings in the literature review were the voices of teachers who had left school for various reasons. Those stories were primarily shaped by a sense of contrast from staying and leaving, such as Craig's (2014) narrative inquiry which features a beginning teacher's career and her *stories to live by* and *stories to leave by*. The insight gained by reviewing this type of research helped remind me of the intersection of these stories: the variables that cause teachers to leave, those left behind, and the various reactions possible.

Reflecting on the current literature, as it was presented in the literature review, also added another layer to the final narratives. This, in conjunction with being a teacher who had left within-the year directly prior to the start of this study, allowed for a thread to be followed, which served more of a counterweight than a tension. To use another metaphor: it allowed both sides of the coin to be seen simultaneously. The braids that emerged, the ways in which the history of

teacher turnover, my own stories of turnover, and the unique narratives of each of the participants were woven together were one part of the overall tapestry. However, as it was being braided, it changed me as a researcher and teacher. The teacher voice and experience were established in the literature review and my reflection and journaling. Those stories could only be beginning points of any story about within-year teacher turnover; they could only give a glimpse of the habitual. A student's story, especially having experienced this phenomenon chronically, became the bridge for understanding what happened for those left behind. They completed the braid, even if narrative inquiry would encourage the idea that the story does not end when the research work concludes. Reflecting on what Creswell (2012) would call *continuity* or the temporal dimension (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) created the sense that these stories had intersecting beginnings, middles, and ends. The end of one teacher's position at a school was the start of one student's experiences of within-year turnover. These, in turn, made me reflect on how my own students might have felt my departure and how students and teachers would react to the results of this study. "For narrative inquirers, it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one's personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 122). Thus the personal, practical, and social justifications provided an additional layer to this work as each provided an opportunity to think about this inquiry through a different justification and how others might use these narratives in the future.

Trying to hold the very non-linear analysis of narrative inquiry became difficult as there were so many data points to consider. I found it necessary to use my affinity for the visual arts to assist in the analysis portion of this work. As narrative inquiry is a highly interpretive methodology (Josselson, 2006), it seemed apropos to utilize another means of interpretation. As



Kim (2016) suggests, data analysis is “an act of finding narrative meaning” (p.190). The act of using the arts to create meaning started almost by accident one evening as I poured over notes and listened to audio of interviews. I felt that I could not see the full picture of what participants were sharing. I did not want to leave the physical space I was in, lest I lose the focus I had. Instead, I picked up my supplies for watercolors and began to paint. As I choose the colors and filled my brushes, the threads of participant’s stories seemed to call like individual pigments on the page. The colors would swirl together in some ways, and remain distinct in others. There were moments of compliment and moments of contrast that echoed what I had been hearing in their stories. Over the course of this study, this form of visual memoing would turn into a series of paintings that captured the subject of sunrises and sunsets. The metaphor of this subject matter, as well as the overall nature of water coloring, became a means of representation of knowledge that I expand upon in the final chapter of this work.

### Figure 3

#### *Water Color Memo*



This concept of *impact* gained new significance throughout data collection and analysis. While the focus of this work was around teacher-student relationships, the stories that unfolded

could not but help to mention the other people at play in the equation. A common thread uniting these narratives was the impact that these scenarios of within-year teacher attrition had on these students' opinions of other students. Another common thread was the impact that these scenarios would have on future relationships with teachers that would result in both negative and positive outcomes. These threads were present across the participants' stories and my own reflection, and once woven together, formed the fabric of narratives that answer some questions around what happens to a system when a teacher leaves within the year.

### **Trustworthiness**

Validity in qualitative research, or what is better referred to as trustworthiness, is the accuracy of interpretations and includes thoughtful protocols embedded into the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) caution against applying the language of other methodologies and instead encourage a sense of *wakefulness* within narrative inquiry. This encouraged thoughtful attention to all aspects of the inquiry, especially analysis and interpretation. In order to ensure attend to validity or trustworthiness, this research included careful attention to credibility and interpretive or emic validity.

### **Interpretive Validity**

Interpretive or emic validity refers to the accuracy of interpreting the participants' perspectives. Member-checking, the iterative process that allows researchers to collaborate with participants, was used to assess if interpretations of what has been recorded in interviews or observations were accurate (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This aligned with narrative inquiry as narratives were developed in collaboration with participants.

This established a sense of interpretive *wakefulness* and that the participant's voices were present throughout data collection and analysis.

One other consideration for trustworthiness was researcher bias, or how a researcher might assert their authority or interpretation within the analysis. One question posed across any form of methodology but might be especially problematic: How can someone know if the stories created actually reflect what happened? While other methodologies have their answers, it becomes even more difficult for narrative inquiry as “the point of narrative research is to reveal the subjective experience of participants as they interpret the events and conditions of their everyday lives” (Coulter & Smith, 2009, p.578). Subjectivity is an acknowledged component of narrative inquiry, given that the stories collected are not intended to capture a proposed truth but rather reveal truths about the participants and larger contexts at play within the restorying. However, in an effort to ensure that the researcher's voice did not dominate the other data, there were specific methods that I employed within this research.

In order to offset an overpowering of the researcher's voice, one strategy used was memoing. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), memos are the prose or descriptions which elaborate on the coding process. Unlike member-checking, memoing was done by the researcher alone or as a form of communication with another researcher. Memoing was used daily throughout this research to reflect on developments made in interviews, during the member-checking process, through the quasi-observational artifact creation and analysis. For this research, memos were also shared with a collaborative partner, who was not involved as a researcher, to ensure that there was a balance of voices between the stories of all participants and how I analyzed and restoryed with them. Memoing also allowed me to track various themes that arose throughout the interviewing and coding processes. For this study, it was necessary to use

daily memoing to see how the experiences of chronic teacher turnover were unique experiences for each individual, but also the ways in which themes might overlap between stories. Visual memos, in the form of water colors, were also used to help process during analysis and served as a helpful tool to restory data from the interviews.

Utilizing the three dimensions, temporal, spatial, and social, was crucial during interpretation, analysis, and memoing. This was crucial for establishing threads within the vast amount of data generated through the combination of interviews and artifact analysis and the additional layer of continuous member-checking. The latter was the primary method of ensuring credibility, as it was central to the overall narrative inquiry design that allowed participants to validate their experiences through the collaborative check-ins.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study was the availability of participants. Although the entire Junior and Senior classes were invited to participate via invitations through their teachers or recruiting efforts through my sponsorship of Link Crew, very few students responded. Future research might look to ways to more clearly identify students who have experienced chronic within-year teacher turnover through other means than snowballing. Current school district records do not accurately keep track of this information, so identifying students Both Juniors and Seniors tend to be busy with other school-related business, and their schedules are hectic. While arguably less so, Juniors tend to keep tight and busy schedules as well. This is true of typical years in education, but the stresses and strains placed on the educational system by the COVID-19 global pandemic also lead to availability issues.

Another limitation of this work was to consider how COVID has changed school structure and perceptions about schooling. All participants expressed some kind of negative

response to how COVID had interrupted their school experience. It seemed to cast a bleak pallor over school as a whole, and all participants revealed some level of disdain for this interruption. Even though scenarios of teachers leaving within the 2020-2021 school year were not considered due to the unique nature of conditions caused by virtual and hybrid teaching, the impact of COVID on student perceptions of schooling could not be excluded from the temporal, spatial, and social dimensions. Future studies might examine the ways in which COVID has impacted student experiences of schooling.

The final limitation to this study has already been addressed in part: the nature of the data and the field texts. The analysis and findings were based on the subjective interpretation of the participants and myself as a researcher. Memories and experiences are subject to the temporal, spatial, and social dimensions, and reconstruction of these memories cannot be objectively recreated. This again speaks to the heart of narrative inquiry as a means to create stories that reflect a level of personal interpretation from the participants and myself. The stories we created about these experiences were as revealing about the phenomenon itself as it was about who we are as individuals.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher turnover in general and chronic within year teacher turnover more specifically are costing the educational system significantly and placing strains on teacher-student relationships. The purpose of this study was to empower the voices of students to share the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover on their experiences of school and teacher-student relationships. Having worked with this age range of students for so long, I learned a vast amount by viewing schooling through their eyes and hearing their own voices tell their stories instead of letting more quantitative data speak for them. It was my hope that the individual participants

would be able to interact with their experiences in new ways and that educators, including myself, would more fully appreciate the student perspective of what happens when teachers leave. Undoubtedly, the creation of the narratives presented in Chapter IV are examples of students telling their own stories and are opportunities to see the other side of this issue.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NARRATIVES

#### **Introduction**

This chapter houses the narratives for each of the three participants. Each student, John, Sterling, and Harris, has their own section that moves from a broad sense of who they are as a person and student, into the more specifics of their encounters of within-year teacher turnover. Rather than follow a strict chronological approach, the narratives are organized by the threads and tensions of their stories experienced in the restorying process. Each section concludes with the letter artifact that the participant created in the course of our work together.

It is also significant to note the impact COVID played during these stories. During the time of these interviews, mandates were in place at the site where the study took place. All participants and myself were required to wear masks while in proximity of one another to help mitigate the spread of COVID. Mentions of said masks are noted throughout the narratives.

The participants for this research were Juniors who had experienced at least three instances of within-year teacher turnover throughout their school history. Although Seniors were originally the primary focus of recruitment, none who were interested followed through on consent and assent forms and mostly cited lack of available time for declining participation. The participants who followed through with consent and assent protocols were a combination of students I had previously and one I had no prior interaction with. John was a Junior who had three teachers leave within the school year throughout his time in school. One occurrence in second grade, another in fourth grade, and another in sixth grade. Sterling was another Junior, a

former student, and a group member for a school activity that I sponsored. She had experienced within-year teacher turnover three times but shared a few end-of-the-year turnover experiences because she felt connections to those occurrences. Although she discussed those and how they related to her thoughts on teacher relationships, they were not considered part of her narratives about within-year turnover. Harris, the final participant, was also a former student. He had experienced teacher turnover three times and had the most recent experience to share as one of his teachers quit mere weeks before beginning this interview series. The chance to hear their stories of turnover, especially for those who were former students, was a chance to see more into who they were as people and students. These students were so much more than just their experiences with teacher turnover, and it became a part of the inquiry to see how these instances fit in with their overall sense of being a student.

### **John**

Unlike the other two student participants in this study, John was the only one with whom I did not have a previous connection as a former student. After hearing about it in his concurrent enrollment class from his teacher, John reached out to me about the study. His teacher, a close friend, would later share with me that John started sharing stories with his classmates about his teachers who had left after hearing about the focus of this work. It was one of the few times he had ever spoken out in class, so she knew that it must be meaningful for him. She had thus encouraged him to reach out to me through email for more information.

John's initial emails to me were courteous but short and to the point. He expressed concern about whether he would help or have enough information to share. Because his experiences mainly were from elementary school, he shared that he could not remember things correctly or with enough detail to be helpful. After assuring him that his stories, however he



remembered events, would be very helpful in learning about the student experience, he scheduled a time to interview. Upon meeting John in person for the first time, I saw that his inquiry and concern from the email echoed his personality. Timid was not the right word to capture John because once he began speaking, it was clear that he did not mind sharing his view and opinions on a variety of topics. What I originally referred to as shy, he corrected because “being shy implies that you want attention, and I want the opposite. He showed some nervousness signs; he needed something to play with throughout interviews to keep his hands busy. He kept his hands occupied with various fidget toys during one interview while responding to questions. During another, he would play with the leaves of a nearby plant while sharing his experiences. He seemed to exaggerate these movements whenever moments of tension came up in his story.

John was also the only participant who had attended schools in a different state. Previously living in Florida, John attended public schools in a small town on the east coast and then moved to Colorado during the 7th grade. Although he stated apparent differences between schools in Florida and Colorado, he said that the best word to describe or capture himself as a student would be immature:

I know that sounds wrong, but I don't mean that how most people mean that.

Because I definitely don't think of myself as behind. When I think of that word, it means someone who doesn't fit in with the rest of society. It's not a bad thing like how most people mean it. I did good in my classes, but I never fit in because I was actually a bit ahead. I wouldn't speak up or share out on purpose because I didn't have to. No one, not even teachers, could make me do that because I didn't want to; I wasn't comfortable with that. I wasn't going to do things...I'm not

going to do things just because other people tell me I should. That's what I mean by being immature, and I'm actually kind of proud of it.

Many of John's stories and experiences alluded to this notion of not wishing to conform but wanting to maintain his own way of going through school and life. As he stated in an interview, "You may have your own path, but I will have mine, even if it goes against the current". He had strong beliefs about doing things his own way. He repeated this when he shared about the artifact that represented him as a student. He did not want to bring it in, but he shared that the object was an old stuffed animal of Hobbes, the tiger from the comic *Calvin and Hobbes*. John said that most people in the comic overlook Hobbes because he is just there, but there is a lot of imagination and divergent thinking in how Hobbes acts. That was how John viewed himself, as someone who went unnoticed but noticed a lot himself. As he existed in the comics, Hobbes encouraged the path of looking at things more skeptically and participating in divergent ways.

In many of his descriptions of how school was for him generally, he implied that this kept him from establishing relationships with many teachers. Many of the teachers had expected him to act in a certain way throughout his life because he did well with learning and showed aptitude in many subjects. In fact, he was even invited to be a part of the school's gifted and talented program within elementary school. His father did not sign off on being a part of the program. Only kids in the gifted and talented program attended different, advanced classes at his elementary school. John's only choice was to remain in typical classes, and because he complied by doing the work, he was left alone to his own devices: neither leading classes nor disrupting them. According to John, his teachers always expected him to be more extroverted and participate more since concepts came so quickly to him. His reluctance to do so was rooted in his strong sense of going against expectations.

John believed in involving himself enough in school to get something out of it but did not feel the need to overexert himself with extracurriculars. He was a part of student leadership and was a role model for lower grades. His hands tapped more frequently when he shared about liking to speak more one-on-one with students in lower grades but not liking being expected to speak and share in front of larger groups. He stated, “I get that I understand school and do okay with it, but I’m not trying to be a spokesperson. Maybe a teacher thought I was a good role model because of my grades and because I didn’t get in trouble, but don’t make me speak to groups about it. Because I won’t”. He spoke about having friends that he could talk to, but not needing other people. He was involved in the Anime (Japanese Animation) club because some friends wanted him to join but pulled back his participation when the club became unorganized. He enjoyed the stories behind different Anime but did not like that his peers made their affinity for it so all-encompassing. “I don’t like being one of those people that are super eccentrically devoting their whole lives to anything. It’s [anime] enjoyable, but I’m not going to push it on everyone around me”. In our conversations, John often seemed to bring up his perceptions of the behaviors of others. When I mentioned it, he agreed and stated that being the quiet person often meant that he had more time to observe what other people were doing and how they acted. He was highly cognizant of other people. “Being the quiet kid, the kid that just focuses on their work and that’s it, you also observe a lot of the behaviors around you. Of adults and kids”.

John seemed to be aware of his own sense of comfort when working with others and was aware of his own interests and how they related. In sharing about other ways he was involved in school, he described his interest in costuming and design. He had attended a Renaissance Fair with his mother a few years ago, which first sparked his interest in period clothing. He had always appreciated the attention to detail of the stories in various video games he had played, but

after attending the Renaissance Fair, the idea of costuming sparked a new level of awareness of designing costumes. As a Junior, he was the head of costumes for both the Fall and Spring musicals. His excitement for this topic was palpable, lighting up his face even from behind the mask as he talked about some of the costumes he had created for different characters in different shows. This was the first time in the conversation when he displayed a strong emotional response for something related to school, as much of his conversation around classes and being a student was relatively to the point.

For most of his elementary and middle school years, John attended to his classes and did well in school, getting primarily As and Bs but never feeling challenged. There were no honors or accelerated classes at the schools he attended until he moved to Colorado. In 8th grade, he was able to take more advanced classes and enjoyed the chance to push his learning. In high school, at the site where this study was conducted, he sought out the more difficult classes such as Honors, AP, and concurrent enrollment. John readily admitted that although he liked being pushed, he did not always care for some teachers. He critiqued their habit of putting the academics first and students last. This threat would emerge many times throughout his stories.

As a high schooler, he said he was just then beginning to see that there were teachers capable of seeing students as more than students; there were some teachers who treated students as people first. I learned this and much about John through the device of fidget toys. The first, mentioned earlier, that he needed something to occupy the energy in his hands, and the second established his views on teachers. “Another teacher this year has these [fidget toys] in her room. I like it. I like when teachers treat students as people who have needs besides just ‘Pass this test’ and ‘Get the assignment turned in’. I haven’t had many teachers like that”. Eryilmaz (2014) suggested that this sense of awareness of priority, both academic and emotional, is highly

impactful on student perceptions of teachers as either *liked* or *disliked*. While other variables do play a part, John's awareness of how his teachers attended to those priorities spoke to the delicate balance many teachers negotiate within the classroom. This awareness John had, as a Junior, reflected the shift many students experience with teachers from prioritizing academic acumen within the elementary years to appreciating the relational component as secondary students when considering what makes a *good teacher* (Beishuizen et al., 2001).

This perspective on the teacher-student relationship helped provide further understanding for the encounters John had of within-year teacher turnover, but also his overall experiences of school.

### **Observing Challenges**

Elementary school seemed like a time when John was stuck; he was learning easily, but he was not challenged with his classes. The one opportunity he had to advance coursework was denied because the letter of approval did not get signed, and there was no follow-up. He became acutely aware of outpacing his peers around first grade. While everyone else was reading simple chapter books in the class, John was tearing through *The Wizard of Oz* within a week or two. Reading was an area he saw himself excelling at, but science and math were also strengths.

I would finish these tests early. Every Friday, we would have a test on the different subjects. For my math and science tests, I would finish, then look around the room and see everyone still working. I did not want to be the first kid to get up from my desk, walk all the way across the room, and put my test on the teacher's desk. I'm still uncomfortable with that. I would wait for someone else to do it, then I could turn it in. I knew I wasn't rushing because I got really good grades on everything.

John's sense of being hyperaware of those around him was a continuous thread throughout his experiences of school. It revealed the presence of things concerning to him, and its absence revealed John's relation to teachers, subjects, and peers as well. His first encounter with a teacher leaving within a year occurred in 2nd grade when his teacher, Ms. K, left in November for maternity leave and did not return the rest of the year. She seemed to linger in spirit for the remainder of the year, as she submitted lessons and would send pictures of her newborn to the substitute to show the class. This first occurrence did not seem to have much emotional impact on John initially. "We all knew she was leaving; it was obvious she was going to have a baby. It wasn't personal, it just...that's how life is." During his interview, he shrugged many times as if to dismiss the mere thought that he would have a strong emotional response to something that, for him, was perfectly logical. In a follow-up with him, however, stronger emotions emerged from this experience due to his sense of awareness of others.

I was so agitated, no, aggravated with the kids in class. The teacher, the sub, couldn't get kids to quiet down. They collapsed the structure. He was just trying to do his job, and I really couldn't get why they wouldn't let him teach. I didn't want to have anything to do with their...ridiculousness, so I just sat in my seat. The teacher was nice to me and let me read my own books and do my own work. He just left me alone because he was always busy dealing with the other kids going crazy. But I just had to tune all that out because I didn't want anything to do with them."

John's challenges in this situation were created both by his peers and by the lack of attention he received. Because he was compliant and did not cause a problem, he was left to his own devices to read and do the work quietly. He was not causing problems in the classroom, which meant that

he had to be self-sufficient while the substitute battled for control with the class. He also had to sit with his aggravation for his classmates because there was no other option. While John's response revealed a level of pity for the substitute teacher, when I questioned him about more details such as his name, John could not seem to remember. A man who ended up being his teacher for the better half of second grade was a nameless entity lost to the more poignant memories of a disorderly classroom and time spent working alone at his desk.

Even this scene presented, where the teacher who left had some contact with the classroom and influence on teaching through lesson plans, illustrated some of the chaos that occurs in classrooms when teachers leave within the year. Some research suggests that the disruption to learning is significant to student achievement goals and is primarily caused by inefficiency of substitute teachers to either manage class behavior or handle the content (Boyd et al., 2005; Hanushek et al., 2004). Although John revealed that he had no positive or negative emotions toward his teacher who left, he did feel a significant amount of aggravation toward his classmates for taking advantage of the situation. This created the challenge of having to survive the classroom, both John and the substitute teacher, rather than the opportunity to thrive within it. Ms. K, the teacher who went on maternity leave, seemed to have done her best to leave a sense of structure and routines to follow, but those seemed to fall due to student pushback and behaviors. Regardless, John made it through his second-grade year but stated that he would continue to participate in classes much the same way afterward: head down; focused on work; not talking to anyone; not participating beyond work completion.

He would turn this behavior into a coping mechanism, especially for classes he did not like. Another instance of within-year teacher turnover in 6th grade showed John's powers of observation as a revealing tool to his perceptions of classmates and teachers. His brevity in

describing this next instance reflected the disdain he had for the particular teacher who left within the year.

In 6th grade I had a gym teacher...no it was two for the class, a guy and a girl. He was always yelling and using exercise as punishment. If the class didn't listen or didn't move fast enough, he would make us all do squats or run around. I wouldn't do that because I wasn't the one talking. I got in trouble a few times, like had lunch detention, but I didn't really care. I wasn't doing anything wrong. What he was doing was wrong. At some point, he just wasn't there and the other lady took over the whole class. She wasn't much better, but she was a bit nicer than him. Maybe she only seemed better because she could only yell at so many kids at a time, and there were so many of us in gym class, so it was easier to stay hidden or not get grouped with the kids being ridiculous. They were annoying, but not as annoying as the other guy. I was glad when he didn't come back.

John's memory of names, when the teacher had left, and the reason behind his leaving were gone. His dismissive body language while sharing implied that the entire episode was something that was a mere blip in his school account. It illustrated the sense that some teachers are just there, and their absence, or replacements, might be more appreciated than their continued presence. While this was one student's perspective of the encounter, it spoke to the question within the literature of when teacher turnover can be beneficial. Teachers who have left the profession may have done so because the role of the educator was not the best fit. As Katz (2018) points out in one policy brief for educators of Virginia, "some turnover can be beneficial. In particular, the quality of the teacher workforce will improve if low-performing teachers leave the profession and are replaced with high-performing teachers (p. 3). Even though these choices



may have helped provide a space for better-suited candidates, the disruption in light of their departure, as seen in John's example, created a part of the surrounding context (Redding & Henry, 2019). These shifts in personnel create issues for interpersonal relationships between peers as well as between students and teachers.

I could not help but think about my own case of leaving within the year and if it brought any unintended challenges for the students that I had left. When I knew I would be leaving, I was cognizant of my decisions around when and what to tell my current students about why I was leaving and what it would mean for them. As a teacher who has tried to be one like John mentioned, a teacher who puts students and relationships first, this point in our conversation made me reflect even more on the situation I had created for students. Had the transition from one teacher to another gone smoothly for them? Were there structures in place so that each of them as a student could continue to do well? Did they actually benefit from the change in teachers? While the last question was difficult to ponder, it was more appropriate to consider that even if that were the case, so long as students were taken care of and growing as learners, it did not matter. Unfortunately, within John's stories ran the vital thread that had been able to endure these circumstances, but he was challenged to make it through. Even though these situations reflected a level of detachment to the teachers who left and the teachers who replaced them, John seemed to have had to learn how to handle himself amongst the chaos created when a teacher leaves.

### **Breaking Tradition**

In elementary school, John had a music teacher whose class he enjoyed. In fact, this music teacher, Mr. T, had been his own father's teacher. "I thought it was cool my dad had him as a teacher. I guess I should have realized that made him much older and more likely to leave". In

the few years that John had Mr. T as a teacher, from Kindergarten to the very beginning of fourth grade, he had learned a great appreciation for music and for the fun nature of the class.

Every Friday was Fun Friday in Mr. T's class. We got to play with those big tubes, the Boomwackers, and we got to play games. It made me really look forward to the end of the week. Not just because of the weekend, but because in that class we got to have a bit of fun instead of non-stop work. It was only thirty minutes a day, but that time he created meant a lot for me as a kid. Plus he did birthdays. What I mean is that whenever it was a kid's birthday, he would play Happy Birthday on the piano and the whole class would have to sing it really loud. I never wanted him to sing that to me, so I'm really glad my birthday is in the summer, but it was nice. Like it was nice that he took the time to remember something like a birthday and make a big deal out of it. That's what I mean by teachers treating students like people. Giving them space to have fun or relax, but also knowing things about them.

I could tell that John liked Mr. T's class, as it was the only one he spoke of where there was a slight sense of excitement in his voice, and he was to go into specifics about what he enjoyed. This concept of what caring looked like in Mr. T's class reflects what Noddings (2005) refers to as attending to needs, both *inferred* and *explicit*. Inferred needs are needs that the caregiver attends to because they infer that the cared-for requires them, such as a teacher concluding that a student wants a good grade in a class. Or in this case, that children would want their birthday recognized. Expressed needs are needs that the cared-for have expressed, directly and indirectly, as necessary. In this case, the fact that John was shy and withdrawn could have denoted a need to not be recognized publicly, if his birthday fell within the school year. The fact that Mr. T was

happily willing to provide a space to respond to his students' need for fun and the need to be recognized and celebrated created a sense of care within his teaching dynamic. This sense of care sets the foundation for teacher and student relationships. Unfortunately, for John, at the beginning of fourth grade, Mr. T decided to retire. He spent a few short weeks in the classroom and then was replaced with another teacher. John did not remember Mr. T talking about leaving. He said it felt very abrupt since it was still at the beginning of the year. However, John also spoke with an understanding of the situation, looking back at it. "It made sense. He was old. But I was really looking forward to having him again and those Fun Fridays".

The teacher who replaced him was only referred to as the *sub* in our conversations about this experience of within-year teacher turnover. Even though this teacher was consistent and stayed for the remainder of the school year, John said he did not remember her name or think of her as the teacher. "I just think of her in my head as the sub for Mr. T".

Although there was less behavioral chaos in the wake of Mr. T's departure than in his first experience, John expressed a sense of sadness or missing out because of the loss of traditions that he had come to expect. The *sub* did not have Friday Fun; in fact, she hardly let the students touch the instruments in the room at all. She did not do birthday celebrations with songs or recognition. "She was nice, it wasn't like she was mean. And she could control the class". She wanted to develop a choir program at the school and refocused all the music classes toward that approach. John seemed to appreciate that she was passionate about it, but choir was not for him. He also seemed to resent that, traditionally, the fourth graders got their own recorders from the school and learned to play them. She never handed them out, nor did she teach the class about them. John's disappointment at not being able to have that experience was clearly seen in his downcast eyes as he relayed the story. It was something he had looked forward to as a young boy

and never got the chance to experience. It was another tradition that would be left behind in the wake of Mr. T's absence.

In that way, music became just another way to spend thirty minutes of school time. The *sub* left after that year to pursue a job at the local middle school and do more with choir and was replaced the following year by another teacher. Even though John said it was a bit better because the new teacher at least let them play different instruments, music was never the same after Mr. T left.

When I asked John the specific question about if there was any impact on his relationships with teachers, based on his experiences of chronic within-year teacher turnover, he responded:

With other teachers? I don't think so. I get why most of them left because of a baby or because of retiring. And with that one guy PE teacher, I didn't know why he left, but I was honestly glad he was gone. It maybe would have been different if they had left for other reasons, but I don't know. Those two were nice to have as teachers when they were around, and when they left it sucked. Well, it was okay with Ms. K's class because I was left alone, but Mr. T leaving bothers me more. Having Mr. T made me appreciate teachers who are like him, you know, making connections with kids and treating them as people. But that's because of what he did while he was my teacher, not because he left.

Within his description, I found a thread that would also be repeated in other narratives. The meaning behind the departure was heavily predicated on established relationships and having an understanding of why the teacher left. Any remorse occurring from John's first instance of his teacher leaving was founded in how the new teacher couldn't handle the class and how his classmates would be disruptive. In the second case, Mr. T had created traditions John had been

looking forward to continuing. The arrival of a new teacher with different methods was a disappointment. Those feelings carried forward more so than any direct feelings from the departure itself.

### **John's Letter**

After our final interview, I explained to John the artifact that I hoped he would be willing to create. I asked him to create a letter that could be the traditional written format, or an email, a recording, artwork, or any medium he would like. In the last session we had together he had brought a sketchbook that he had flipped through absentmindedly during our time. I learned art and design were part of his post-secondary goals as he hoped to find a college abroad with an animation program.

I told him the idea behind this letter was that it could be written to a teacher who had left within the year. He could choose if he wanted to write it to a single teacher, a collective of teachers who had left, or more of an open letter to any teacher who had left within the year. His reaction to that could only be described as disgusted confusion. "I don't get it. I don't know if I could do something like that".

At his reaction, I explained the idea and purpose behind the creation of these letters. Because this work was guided by the impact of teachers leaving on students, that a letter might be a vehicle to say something to a teacher, or teachers, who had left that would be more like talking to that teacher rather than about them. The ability to take the concept of a traditional letter and let each participant be individually inclined to represent their emotions through various mediums was meant to add another layer of reflection to these experiences (Eisner, 2002). A foundation of this artifact was that this should be something expressive, not an assignment to complete. He nodded but still seemed uncomfortable with the idea of creating something of that

nature. John asked if he could just say directly what he was thinking about a teacher who had left and its impact on him. His response was toward the teacher I thought he might speak about, Mr.

T:

He was the first teacher I had that made me feel like a connection with school or that teachers and students could have a connection besides from what they were teaching. All of the traditions he created in music class and the ways he actually let his students participate and be a part of the class made a difference to me, even though I didn't show it because I don't like to gain attention. But the fact that he remembered birthdays for all of his students and paid attention to it, that really showed that he cared about his students as people first. I wish he didn't retire and leave the school. Or, I wish he did it after I was done with fifth grade. I get why he did, and it makes sense. But it still sucked for me because I had him and got to experience all of those traditions and then he and they just went away and got replaced. I don't blame him for leaving, because again he was old and probably more than ready to retire. But it would be nice if he knew that he was the first teacher that showed me how teachers could be with their students. You know? How teachers could treat their students as more than just assignments and test scores and get through this and that unit. He cared about us, and I really appreciated that about him.

The dichotomy between John's understanding of why his teachers left and his disappointment with his experiences after their departure struck me as mature, despite John's words to describe himself. To be able to carry both of those emotions in a way that did not seek to place blame seemed a remarkable bit of reflection on the scenario. In shaping these conversations with John

into narratives, the idea of impact on the relational dynamic between him as a student and the teachers who had left came to the forefront. Relationships between teachers and students were based on a variety of factors, including relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Roorda et al., 2011), and even if John had not used those terms, the idea behind these relationships being founded on knowledge, care, and the ability of students to have some level of independence was pertinent. It forced me to reflect on my own experiences of leaving students and think of how they, my former students, might have been impacted by my departure. Just as John revealed, the context of the situation bears considerable weight on how the events may be interpreted. The threads that emerged in these stories about how the teachers left and the relationships they had prior to their departure would be prominent across the other narratives as well as be points of reflection for my own story of leaving.

### **Sterling**

Sterling was one of those people whose energy and vibrancy people immediately paid attention to. Whether it was her effortless sense of fashion, or her ability to add to any discussion, Sterling had always stood out, even from the time I had her as a freshman in my Honors English 9 class. She had the kind of emotional and academic capacity that poured through every conversation and every action. I was very glad to see that the same energy she had as a freshman had only grown, despite the fact that most of her high school experience had been disrupted due to the COVID 19 global pandemic.

Sterling was a part of a group I sponsored at the school, Link Crew, and had first seen information about the study through that group. However, when the information was iterated in her AP Language class, she decided to follow up with me about the opportunity to share about her experiences of within-year teacher turnover. When she handed me the folder with her signed

consent and assent forms, she wanted to start immediately with the interview, as in on the spot. I asked her for times to schedule when she could come to my classroom away from other students and we could record properly. Sterling seemed excited to begin the work.

In the first interview, she frequently pulled on her mask as she shared with me how her perspective of school had shifted from elementary school to now.

I used to love school. Like, *loved* it. I was the kind of kid that always wanted to be at school; get the work done; get the good grades; I actually enjoyed it. I was that kid. But things have changed, and so now I don't really...it's not that I don't like school. It's fine. It's just that I don't love it anymore. It is what it is. I'll show up, and you know me, I'll participate and share, because I love sharing. I'll put myself out there and be really energetic. The choices that I make now are really intentional. And sometimes I like acting the fool and be loud and active, and you [others] might not like this, but I like this. And sometimes people say that I'm being too loud, like my volume is too loud and I'm long-winded. And people tell me to lower my volume, but I'm like 'Why should I? Why should I hide how I naturally talk?' If you [others] are bothered by it, then get out of my proximity. I don't want to have to apologize for that, but school makes me feel like that sometimes. Be less loud. I'm just here. It's what I have to do to get to that next step. I like my classes, but it feels like now I see the formula. I see what teachers are doing, and I know what we will do in a unit. I know teachers are just doing their best to teach, but this past year with COVID really made me see through what school is. Like I said, it's fine, and I'm still getting As, but I don't love school like I used to.

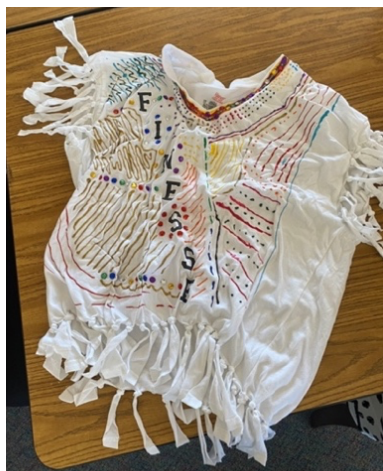


As one of her former teachers, her confession about school saddened me. This was a girl who was so incredibly bright, friendly, kind, intelligent, mature, and multi-talented who should have been thriving in school. With all of her abilities, school should have been a place she loved coming to each day. Instead, it had turned into a task to complete. Even though all of her packed schedule of classes were still either advanced, concurrent enrollment, or AP, she seemed to be going through the motions. When she described her least favorite class, she said that if I were to see her in there, I would see her hunched over her desk, glaring at the clock to move faster. School was similar in that she was just watching the time, trying to make it to the end.

Even the artifact she brought in to represent who she was a student reflected the transition from loving school to just getting through it each day. In 8th grade, she had participated in a talent show; she and a friend had customized their own shirts for it.

Mine was bedazzled, tinsel, cut up, dyed, and out there—just like me. But my friend kept hers safe so she could wear it as a regular shirt. I wanted the shirt to stand out—just like me. I worked really hard on it...well, I worked hard on it then ran out of time and had to rush at the end. Just like how I do some school work now. The choices that I made with the shirt and the choices that I make now are really intentional. I love that shirt, it's in a memory box right now. Every time I look at it, it makes me feel good and it's tied to good sentiment.

Sterling said the shirt represented her as a student because it reflected her ability to stand out from the crowd and be loud, but it also represented something she loved. The way she loved the shirt that she created connected to the way she used to love school and how school used to make her feel.

**Figure 4***Sterling's Shirt Artifact*

When I asked her if there were any parts of school that she still loved, she did share that her theatre class and involvement in the performing arts was still driving forces for her. “Fifth period is my theatre class, and I cannot wait each day to get there. We’ll be doing scene work or theatre games and it feels like it’s been five minutes before the bell rings and it’s time to go”.

Sterling was also a very social person in school, but seemed to be able to balance the sense of obligation to her friends as well as to her academics. She spoke of getting to school early to have enough time to hang out with her friends in the Commons in the morning, walk with her girlfriend to first period, then strategically plan to meet up for lunch after third period. I had witnessed Sterling’s incredible ability as a people-person and an academic in my classroom as a freshman, but also as a Link Leader. Link Crew was an organization in the school of upperclassmen whose role was to help make freshmen feel more connected to their teachers and the community. Link Leaders ran freshmen orientation at the beginning of the year and held monthly connection meetings with freshmen throughout the year. Sterling was selected to be a part of this group not only because she was a fantastic role model of a student, but also because

of her capacity to care for others. I watched her work with freshman in monthly meetings, and she was wonderful at leading them through activities by modeling how to connect with others.

This idea of caring for others came up while discussing her plans for after graduation. Each idea she shared revealed a need to serve others, whether through medicine and health or otherwise.

I haven't quite decided on what I want to do after I graduate. I think I want to be a doctor, and work with kids. Or I would want to be a veterinarian and care for animals. But then I also think about being a therapist. I love listening to people and problem-solving with them. I think I'm pretty good at seeing problems or issues from a different perspective.

Sterling's ambitions for the future were rooted in ideals from her past, as she stated that this sense of caring had always been a part of who she was and her environment. She had many teachers along the way whom she described as caring individuals who created spaces for their students to grow academically as well as emotionally. This sense of holistic care, attending to students as well-rounded people (Noddings, 2002) seemed to be tied to Sterling's sense of success and well-being in school as a person and a student (CASEL, 2019; McConnell et al., 2020). She seemed to place great value on those experiences which helped her grow her love of school in the elementary and middle school years. However, some of the encounters she shared of within-year teacher turnover revealed that Sterling had to create a space of caring for herself in order to keep moving forward.

### **Not Devastating**

When Sterling was in second grade, she had a music teacher, Mr. C. According to Sterling, he was nice and fun, but seemed as if he was not quite happy. "Something about teacher

pay. I remember him saying something about needing better pay because he had a family”. One day, her friend came to her and shared that Mr. C. had quit. Sterling remembered her friend being severely upset by it; her friend had been in tears at the news. Sterling recalled feeling a bit shocked, but nothing more than that. After a brief period of subs, he was quickly replaced by a new teacher, Ms. O, whom Sterling enjoyed. “She [Ms. O] was very hands-on. We got to actually play piano and learn various styles of music. She also started up choir, which is where I first started to like it”. This transition indicated an improvement for Sterling as she found the replacement teacher’s approach to class provided her an opportunity to appreciate music in a new way.

When Mr. C left...well he was okay. He had structure in his class. We would watch a video then practice. Watch another video, then practice again. It wasn’t a bad class. But, like I said, he seemed like he wasn’t happy, so I didn’t feel a connection to that teacher. Then he left, kind of out of nowhere, and then we got Ms. O. I really liked what she did with class, and she’s one of the people that got me started with music. So when I think about that, it’s not devastating that he left because things worked out better in the long run.

When viewed from a relational ontology, teaching and learning necessitates a connection between teacher and student beyond mere assignment to a class. The concept of being an *okay* teacher is not enough to cultivate such bonds that are the foundations of good teacher and student relationships. In a meta-analysis, Blum (2005) reported that relationships must be coupled with high academic standards and teacher support. In addition, connections between school's physical and emotional safety are inherent to positive relationships between teachers and students (Rashman et al., 2009). Within the scenario that Sterling described was the sense that

there could be little to no reaction to Mr. C's departure because there was really no connection between Sterling and Mr. C that would make her feel one way or another when he quit. Sterling expressed little recognition of attempts to connect beyond teaching the content in his short time there. However, at the time of this incident, Sterling was in second grade and grasped the situation as simply that one teacher left, and another teacher took over. The fact that the teacher who took over had a more favorable teaching style for Sterling might have also influenced her reflections on the situation.

This point in Sterling's story made me think again of how my former students would regard me if ever they were to think back on our short time together. It seemed almost serendipitous that the day after I had this interview with Sterling, I had to serve as an emergency substitute for my former class for the day. There was a wide spectrum to their responses ranging from being very glad to see me and asking me to return to teach them to sarcastic dismissal. There was one moment when one of my former students shouted out that I had abandoned them as I was explaining my new role in the building. Teenagers have a special acumen for delivering statements that can cut to the quick. I was fairly sure he had said that as a form of hyperbole, but I had to hold space for the fact that some of my former students might have taken my leaving as a form of abandonment. I vacillated between what would be worse: the indifference of students who would not be bothered by my leaving or disdain for the notion that I had abandoned them to their situation.

I left some space for hope. I felt some level of reassurance that hopefully the stories my former students would have of my departure would not echo some of the sentiments of the story Sterling would eventually share about her experience of within-year teacher turnover in her 7th-grade year.

## **Taking Advantage**

As Sterling grew and went from one grade to the next, she continued to take advanced classes that challenged her. Sterling had been in Honors or advanced classes for most of her school career, and she acknowledged that students like her tend to “be more mature, especially comparing Honors students to regular students”. This sense of maturity was tested when Sterling was in 9th grade Honors Physics. Her teacher, Mrs. P, left at the beginning of the spring semester for maternity leave and did not return; a long-term sub replaced her for the remainder of the year. Sterling explained that she was completely aware that the original teacher, Mrs. P, would be leaving, as it was no secret, but she felt disappointed with the sub who replaced her as the teacher.

Although Sterling described this long-term sub, Mr. M, as “really nice and laid back”, she confessed that he had a very different teaching approach from their original teacher. His way of teaching was to provide the lessons and materials then to give the answers so that students only had to repeat the information. After he gave the information and the students finished, they were allowed free time. When I asked her if that led to misbehavior, she clarified that “some students would go a bit wild and act up by being on their phones, but it wasn’t chaos. It was an Honors class so no one ever did anything to get in trouble”. Students may have been doing non-school-related activities such as playing games or socializing during their free time, but they were not necessarily disruptive.

When I asked Sterling what she got out of that class, she shared that she learned a bit, but not as much as when the original teacher, Mrs. P, was there.

We got away with a lot once she had left. Mr. M gave us the answers, and there were a lot of people who took advantage of that. They wouldn’t try to learn on

their own; they knew he would give them the answers. Mrs. P. was more challenging, but in a good way. I still got As in the class, both when I had her and when the new teacher took over. But with her I had to work for that A, if that makes sense? I still had to work in that class to keep the A, but it was just completing work. It was easy to take advantage of the situation because the sub didn't push us the way that she had. Once I saw what the new teacher was doing, I admit that I also messed around a little bit more than I used to. After a few weeks of that, I settled back into focusing on getting my work done. But I had to regulate myself because Mr. M didn't seem to notice.

It was remarkable to gain insight into Sterling's perspective about the situation and how even her response revealed a sense that the class could have been otherwise. She called it taking advantage of the situation, in some way insinuating that the class should have been another way, more challenging, or more difficult to earn the A. I followed up with her about this scenario, if she felt as if she learned as much from this class if Mrs. P had stayed. Sterling's response:

I learned still, because there was still work to do and I like learning. But I do feel, based on how Mrs. P was teaching us, that we didn't learn as much as we would have. Because we were never challenged after she left. Challenged in the material, not other kinds of challenges, because there were some. I had to challenge myself just to keep from slacking and spending most of class talking with other people. I had to challenge myself to get something out of the class through the work and assignments, because it wasn't coming directly from Mr. M.

Considering these emotions around the class, I wanted to follow up with her about any other feelings she had around the situation. Sterling stated that she felt mixed emotions about how the

class had gone for her that year and her teacher leaving. On the one hand, she was disappointed at not being challenged and getting as much out of the class as she could have with her original teacher. On the other, she did not feel a need to place blame.

It's not as if Mrs. P had left because the class was bad or she didn't like us. And it's not like she left for another job or quit. She had a baby. We were all happy for her and excited to see pictures once the baby was born. But it also made the class different after she left. She was a great teacher and she really made us think about what we were learning. With the sub, we weren't pushed. I would have liked to learn more, but it's not like I blame Mrs. P for leaving. I just wish she were our teacher the whole year. But again. I get it. You can't really blame someone for having a baby. That sounds pretty terrible.

### **We Were Divided**

Sterling's most disruptive encounter of within-year teacher turnover was in her 7th-grade social studies class. Up to the point that the teacher left, Sterling said that she had enjoyed the class as much as any other. She had been excited to learn, and the teacher, Ms. J, had made the class and content enjoyable. Although social studies was not her favorite class, Sterling still approached it with an air of wanting to learn and do well. Into the second quarter, Ms. J would share more about herself, including that she had not always wanted to be a teacher. Prior to her departure, Ms. J stated she came to teaching after having a previous career. Although Sterling could not remember precisely, she said it seemed to be a profession related to the legal system. This information seemed to come into play in the middle of the year when Ms. J. was gone one day and never returned. Sterling stated that her class figured that she had gone back to her



previous profession, as it seemed the teacher preferred that career over teaching. “She would talk about how much she missed her old job”.

Sterling said she felt a sense of disappointment in the fact that her teacher had left so abruptly. There was no sense of closure as it had seemed, to Sterling, that Ms. J left out of the blue and had not given indication that she would be leaving, either directly or through behavior.

I was confused when we had a few different subs for a while, but then shocked when I learned that Ms. J was never coming back. I didn’t know where that was coming from. Everyone started to make up rumors that she had been fired or something. I don’t know why, because she was one of the nice teachers. That class hadn’t been my favorite, but it had been okay. Ms. J was nice enough.

Having her leave like that, with no warning, felt surprising. It felt like she should have said something to us at least, even just goodbye or something.

In the first few weeks of her departure, the class had a steady rotation of substitutes. Sterling said she did not remember much from that period, either good or bad. “I think it was just like whenever there is a sub. Things get a little crazy”. When the new teacher that would replace Ms. J permanently arrived, however, class took a turn for the chaotic.

We got this new teacher named Mr. K; he was horrible. He was always yelling at the class. Even from the moment we walked into the classroom he was yelling. That class consisted of students just shouting out and interrupting him. He would give out class punishments because he had no sense of control. His only way of dealing with the class was to yell. I dreaded going to that class each day because it was so bad.

Because Sterling was a dedicated student who wanted to learn and do well, she kept going to class and quickly found herself in the middle of a figurative and literal divide within the classroom. Mr. K was ex-military, as the class had learned in a get-to-know-me slide show that he put together at the beginning of his time with them. Sterling said he ran the class like a drill sergeant, which was understandable to her considering how bad students' behavior had become. They would wander into class late; they would interrupt lessons; they would make messes and throw things across the room. Still, Sterling thought that his approach might have added to students' choices. "No one really felt respected in that class. They shouldn't have been acting out, but he was the adult and shouldn't have been yelling non-stop".

This concept of reciprocity regarding respect seems foundational to relationships but seems to be misinterpreted in light of some authority styles. Teachers who take a more authoritarian approach view teaching as an adult-led and dominated activity (Säljö, 2009). In these situations, the assumption is that students should automatically demonstrate respect to authority. With this type of instruction, behaviors are often seen in terms of black and white, with little room for interpretation. Some research shows that the level of distance and purposeful disconnect from students is a means to maintain discipline and help students be more self-reliant (Rashman et al., 2009).

His approach and harsh punishment style, paired with Sterling and a few other classmates' desire to learn, led to part of the class physically separating themselves from those that were constantly at battle with Mr. K. Sterling stated that she and a group of other students pulled their desks together, separating themselves from the students who were constantly at odds with their new teacher. She said that eventually, her side of the room was left to do their work, while his attention was focused on managing the behaviors of the other side of the room. Even though she

admitted that she could get her work done and fend for herself, she also said that she did not feel as if she learned anything for the rest of that year in social studies.

That was in seventh grade, and although I still loved school, that experience was the first time I realized that teachers could be wrong in their approaches to classes. The kids in my class were wrong for what they were doing, and not listening or doing their work, but he seemed to egg them on. There was an instructional coach that came in to try to help the situation, but they were only there for a week, and then things were back to yelling and group punishments. I was so glad at the end of that year, especially for being done with that class.

This example showed a divide within this class and clearly within Sterling's perceptions about school and how teachers led their classrooms. There seemed a bit of revelation in Sterling as she began to draw the threads from her current feelings about school back to this instance of within-year teacher turnover. The establishment of positive relationships is a crucial factor in student success (Id-Deen, 2016; Nieto, 1994). I saw the threads of positive relationships emerging from these stories as starting places from when teachers left through the shift to the replacement teacher. If teachers who left had a positive impact on students and a sense of connection, then there were more emotions around their leaving. If the replacement teacher picked up the threads of connections or created them outright, then the experiences following departure were better for students. If, however, the replacement teacher had no sense of building connections or establishing relationships through both rigor and relational care, then at best, students got through the class. In the worst cases, as exemplified by Sterling's experience with Mr. K, students had to survive.

Sterling was a resilient and strong young woman, and her stories reflected her ability to use her strengths to make the best out of any situation. Whether that was a music class and her ability to adapt to a new teaching style or taking the lead on her own learning in both 7th-grade social studies and 9th grade Honors Physics, Sterling would find a way to learn. Even though she expressed that she “could see through school for what it is-the same routines repeated over and over”, she still had a dedication and perseverance to do well, despite what was thrown her direction.

### **Sterling’s Letter**

Having had Sterling in class previously, I knew what a creative personality she had, so I was excited to present her with the opportunity to create another representation of the impact chronic within-year teacher turnover had for her. We discussed the purpose behind the artifact, and I elaborated on Eisner’s (2002) modes of representation. I shared that she had done a thorough job recalling her experiences through our interviews but that an artifact might also capture some of the other emotions and thoughts around these encounters that the questions had not been able to tap into yet. I gave her some examples of options, and she perked up with excitement at some of her own suggestions.

I am really into movement and dance. I could do a dance to show what I would say to a teacher...or those teachers. But I’m hesitant on that. I don’t want to make a fool of myself. I was thinking about a play, because I like acting so much. Maybe a monologue? Could I give a speech? Could I pretend like I was talking to a room full of teachers who were thinking about leaving in the middle of the year and talk to them about what I’m feeling? It could feel like a TedTalk because I’d be talking about something important and teaching from my own experience.

Sterling was eager to begin work on this and presented a few different versions. Initially, she created a monologue, creating a character that was supposed to be self-representative. I enjoyed reading this iteration of the letter, but Sterling seemed unhappy with it and asked me not to include it in the study. I asked if it were okay to mention it but not give details, which she agreed to, but she still wanted to create something.

Given what Sterling had said about just going through the motions of school and getting work done like a checklist, it was meaningful for me to see her approach to this letter. I wanted student voice to be at the center of this study, and I felt that within this process as Sterling took time to create an artifact that was meaningful to her.

I appreciated the attention that she put into this work, much like the attention she put into her shirt artifact. Both reflected Sterling's desire to put her individual flair into works she was passionate about.

Educators. Teachers. Thank you all for being here today and for being a part of my educational journey. It's funny because I'm talking to you all here today because you didn't stay. And I'm not saying that to blame you... most of you. But seriously. I didn't get the chance to say to you what I wanted to because you left.

Mr. C, you were a really good music teacher. I feel like I learned a lot about music from you. I'm not sure why you left or what job you're doing now, but I hope that you're doing well.

Ms. J, I really wish you didn't leave. I hope that you found happiness in your new job, but I missed having you for a teacher for many reasons. You were nice to your students and you were good at teaching-some things that your

replacement lacked. Hup! We'll get to that issue in a minute. 7<sup>th</sup> grade would have been better if you stayed, but I hope that you found happiness in your new job.

Mrs. P, first I want to say that your baby is adorable. I'm glad we got to see pictures. Know that you returned the next year, but I missed you for the rest of freshman year. You were great at challenging us, and I know I would have learned a lot from you. But, I'm glad that you and your baby are healthy and that you got to spend those first months together. That's important.

You all had your reasons for leaving, and I really wish you all the best.

And now, the teachers who took your place.

Ms. O, you are incredible. No offense to you, Mr. C, but I loved the way that you made music class feel for me, Ms. O. I'm still performing, and I'm still singing because you got me started with music. It's still my passion, and I want to thank you for the way you taught me.

Mr. K...I'm not gonna hold back because there are some things that you need to know. The first is that you should be the one taking orders, not the one giving them. You made my 7<sup>th</sup> grade so much harder than it had to be. You might want to learn to listen more to people instead of yelling. I was bullied in your class because you were too busy yelling at kids and not noticing the ones that needed help. I could go on, but I'm just going to say that I really hope that you're not still teaching because it is not a good fit for you. Go back to the military if you want to yell at people.

Finally, Mr. M. I liked how chill you were with us because freshman year was rough. You were also pretty good at listening to your students' problems,

which I appreciated. But, I think you could work on not giving as much free time. We got away with a lot. Just some helpful criticism for you if you are still teaching.

All of you have been a part of my journey. Some of you made it worse, but most of you made it better. I have some good memories from classes with you, so overall, thank you.

After she had shared her speech she gave a dramatic bow and laughed. When I asked her why she was laughing, she responded: “I think everyone should get a chance to say something like that to their teachers. It’s therapeutic”.

### **Harris**

As someone who taught freshmen, it was always interesting to see how students evolved over their time in high school. Usually, it was a matter of more reserved students coming out of their shells and becoming more comfortable with their personalities by the time they were upperclassmen. With Harris, there was a sense of maturation, but in a different way. In my Honors English 9 class, Harris had been one of the loudest kids in the room, which had been impressive because I had him at the end of the day when most of the students’ energy had all but waned. He would participate in every class discussion but also in every side conversation. A favorite habit of his had been to wait until the middle of class, after a bit of instruction, when I would open up for any questions or clarifications. Like clockwork, his hand would shoot up, and regardless of topic or what we had been talking about, his question would be, “So, Ms., How are you doing today?” or “Ms., what are you doing after school?” in front of the whole class. At first, I thought it was sweet that he would inquire, but when it became a ritual that would often get the

class off task and off-topic, I eventually had to redirect him, saying I appreciated the sentiment, but maybe we could check in with each other at a better time in class.

When we sat down for the first interview, he leaned hunched over and glanced at me with a look like shame. “I was really immature freshman year. But I can see how I was, and now I know better”. I shared with him my sentiment of appreciation for the intention behind his actions freshman year, just my struggle with the execution. I also shared with him how bright he had been in class, always adding different perspectives to discussions, and that I was glad he was still taking advanced classes. Harris had found out about this study through his AP Language class. Just like John, he had been eager to share about this topic and wanted the opportunity to talk about his experiences of within-year teacher turnover. After discussing how the study would be conducted and getting his consent and assent letters, Harris jumped into interviewing as soon as possible.

Relearning about Harris and how high school had gone for him to this point was an opportunity to reconnect with him. I was impressed with the level of maturity he exhibited in the interviews as he talked about himself, his school career, how school was going, and his goals after graduation. He was open and candid, willing to chastise himself for behaviors he showed while he was my student. The more chaotic energy of his freshman year had shifted into calm confidence as he talked about how school had been going for him.

My school history? In general, I sucked at school as far as being a good student.

As a kid, I was really bad at it. Through fifth grade I had terrible grades. I would get the equivalent of Fs. It was really bad and kept getting worse and worse, but I didn't see a problem with it during that time. As I got older I started to realize the importance of grades. When I got into middle school, I realized that I was



surrounding myself with really toxic people. In seventh grade I began improving, and it helped me feel a lot better; let me get more connected with teachers. It was family reasons, like my stepdad he really told me a lot about education and helped me get better because I saw how smart he was and how you can carry yourself. I decided to try to rebuild myself around getting better grades. It allowed me to get connected with friends and find the right friends.

I was struck by the fact that Harris had ever struggled with school and grades when I had him as a freshman. He was always bright in class, obviously well-read, and intuitive. I had assumed that he had always been studious and attentive to his grades, especially since grades had meant so much to him as a student in my class. His shift from not caring about school, and the impetus that made him change, the influence of his stepfather, helped me appreciate even more the level of maturity he demonstrated in the interviews.

Harris had become a student who was very aware of his choices in school and how those choices might impact his performance and goals. While many Juniors tended to take class periods off as they completed their credits for graduation, Harris had an entirely full schedule of classes. This was especially impressive given that he was taking a handful of concurrent enrollment and AP classes. Most students would take off periods just to be able to stay caught up on studying, but Harris explained he had deliberately made this choice because “I don’t want to slack off, and if I had time during the day that wasn’t structured, I might be tempted to do that”.

With a full schedule, Harris also made time for his one school activity, the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA). He used to be involved in Football but said that it made it hard to focus on his grades and “making good connections with people”. By that, he meant that practices and games consumed so much of his time that it was difficult to balance school, sports,

and friendships. He had wanted to do more clubs as a sophomore but shared with remorse how COVID had put a halt to those plans. With FBLA, however, Harris glowed with pride at all he was learning. He shared that the club had given him a strong sense of what he wanted to do after he graduated and made him feel like all of his learning could be focused on getting a business degree and starting his own business. However, he also expressed some sense of insecurity about the idea of college. Although business interested him, he was not sure if college seemed like the right fit for him. “I don’t know if I would just be going for the experience of college. Education is important to me, but it’s not like I have a dream college. I’ll probably think more of it and make a decision during senior year”.

I felt the need to reassure him that many people do not go to college and find paths through other means that can be equally successful. He nodded agreeably, then asked me about where I attended school and if I thought it was helpful. I shared with him that I knew I had wanted to be a teacher since I was a senior in high school, and that pathway dictated college. I told him I had loved my undergrad experience and becoming a teacher. He asked questions for a bit about it being my dream job, and I had explained that although I had started in music education, I lacked what he had as a strength: math. I had switched to English Education because I knew that teaching was the path I was meant to take, and I loved reading and writing. I also asked him if he had a dream job in mind.

I’m not sure what my dream job is, or if a dream job is a thing for everyone. I changed what I thought I wanted to do around seventh grade. Now, I want to get somewhere in tech or get somewhere in game development or something of that sort. I’ve been a gamer my whole life, it’s something that has rattled around in my brain, but I never saw it as possible because I didn’t see myself getting that level

of education. But then I took classes like Cybersecurity and Business, and I see it as an option. I'm just testing all avenues to find out if it's something that I want to do.

Harris often spoke of his interest in creating something through technology. Though he was not sure what that would look like entirely regarding post-secondary goals, he was clear about where this interest originated. The teacher who first sparked this affinity for Harris was also the first teacher who left within the year and marked Harris' first encounter with within-year teacher turnover.

### **Problem Solving**

When Harris was in 8th grade, he took a technology class. The teacher, Mr. L, seemed to be someone Harris respected from the very beginning of their time together. Mr. L had a lot of knowledge about technology; his job also included being the site technician for all technical matters for the school. "We would be learning a lesson, and a kid would run in with a Chromebook to fix". Sometimes Mr. L would take the problem he was handed and use it as a learning opportunity for his students to hear how they would approach the issue.

Harris explained that Mr. L's way of teaching was to give his students a problem and then give them the freedom to solve it independently with the skills they picked up in his class. Harris' favorite project was to create a video capturing the 8th graders' year and their hopes for moving on to high school. The class got to go around recording the school, conduct interviews, and then had complete autonomy over the editing and production of the final video.

I still think about that project because I worked so hard on that and I was really proud of it. They [administration] showed the video for the entire 8th grade to see at the end of the year. I really appreciated what Mr. L taught us because I felt

really knowledgeable. Like my friend and I would interview people during lunch. We didn't have to do that because Mr. L let us work during class, but I wanted to interview people. I wanted this video to be amazing. Mr. L just gave us the task and the skills, then let us have our way with it. Before him, I had never had a teacher that would trust us enough to do that. I learned so much in that class by trying things out and him letting us keep trying until we got it right.

Toward the middle of the spring semester, Harris said he started to notice a change in the class. Mr. L continued to give the class freedom to explore different skills and projects, but it started to seem as if he was constantly inundated with technology issues. Harris said that Mr. L stopped giving skill lessons because he would be interrupted non-stop with emails or technology that he had to fix. After a few weeks, Mr. L announced that someone else would be taking over the class because he had to switch to being the site's full-time technology support person. The rest of the year, less than a quarter, was filled with a series of subs and teachers who would emergency cover the class. "We didn't know each day who would be in front of us. My friend and I did just fine because we kept working on our project. A lot of the class just messed around".

Harris expressed disappointment that Mr. L could not continue being their teacher because he enjoyed his teaching style and the skills that he had taught them. He also appreciated the fact that he gave the class the freedom to tackle different projects. With a series of different subs and teachers, the remainder of the year meant that no one was really in control. Harris and his friend were allowed to do what they wanted because they were not causing trouble, but he also did not learn any new ways of problem-solving.

When asked how he felt about Mr. L leaving his teaching role, Harris shared a level of understanding:

I could tell that he was getting frustrated. I would too if I had to teach...well at all really...but if I was teaching and constantly interrupted to fix things non-stop, I would be irritated too. I think that's maybe why he originally gave us so much freedom to solve our own problems and space to explore. He had to find ways to do both jobs, and he couldn't do that if he were teaching out of a book or having to give us assignments or worksheets every day. Eventually, I guess it was too much work to do both things. I wish he were our teacher the remainder of the year because he might have been able to show us skills and shortcuts that would have helped with our 8th-grade video, but I did okay with things even without a constant teacher.

Harris' experience in this instance reminded me of many situations throughout my own teaching career of having to cover classes where the teacher had to leave, and a replacement was hard to come by. His retelling of his own story was familiar to the experience I had covering classes and having to carefully watch some students, but letting others have more freedom. As a sub, even for a day, student personalities were quick to emerge. The fact that Harris was eager to continue his project, even after Mr. L left his position, demonstrated his passion for learning and accomplishing his goals. Admittedly, he might have done better with more skilled guidance from his technology teacher, but he beamed with pride, talking about the work he put into editing and finishing the film.

### **Laid Back Approach**

Harris' second encounter of within-year teacher turnover coincided with another participant's experience. Both Sterling and Harris had Mrs. P, who left on maternity leave and did not return for the year. Although there were many similarities in their accounts of the sub,

their interpretations were different. Where Sterling had struggled with the long-term subs approach and less challenging instruction, Harris stated that he really enjoyed the change.

That sounds bad to say, and I don't mean any disrespect to Mrs. P. She was a great teacher and I enjoyed class with her. But when Mr. M took over, I really liked his approach. He was very laid back, but it was in a way that I found I could express myself. For example, he let us stay in his classroom during lunches, because the Commons are...well it's too many kids in there at once. So after a week of knowing him, he let us just stay in there and listen to music and write on the boards. He encouraged us to write out these riddles we found and post them for other classes. One time we covered all three of the whiteboards in riddles. He told us his classes enjoyed solving them and figuring them out. But he also talked to us like people during lunches. He would give us advice about our classes and about life.

In addition to appreciating Mr. M's ability to relate to his students and create spaces for them to share, Harris also enjoyed his instructional approach. Harris explained that Mr. M would walk the class through the lesson, give them the work, and then whenever they finished, they could have free time. The teacher checked the work to ensure no one was simply rushing through it and give the answers. Harris enjoyed this approach because he thought that it made students feel like they were not just doing busywork. He thought it was such a good model of teaching that he emphasized that "more teachers should try it instead of just trying to fill class time with non-stop work".

As a teacher, I wanted to push back on this idea of instruction. However, it was necessary to remember that this was about Harris' encounter and his earnest reflections about his

experiences. While I asked for more detail, I did not seek to critique the approach, even though it did not align with my own sense of pedagogy and instruction.

Harris did feel the need to defend Mrs. P throughout his reflection of this experience, constantly saying he did not mean to disrespect her in what he said. She had been a great teacher, but something about Mr. M's teaching made Harris appreciate the class even more. He said he felt a balance of learning a lot about the content and one of the first instances of being heard as a person within a classroom. He felt listened to by the teacher, not merely about things related to the subject matter but also his struggles inside and outside of school. In her way, Mrs. P had been very caring, but Harris felt more seen by the long-term sub. This influenced his feelings around her departure. For one, he understood why she was leaving, and she had given her students plenty of structure before she left for maternity leave. He said that it made sense for her to take the time for her family. When Mr. M came in, and Harris found himself enjoying the class and the space Mr. M was creating, he found the fact that she had left within the year worked out in his favor.

I don't want to use the word beneficial, because that sounds really mean and disrespectful. I was doing really well in her class before she left, and I think I would have continued to do well. But, Mr. M really gave me a chance to be a person in school. I could be loud and a bit crazy. I could be silly. But I could also do well in his class. Before I started caring about school, I thought you had to be one or the other. Very serious and studying all the time or silly and not caring.

With Mr. M, I found a way to be both, which really helped me as a freshman. I enjoyed Harris' candor in these moments as he tried to elaborate on his enjoyment of the long-term subs' method while holding respect for his teacher who had left. It spoke to his ability to

carry multiple sides to himself and negotiate spaces for all sides to flourish. This sense of duality and having to carry multiple emotions at once would also be present in his last and most intense account of turnover.

### **Still Reeling**

Whether it was because it was more recent or the most intense, Harris spent the majority of our conversations on the account of within-year teacher turnover to the most recent instance that had happened a few weeks prior to our interviews. “This one just happened, so it’s easy to remember, but it’s also probably the one that hit me hardest”.

Harris decided to take Intro to Business as a Junior as a chance to branch out and see what was available as far as electives for school. The teacher, Mr. V, was new to the building, but his classroom and teaching style seemed to be constructed so that Harris immediately felt drawn to the class and the teacher.

Even the way he started out class made it feel different than other teachers. He would have music playing. Nothing too crazy, but just playing some nice tunes or something a student would find interesting. It felt inviting. It felt very welcoming. But even more than that he tried to be connected to his students. Not just with fun activities, which he did have, but in how he taught. He wasn’t the kind of teacher who just gave assignments, and just got through the units, and measured our scores and our grades. He was really good about giving examples, which I think is really important with business. He talked to us to learn our interests and incorporated those kind of examples into the lessons and the work. I really liked that he didn’t just give examples from big companies like Tesla, Apple, or Microsoft, but he really did his research to find smaller companies that had started



really small and actually in people's homes. He wanted us to see examples of businesses like that so that we could see ourselves doing that too. He researched local business so we could see it in our own community. We could have the hope of starting businesses just like the examples. He found a way to make it seem possible for his students.

Harris would refer to this teacher's ability to create relatable examples for his students throughout our conversation. Harris shared that his teacher would listen to the interests of his students and try as best as he could to incorporate examples from real life and pop culture. "Instead of saying that Johnny had to sell 30 apples, he would pull out an example from Star Wars, which so many of us loved". Mr. V constantly asked about what was interesting for his students so that he could take that information into account as he was lesson planning. He seemed to strive to make things highly relevant for his students so that they would not view the content as something to get through but rather would view this as an opportunity that they could take advantage of with the right tools and structures. He even sought out resources for his students, such as guest speakers to come in and share experiences directly and answer questions.

He brought in someone from a security company, and he asked us questions, and we were able to ask him. You had this person right there who could talk about furthering your future business. We could ask the questions we really wanted to. It meant a lot to me that Mr. V took the time to track this guy down and schedule him to come in. He took the extra time for his students.

In addition to this pedagogy, Mr. V also demonstrated strong care dynamics within his classrooms. Having music playing to create an inviting atmosphere was one component, but Harris also shared some interactions he had witnessed within his class.

There was this one kid who was always late and was always missing his work. A lot of other teachers I had might have gone tough on him or yelled at him, but Mr. V really took the time to listen to this kid. He would see what he could do to help him, or give him different deadlines, because it seemed like this kid was really having a rough time. Mr. V wanted to help this kid, not just get a good grade, but help him as a person. I can't say if it meant anything to that other kid, I hope it did, but for me, to see a teacher take that much time to actually listen to their student...especially a student who wasn't doing particularly well...that showed me that this was a teacher who cared about students. He had this quote about moving forward. I can't remember what it was, but he said it a lot. Especially for kids that needed to hear it. Either to get through things or to overcome a challenge.

In addition to creating inviting and caring spaces during class time, Mr. V also welcomed students during lunch. The Commons, or cafeteria, of the school site was a crowded place during lunches with limited seating and places for students to go. Harris and his group of friends found a place where they could relax, share, and be themselves during the school day. It was a much-needed reprieve where Mr. V would provide a space for them and joyfully jump into conversations and share with them about their topics of interest. Harris enjoyed this space and teacher so much that he joined FBLA to pursue his own interest in business and be able to spend more time learning from Mr. V.

This class seemed like an opportunity to learn in a caring environment, with someone who was constantly striving to do his best for students and to create a sense of community in his classroom. This was a stark difference from the past year of teaching, where most classes had to

be remote or hybrid due to the conditions of the COVID 19 global pandemic. Having the chance to take a class like that with a teacher who prioritized relationships seemed like a welcome opportunity for Harris. However, in the final week of school for the fall semester, Harris received very difficult news from his teacher.

During one of their lunchtime sessions, Mr. V sat the group down and told them that he would not be returning in the Spring. Harris described his response: “I was crushed. It felt like someone had punched me in the gut”. Mr. V explained that he loved teaching them, but the combined stresses of being an early career teacher in addition to the additional responsibilities levied upon educators in light of COVID was too much for him. The shifting policies and having to regulate mask ordinances while also trying to look out for personal health were frustrations that caused many teachers to reconsider their positions this year (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). He told this group that he felt the need to be honest with them. He was not leaving because of them, but he felt the need to make this choice for his own well-being. Harris said that he appreciated being told first, but it meant that he had to hear the news again with his classmates in class. It hurt more to hear it twice.

Mr. V wanted to continue to check in with this group of students he had grown close with, so the group created a group chat. Harris scrolled through his phone through dozens of messages to try to explain their typical conversations.

It started out all of us getting together to treat him to sushi—we all love sushi—as a way to say goodbye. That was a great meal. We shared a lot about things we like and what we hope for after we graduate. He not only listened, but he gave good advice. He had always given good advice in class, but this was more about life. Life lessons. From there, he would send messages every day to the group.

Things like ‘Merry Monday, gentleman’ or ‘Have a terrific Tuesday’. Then he usually sends some kind of video that we would all enjoy. He’s done it every day since he’s left, and there’s no reason for him to keep up these messages except that he knows how much it means to us and he wants to know that we are doing okay. That means a lot. One time he was late on sending a message, and I thought that it made sense because maybe we shouldn’t expect him to always send messages. I was feeling disappointed, but understood it. But then that afternoon he apologized for the delay and wished us a great day. It feels really good to be recognized and to have someone take that kind of time out of their day to reach out and check on you. I really miss having him as a teacher and doing that, but I’m really thankful for these messages to keep that connection going.

It was obvious in the way that Harris looked at the messages and had some committed to memory that they meant more to him than other communications. The messages were what he selected as his artifact to reflect who he was as a student. He elaborated that the messages captured his desire to be seen as a student and as a person and the appreciation he had when teachers were able to balance both. He also said that the messages reflected his desire to learn. “Mr. V reaches out to us with encouragement to keep going and do great things. That’s why my education is important to me, so that I can do those things one day”. This example also demonstrated the concept of reciprocity and transaction within caring relationships (Noddings, 2012). Although she noted that caregiving relationships are not always equal, “both parties contribute to the establishment and maintenance of caring” (Noddings, 2012, p. 772). Within these messages were the continuous maintenance of the relationship by both parties involved.

Harris brought most of his conversations back to the group chat, as it was a significant resource for him to stay connected to his teacher that had left. He also shared that he kept Mr. V updated on how class was going in his absence. Harris confessed that what used to be his favorite class period of the day, had turned into a class he attended to get it done. His sensibility was evident when he shared that the new teacher was doing his best, but he had big shoes to fill and would always be at a disadvantage in that regard. Harris revealed that he still tried his best in class but that the new teacher's style fell short of Mr. V's. The new teacher played music for the class, but there was no sense of personalization for individual student's style. The new teacher asked questions to large groups of students, instead of having more individualized conversations to find out areas of need. "They both try to make learning personal, but Mr. V's approach was to take the time to get to know each of his students, even if it took an entire semester. The new teacher is trying to lump us all together".

Harris also admitted to the fact that he was constantly comparing the new teacher to how the class had been with Mr. V. He said he knew it was not fair to hold the new teacher to the high expectations he had with Mr. V, but it was difficult to keep himself from doing so. "Mr. V. set the bar so high, and I know Mr. G. is doing his best and he's doing an okay job. But in my head, I'll always have this comparison and wonder what class would be like if Mr. V. were still here".

This line of thinking echoed Sterling's awareness of otherness, or the idea that the class could have, or should have, been another way if the teacher did not leave their position. Harris' story revealed that level of recognition that the class would have been different if the original teacher had continued in their role. For Harris, this realization was hard to sit with, but he also spoke about striving to do well in the class and not hold these feelings against the new teacher as much as possible.

Working through this encounter alongside Harris revealed the care and respect he held for his teachers, past and present. It also revealed his awareness of situations and how it helped him process events that happened around him. I watched him process his emotions as most of the questions I asked him throughout the interview somehow turned back into stories relating in some way to this latest encounter of within-year teacher turnover. It was something he was still learning how to deal with and move forward without his teacher in the classroom who had become a role model for life.

### **Harris' Letter**

When the last of the interview questions were asked, I brought up the idea of creating a letter for teachers who had left. Just as I had with John and Sterling, I explained the purpose of such a letter being an opportunity to express the impact on these situations beyond the question and answer method of the interviews. I presented him with some examples.

He had many questions about what it could look and sound like, but in the end decided to use his skills from middle school and create a recording that captured his thoughts and emotions around the issue.

I'm here today to say thank you to a teacher who left, but is still teaching me. Mr. V, quite honestly you have changed my life and have made me a better person. I was just talking about things I'm doing now that you started. I'm checking in on people I never would have spoken to because that is the example that you set for me.

I have never had a teacher who cared for students as much as you do. Any time there was a kid in class who was having a bad day or who would keep to

themselves, you would reach out to them and talk with them. You really cared about each and every one of us. Every single day you cared.

You were an amazing business teacher. I want to go into business because you showed me examples from my community of people turning their passion into their business. I miss the way that you taught class. I understand why you had to go, but I will always regret not having you as a teacher for the rest of the year. I miss seeing you in class, ready with the day's playlist.

You were and continue to be an amazing life teacher. You have become a role model for me on how to treat and uplift other people. I wanted you to know the influence you have had on me, not just as a great teacher but as a great person.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

I conducted this research during a turbulent moment in history, not only for education in general but also for the entire world. The ways that the COVID 19 global pandemic impacted schools, from virtual learning to mask mandates, will likely have ramifications for both the short term and the long term. As I wrote about teacher turnover, I also felt the looming storm of teachers leaving en masse. Each day while working with participants and writing findings also seemed to bring new articles of the increasing teacher shortage and the mass exodus of teachers that had started to leave the profession. Data gathered from LinkedIn, a site for professionals to exchange resumes and job opportunities, revealed that teachers left educational positions at a rate 66% higher in November of 2021 than the year before (Anders, 2022). While this data is incomplete and does not accurately account for all within-year attrition that includes switching positions or moving to a different school or district, it illustrates some of the teaching shortages. Teacher turnover, both within-year and end-of-year, has only magnified in light of the additional stresses placed on the profession due to the response to COVID 19 (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). Within this study, only one participant had a teacher who specifically mentioned leaving the profession because of issues related to the additional stress of COVID 19 response; however, it might be an area for future research to explore the breadth and depth of teacher turnover as a result of the pandemic.



The beginnings of this work were framed by the need to explore the impact of within-year teacher turnover on students. In order to understand the context of teacher turnover, it was necessary to explore teacher turnover in general, then move to the specific workings of within-year teacher turnover, then chronic within-year teacher turnover. This present study revealed the scope of teacher attrition, including current rates. It also included the most common reasons why teachers leave, including burnout and job dissatisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2021), as the most prevalent reasons, despite the commonly held belief that it is a lack of monetary compensation as a driving force behind teacher resignation (Camelo & Ponczek, 2021). Once I gained an understanding of the milieu around teacher turnover, I began to more purposefully seek out the other half of the equation: the impact of this phenomenon on students.

The extant research was helpful for understanding the more quantitative ways of understanding how students were impacted when teachers left within the school year. Students who experience within-year teacher turnover have slightly worse achievement scores than their counterparts who have not had teachers leave within the school year (Redding & Henry, 2019). That was important to know, as it did signify a measure of students' well-being in schools; however, it did not come close to capturing what this might mean for students emotionally. Students were represented as numbers rather than individual experiences surrounding teacher turnover. Very few studies included student voices around the matter, but they did open the door to explore the student perspective of the phenomenon (Id-Deen, 2016; Kloss, 2013). To fully appreciate the impact of teacher turnover, it was necessary to explore more stories and seek out the voices of those who had been mostly left out of the equation.

Throughout this work, I held fast to the idea of empowering the voices of students who had encountered chronic within-year teacher turnover. However, I also had to learn to balance

their voices with my own positionality within this narrative inquiry. Working alongside participants and holding their stories through interviews, reflection, and the creation of narratives forced me to examine my own identity as a teacher. Several times throughout this work, while listening and relistening to their stories, I wanted to challenge and push back against what I heard. Often, it was when one of the student participants would make a comment that was highly critical of their teachers. I reflected on this in a research journal:

I almost interrupted an interview today to try to challenge the actions of Mr. M. I wanted to question this student about how he thought that letting students do what they want and handing them the answers was good teaching. That goes against what I believe in as a teacher. Not that students shouldn't have some time and opportunity to decompress from their studies, but that I believe teacher and student relationships should be predicated on academic rigor and challenge and the understanding of what students go through. I caught myself, luckily. Remind yourself that this is a chance to hold space for their stories and their experiences as they felt in the moment and as they feel about them now. This is not the space to have them evaluate teachers. Remember that this is about what it meant/means for them as they experienced it.

My identity as a teacher served as a way to know which details to seek out through the course interviews and the inquiry, but it had to be reined in at moments such as the one above where it sought to critique rather than clarify. Teaching is a journey, and the moves I would make as a teacher now would not be the same moves I made as a teacher in my past. It would be a disservice to the aims of this work and fellow teachers to relive these stories with an air of placing blame.

Within this inquiry, I also had the opportunity to explore the side of my identity defined as being a teacher who has stayed when other teachers left and being a teacher who has left within the year. There were many moments of commiseration as student participants described the chaos created in the void of vacancies when teachers left. I had many experiences that aligned with that, and often their accounts as students and my accounts as a teacher would have overlapping sentiments around the unraveling control of those experiences. Another meaningful reflection was hearing about these encounters of within-year teacher turnover and the students' thoughts and emotions surrounding those instances. It made me reflect on my very recent scenario of leaving my own classroom within the school year this study was conducted. I could not help but hear my participant's accounts and wonder how much their positive and negative sentiments echoed those of the students I had left.

This sense of holding the entirety of an identity, then zooming in to the more singular parts played throughout this inquiry, for myself and with my participants. Gee (2017) refers to this notion as *subtypes* or the sense of being aware of the multiple different identities that exist within a singular identity. Getting to know them as people, as students, as students who had these specific experiences was crucially important in understanding their stories and shaping the narratives to best reflect them as individuals. That is what premised spending an entire interview getting to know each student's school history and having each student participant bring in an artifact that reflected who they were as a student. Those conversations created an invaluable context to each student's past, present, and future and how these encounters of within-year teacher turnover were situated for each participant.

I explored these experiences of having multiple teachers leave within the school year by asking participants to share about their teachers as they were, their moment of departure, and the

aftermath. Moving with each student from the beginnings to the ends of each account helped create a greater context for who students were at different stages of these events. In the restorying of their narratives, I considered the chronological aspect of these stories and the impact that each encounter had for students.

While shaping these stories into the narratives, it was of utmost importance to maintain the voice of the student participants as much as possible. Member checking became not only a way to establish validity and trustworthiness, it became the lifeline to ensuring that I was not misinterpreting their stories. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind, there needed to be a sense of *wakefulness* as a narrative inquirer or awareness of the collaborative relationship between researcher and participant. Throughout all of our conversations, I would always seek clarification with the participants to ensure that I heard their stories reflected their truth. I would frequently check in about small and large details, but I would also seek clarification for more nebulous emotions. As a teacher and acutely aware of various types of teacher and student styles, I was able to navigate points of clarification by asking questions such as: “When you say you were shocked that your teacher left was it the type shocked connected to a positive or negative emotion? Or shocked as in a more neutral surprise?”.

I sought to create opportunities for student participant voice through these clarifications and had to balance the voice that emerged as the research texts were taking shape.

One of the researcher’s dilemmas in the composing of the research texts is captured by the analogy of living on the edge, trying to maintain one’s balance, as one struggles to express one’s own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to tell of the participants’ storied experiences and to represent their voices, all the

while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voice. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147)

This sense of *living on the edge* was cause for constant reflection as it was easier to write from my own perspective. However, much of the final narratives were constructed using the participant's own words. This was a purposeful choice made to ensure that their voices were at the forefront. Participants also reviewed these narratives to ensure that my interpretations did not supersede their emerging stories.

I also experienced this when considering when to insert the impact that their relived stories were having on me. I realized that many of the salient emotions and thoughts within their stories either echoed my own with similar experiences or caused me to reflect on situations. In the end, I made slight notations of those moments, only when it seemed pertinent to add a teaching perspective to a thread of their stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommended being aware of the educational researcher's identity as an expert in the field and acknowledging it while also checking it accordingly throughout the inquiry process.

When I moved from interviews and interim research texts to more explicitly analyzing and restorying the narratives, I had to find a process to negotiate the vast amounts of data generated. Navigating across the accounts and encounters while also allowing space for the dimensions of temporality, space, and social, while also keeping in mind the theoretical underpinnings of this work was a nonlinear progression. Allowing myself to move in what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to as the *back-and-forthing* truly allowed narratives to emerge and gain shape. Though initial threads were evident even during the interview and interim research text portion of this study, it was not until the narratives were realized that they could be analyzed both for each participant and compared across all of the narratives for all

three. In restorying for each participant, I reflected on the tensions they expressed in their stories and in their interviews and where the emotional weight of each experience fell. This led to narratives built with a sense of impact from each participant rather than stories told chronologically.

I had to rely on diagrams in order to help create a process for restorying. Because of the nonlinear task of taking bits of conversation and weaving them into narratives, it was essential to focus on what guided this work. The use of visuals was crucial for helping to remember the lenses, theories, and literature that undergird this work and that were constantly at play throughout the analysis.

After all had been restoried for each participant, I needed to analyze how the emergent threads connected across all of the participants. It was necessary to look at the stories from different angles and perspectives. I looked for different stories within the stories. For example, I categorized the stories based on reasons why the original teachers left (i.e., maternity leave, another position, quit the profession, or unknown). I also categorized based on if the original teacher had given a warning or not to the students that they were going to leave. Another categorization I did, which was very helpful, was to consider the impact of each encounter as innately positive, negative, or neutral. In this regard, I considered if the participants named any part of each encounter as positive or beneficial, or overall negative and disruptive, or had little to no emotion around the event. This led to one of the significant findings that will be discussed.

Another means of analyzing these narratives was to return to the major theories that undergird the design of this study. Each of the primary three that underpin teacher/ student relationships, Care ethics (Noddings, 1984), Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1969), and Social-Emotional Learning, I used as a lens to help see beyond my and my

participant's collective interpretation of events to the larger view. I generated reflective and guiding questions by asking larger ones: What would Care Ethics ask of these encounters? What would Attachment Theory ask of these encounters? What would Social Emotional Learning ask of these encounters? In this way, I could push back on some assumptions that I might have been making and analyze these narratives with different theoretical lenses. At this point, the realizations helped deepen my understandings of the emergent threads by keeping the analysis grounded in the theoretical construction of this work. I had to balance both Bruner's (1986) *landscapes of action* or the recounting of events, and *landscapes of consciousness* or the attention to why those things matter.

As the analysis continued, dominant threads presented themselves both through their frequency within individual participant's stories and how they connected across all narratives. Through the combination of reflection, revisiting stories, and use of the visual arts, I was able to name the more dominant threads that I recognized as the experiences around 1) academic and relational challenges, 2) no neutrality, and 3) context of turnover mattered. These three findings were by far the most prevalent threads across stories, codes, and the use of various forms of analyzing the data.

### **Narrative Threads**

#### **Thread One: Students' Experiences Of Chronic Within- Year Teacher Turnover Presented Relational And Academic Challenges**

Throughout the time spent with participants, we moved from reliving stories about themselves as students and their overall school histories to the unique encounters they had of within-year teacher turnover. We started to move through these stories by first discussing their memories of the original teachers: how they taught, how they related to students, how they made

each participant feel. Then we moved into how they departed and if there were reasoning provided or if there were any warning of their departure. Finally, we shifted into the aftermath of the departure concerning who took over for the original teacher and how the new structures felt for each participant. The three dimensions of the temporal, spatial, and social guided this movement by creating various points to reflect upon within each story. This reflection helped draw out the details around the encounters these student participants had of within-year teacher turnover.

I began this inquiry with certain preconceived notions in mind about what I might expect throughout this study. Some of those notions were built upon my own encounters of within-year teacher turnover. I had seen both of the teacher sides of the issue, having been a teacher who stayed and saw the aftermath of quite a few teacher's mid-year departures, as well as a teacher who left to pursue another position in the building only a few weeks into the first quarter of the year. At the forefront of my initial thinking were the reactions I had seen from students from both sides, with many being negative.

I also developed notions from the literature, which asserted that students who had experienced instability in their teacher/ student relationships, including within-year teacher turnover, tend to be negatively impacted in various manners (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Redding and Henry (2019) established that within-year teacher turnover led to decreases in academic achievement test results, but there were also other aspects of students to consider. Hamre and Pianta (2001) asserted the impact of relationships on student behavior, where positive relationships can lead to less aggressive behavior and lack of relationships can lead to more pronounced aggression. Such instability has also impacted peer relationships (Bronfenbrenner,



1979; Luckner & Pianta, 2011), student attitudes of school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Silva et al., 2011), and school attendance and involvement (Rey et al., 2007).

With this knowledge in mind, I came into the inquiry space not necessarily looking for corroboration of these types of impacts within the stories of the student participants, but rather an awareness that they might exist as challenges they might likely express. While I did see some of these present with their stories, they also spoke to challenges that I had not previously been able to speak to. Some of their reflections showed understandings about their relationship to school in general and relationships to their teachers and contradictory to the extant literature, and some of their reflections upheld current findings. As I carried their stories and sat with them through the restorying process, I found that there was a thread around challenges each participant encountered in light of their encounters of within-year teacher turnover. As I compared the stories from all three participants, I saw the thread emerge across all of their accounts. This thread was around the relational and academic challenges that each participant spoke directly and indirectly through their accounts.

While I initially believed there would be named relational challenges between the student and either the teacher who left or the teacher who was the replacement, I found that in addition to challenges regarding relationships with teachers were also challenges concerning relationships with peers. Furthermore, each student expressly named challenges aligned with academic goals or performance within their encounters.

### ***John***

John often gave the impression that neither relationships nor academics were particularly important to him in his past or present. Even with his dismissive tone, the details he focused on within the interviews and the restorying process revealed that even if he was not overtly

intentional about those ideas, they were still something he observed acutely. He did not necessarily obsess over academics, but he still wanted to get his work done and do well. He did not worry about having relationships with teachers or other peers but was also highly aware of interactions surrounding him. These were areas that floated in his periphery, even if they were not at the forefront of his attention. They were also areas that created challenges for him within his encounters of within-year teacher turnover.

John relayed the academic challenge in reliving his stories was the lack of challenge he perceived in his first instance of within-year turnover. When his initial teacher, Ms. K left on maternity leave and the new teacher, who went unnamed, replaced her for the year, there was a clear sense of disruption to John's learning. "He spent most of his time correcting my classmates, so I got left alone to do my work". John relayed the feeling of being stuck overall in elementary school and middle school because he could not take advanced classes. This encounter made him feel stymied in that he was stuck in a typical class doing the work but not necessarily learning or getting any attention that might help him flourish. He was left to his own devices, which gave him a challenge of teaching himself.

The more prevalent challenge in these encounters was the challenge of his peers. At the onset of this inquiry, I had imagined that participants would experience relational challenges with either the teachers who left or the teachers who replaced them, but John's examples show that one of the most challenging relations of within-year teacher turnover is the dynamic shift with peers.

In the encounter just described, John stated that he felt "not annoyance, but aggravation" toward his peers when the new teacher took over. The new teacher tried to lead the lessons and tried to be positive with the class, but John's classmates constantly pushed back the rest of the

year. As John best described it: “they collapsed the structure”. The misbehavior created a situation where the new teacher spent most of his time and energy trying to redirect off-task and disruptive behavior, and he spent minimal time on any student who wanted to learn. John reflected that his aggravation stemmed from watching his classmates act out and that it came at the price of his education.

### *Sterling*

Within Sterling’s narratives, there were parallels to what John experienced concerning relational and academic challenges. Sterling was more outright in revealing that she was indignant with some of the behaviors that she witnessed in her teacher turnover encounters.

Sterling’s second instance of within-year teacher turnover demonstrated the most intense reaction to the challenges created by the phenomenon. In 7th grade, Sterling’s social studies teacher, Ms. J, unexpectedly left within the school year and was replaced with the militaristic Mr. K. Surviving the class turned into a challenge as Mr. K soon demonstrated that he had no control over the class and little patience in dealing with misbehavior. Her classmates would interrupt lessons and back-talk Mr. K, and he, in turn, would yell at the entire class and give group punishments. Sterling had to learn quickly to separate herself from the disruptive half of class because “I did not want to have any part of that”. She describes similar irritation to John with her classmates’ behavior, but her encounter also revealed disdain for the new teacher. “They shouldn’t have been acting out, but he was the adult and shouldn’t have been yelling nonstop”. Sterling felt the challenge of avoiding the punitive eye of her new teacher by separating herself physically away from them. She drew a line between herself and them by dragging her desk away from any student who was misbehaving. Like-minded students moved similarly to set themselves apart from their disruptive counterparts.

The strategy worked to remove attention from themselves. Mr. K gave this group work and left them alone while he spent most of his time dealing with the rest of the class. It was adequate for dealing with one challenge, but Sterling still had the challenge of knowing that she was not learning as much as she could be. Even though she completed the work and did her best in that scenario, she felt that there were things that she did not learn that year and that she just survived 7th-grade social studies rather than thriving in it.

This mentality repeated itself in another encounter, even though the circumstances differed. In 9th grade, Sterling's Honors Physics teacher, Mrs. P, left on maternity leave, and a long term sub took over for the remainder of the year, Mr. M. He was, according to Sterling, much nicer and more laid back than Mr. K had been, but there was a similarity that echoed her previous encounter. Mr. M's approach to class was to give students work, give them the answers, and then let them have time to themselves. For a few weeks, Sterling reveled in the freedom to complete work and have some free time: "I have to admit, I got pretty lazy". She realized that she got to relax a bit for a portion of her school day, but it came at the cost of her learning material. As someone who valued her sense of knowledge, she knew that she had to hold herself accountable. Her challenge became to push herself to learn the course material and push herself past the notion that Mrs. P would have advanced her more as a student. Sterling had to learn a lesson of autonomy and self-discipline in this encounter, as Mr. M kept his instructional approach the rest of the year.

### ***Harris***

Working alongside Harris rekindled my appreciation for the potential of positive teacher and student relationships. Within his interviews, he had many moments of self-realization as he relived his encounters of within-year teacher turnover out loud. Harris' reflections showcased

that he was acutely attuned to teacher and student relationships, ideally balancing academic and relational care. He explicitly delineated such a distinction within our conversation, and throughout his experiences when he stated, “Mr. L was a content connection, Mr. M was a relationship connection, and Mr. V was both of those combined”.

In his first encounter, Harris had a technology teacher in 8th grade whose instructional approach he greatly appreciated. The teacher was very knowledgeable in the content because of his many years of experience and his role as the site tech support. He had to stay up to date with new technology integration. Harris learned many new skills about editing programs that he could directly apply to a personal project he was deeply connected with. “All of my teachers have been really smart, but the way he knew all these different technological programs and how he gave us problems to solve, really made him stand out as a teacher”. When Mr. L had to switch his position from part-time teacher to full-time tech support, Harris was put in a similar position as the other participants. He wanted to learn, but the class fell into disarray in Mr. L’s absence with a series of rotating subs. His project, a film capturing major moments of the 8th-grade class, was a passion project so he continued working and was left to his own devices by substitute teachers who were too focused on keeping the rest of the class in line. Harris's challenge was maintaining the self-motivation to keep working on his project when the rest of the class had stopped progress on theirs. Because this was high value to Harris and something he had already invested a great amount of time in, he kept working on it. He struggled with some components and wished Mr. L was available to provide insight. “Things go wrong with technology. There were parts that took me forever, and I would keep thinking that Mr. L would have a quicker way of doing this. I missed having that support”. Despite this challenge, Harris delivered a quality presentation that was shown to the entire 8th-grade class at the end of the year.

Within Harris' last encounter of within-year teacher turnover, he experienced both being academically challenged and, of more significance for Harris, the relational impact of a teacher leaving. When Harris' Business teacher, Mr. V, told him and a group of his close friends that he was quitting his position at the end of the Fall semester, Harris was devastated. He could understand why his teacher was leaving, given the stress of COVID related measures on top of everyday teaching:

I really appreciate what my teachers have had to deal with this year. A lot of people don't listen or do what they are supposed to, and teachers have to try to teach and police kids and be worried about their families. Mr. V said he was a bit worried about catching COVID, and I know that it must be hard to work in a place with so many people who constantly break the mask rule.

Even with this understanding, Harris found it hard to let go of how his teacher had led the classroom in content and the relationships he created. The teacher who took over Mr. V's position, Mr. G, seemed knowledgeable to Harris about Business. However, even though the classroom stayed under control and there was not much disruption in the transition, Harris was bothered by the stark differences between the two teaching styles. Harris had enjoyed Mr. V's ability to create highly relatable content. Mr. G taught directly from the textbook and did not make the subject relative to his new classes. The class was learning, but Harris knew they would be learning in an even more engaging manner if Mr. V were still the teacher.

I can't help but think of what class would be like if Mr. V were still here and in charge. To be clear, Mr. G is doing a good job. It's nowhere close to being like when my other teacher left. That class didn't learn a thing the rest of the year. Mr. G is doing a good job at teaching us, but I know, I just know, that Mr. V would

have made the rest of this year great in Business. We're going to the FBLA competition soon. I wish he could be there. It feels like I'm talking about him like he's gone, like dead, and I know he's not because we chat every day, but it feels like that feeling. Like grief because I know I'm missing out on something, but it's not grief because he's not gone. Class just isn't going to be what it was again.

The severity of Harris comparison of the loss of his teacher to quitting to grief struck me because of its poignancy. Harris seemed to be experiencing a loss on par with that of a person passing. His intense reaction helped position the possibility that teacher turnover, especially within-year turnover, signifies the severing of a relationship for some students. With such an ending came very intense emotions that warrant follow-up and care for the party who had been left behind.

### **Thread Two: Students' Experiences Of Chronic Within-Year Teacher Turnover Reflected No Neutrality**

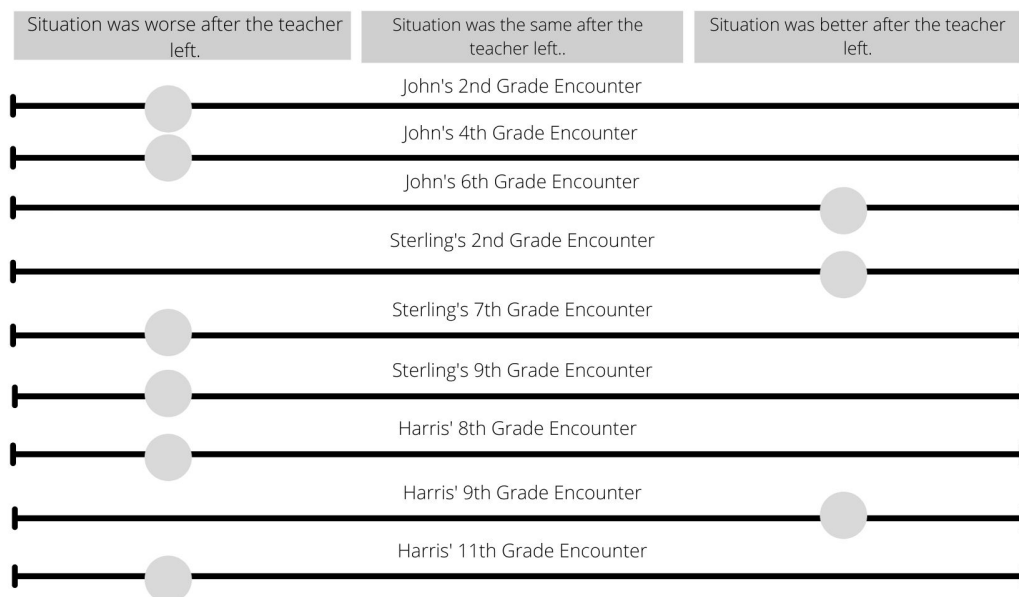
As I worked with participants and we moved from reliving stories to the restorying process, I kept in mind the research questions that guided this inquiry. With continuous reflection on these questions and the stories that participants and I had shaped, I found the need to reconceptualize the stories in various ways. After reviewing notes, transcripts, audio of each interview, initial In Vivo codes, and memos, I tried to envision the stories in alternative ways. As James (2017) suggests in trying to blueprint her own process of narrative inquiry data analysis, "At some point of course I had to take a deep breath and simply take the plunge, stop getting tied up in knots and going round in circles and approach this task squarely in the eye"(p. 3103).

In my life, I have always utilized the visual arts as both a means of escape and deepening my own thinking. Throughout this inquiry, I kept memos, a journal of my own experience of leaving my students within the school year, and a sketchbook for watercolors that I would turn to

when the restorying and analysis process became too large to hold in the written word. From this process stemmed the idea of using visual representations of stories to help me process and find emerging threads within each story and connect threads across all the stories. I began to play with the data and the encounters from each student to see if I could create categories or think about this collection of encounters in different ways. Through this, I created timelines of events to help better understand the temporal dimension of each participant. This served to also remind me of the Deweyan concept of experience and that “all of our experiences develop from and lead to further experiences” (James, 2017, p. 3102). In capturing each encounter on a timeline, I also wanted to explore each encounter as its own unit before seeing how it connected to other encounters for participants.

In this vein, I explored the research questions more acutely concerning the potential impact I was feeling when reliving these stories alongside participants. I was inspired to create this type of category by a comment from one of my participants, Sterling, who stated, “If I were to rate that experience, it would be a negative 12 out of 10”. Taken with this idea, I began to play around with the concept of ranking and how it might be applied in analyzing the data to understand how the participants described their experiences. By reviewing all of the data, I began to see categories within their responses related to the academic and relational components outlined previously, and began, for each encounter, to ask this set of questions: 1) For each encounter, did the participant’s situation improve? 2) For each encounter, did the participant’s situation get worse? 3) For each encounter, did the participant’s situation remain the same? And 4) Was the teacher who left or the teacher who replaced them a direct or indirect cause of the situation improving or getting worse or staying the same? In answering these questions, I created the following diagram:

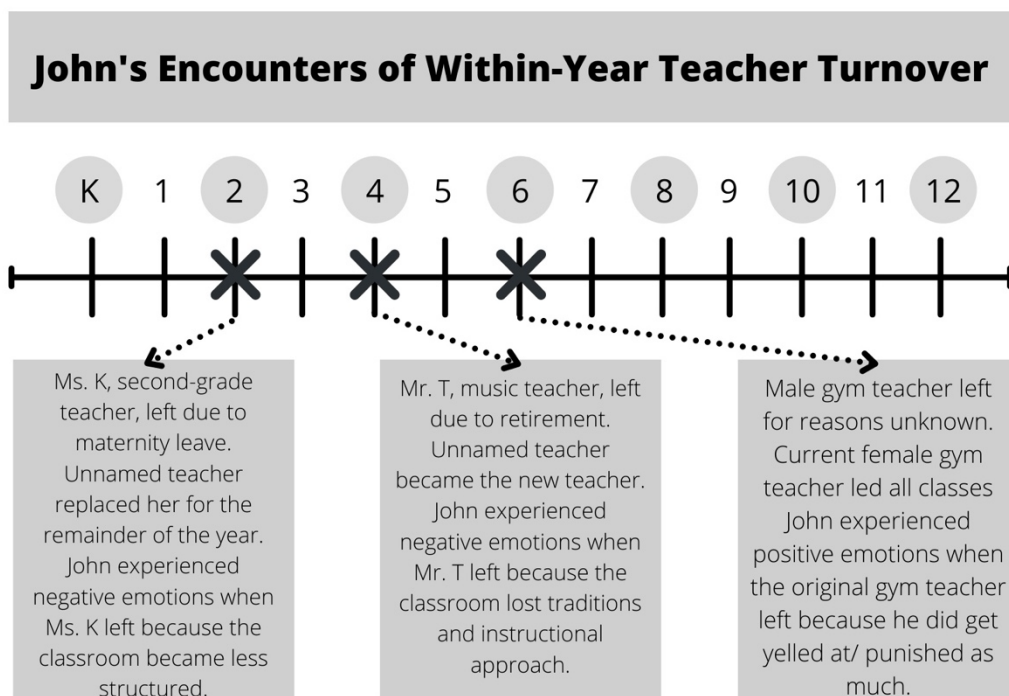


**Figure 5***Impact of Within-Year Turnover Encounters.*

This metric was not intended to be used as a valid or reliable quantitative tool but to process qualitative data. I shared this diagram with my participants (individually so that only their encounters were showing) to ensure the accuracy of representation. I encouraged them to push back on my thinking if they felt it did not accurately capture their experience. After sitting with me and seeing the diagram, all of them agreed that how I had categorized each encounter matched their own feelings and thoughts toward their experiences.

**Figure 6**

*John's Encounters of Within-Year Teacher Turnover.*



### **John**

Understanding John holistically helped situate his reactions to his teachers who left within the year. He was very stoic in all encounters and expressed steadfast opinions about how teachers should deliver the instruction. This very firm line of thinking appeared throughout the stories he shared but was most apparent when he discussed disappointment with teachers or experiences of school from his past. Even though he expressed such criticism and admitted that he had very few teachers whose relational style with students he appreciated, John seemed by all accounts to flourish as a student based on relatively high grades and the ability to self-select Honors and concurrent enrollment classes that were academically stimulating.

Even though his responses indicated that he had more instances of critique for his past teachers, all of his encounters indicated potentially positive and negative interactions. These

reactions were with either the teacher who left in each instance or the replacement teacher, and the environment created therein, who took their place. In his first account of within-year teacher turnover, John directly expressed moving from a relationship that can be described as positive with his previous teacher, Ms. K, to an environment where “the other students acted up with the new teacher. The structures collapsed”. For John, it was not that the new teacher was doing anything purposeful to bring about these negative feelings of class. The sense of mismanagement and his classmates constantly pushing back against the new teacher’s instruction led to challenges socially, as in John’s aggravation for his classmates, and academically, as in John having to lead his own instruction.

In his subsequent chronological encounter of within-year teacher turnover, John had his most pronounced experience of having a positive relationship with the teacher who left to a more negative interaction with the replacement teacher. John loved the traditions that his music teacher from Kindergarten to 4th grade established: “They were traditions that showed that Mr. T really cared for his students” . When Mr. T retired only a few weeks into John’s 4th-grade year, the new teacher did not continue these traditions and replaced music with different structures. Although his conversation did not reveal any negative thoughts about the teacher herself, his story captured great disappointment in losing those traditions and the new teacher's less hands-on approach. This encounter marked a point of losing interest in music as a subject in general.

In the last encounter John experienced in 6th grade with his gym teacher, I found a neutrality in John’s response. However, upon reflecting on what John said about his experience and how he said it, there was reason to believe that this was not a case where he felt no emotion about one teacher leaving and another taking over. In this case, however, there was marginal

improvement when the former teacher left within the year and when the other gym teacher took over all classes.

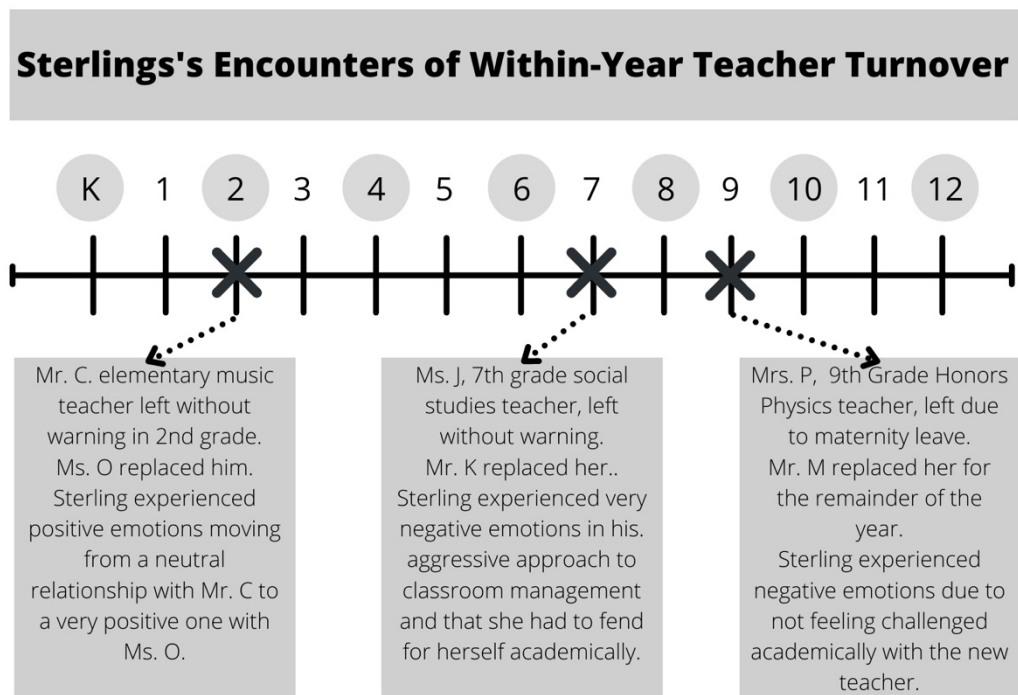
She was not much better, but she was nicer than him. Maybe she only seemed better because she could only yell at so many kids at a time, and there were so many of us in gym class so it was easier to stay hidden or not get grouped with the kids being ridiculous. They were annoying, but not as annoying as the other guy. I was glad when he didn't come back.

John expressed a preference for the teacher who replaced the old, even if it was slight. This instance showed John's awareness of the situation he was in and a lack of neutrality. Even if it was minor, it mattered that a teacher left, and the position was taken over by someone who made the class marginally better than it was before. Whereas John previously found a level of disdain for classmates and had to fend for himself due to a distracted teacher, that dynamic led to him being able to fare better in his gym class.

Two of the three encounters that John described were instances of moving from a positive relationship to a more negative one. The last was an experience that moved from negative to more positive. Even though the former were clearer in that change, the last still cannot be described as neutral. John revealed a preference for the situation created by the teacher that took over.

**Figure 7**

*Sterling's Encounters of Within-Year Teacher Turnover.*



### ***Sterling***

Sterling was much more expressive of emotions throughout the entirety of our time together, and this came through in her reflection about the changes that occurred with transitions from one teacher to another in all of her encounters. She was very passionate about academics and doing well in school, even if her attitude toward school as a whole had switched to “just going through the motions”. Despite this perspective, it was obvious that her ability to learn was of paramount importance to her.

Within her first experience of within-year teacher turnover, Sterling’s responses about her original teacher, Mr. C, were seemingly neutral. She did not recall caring particularly about the class or him as a teacher. When he left unexpectedly, her friend seemed to have a difficult time with it, but Sterling did not seem to mind as much. However, when the new teacher took over,

Ms. O, Sterling beamed with an appreciation for the transformation of the class. “Music felt much more hands-on with Ms. O. She actually played the piano and got choir going. That’s when I first joined and I’ve been doing it ever since”. Sterling’s reflection of Ms. O exuded happiness and a sense of awakening to a subject matter that she would continue into the present. This origin was a major source of positive interaction for Sterling as she shared how much Ms. O made music matter for her as a young girl.

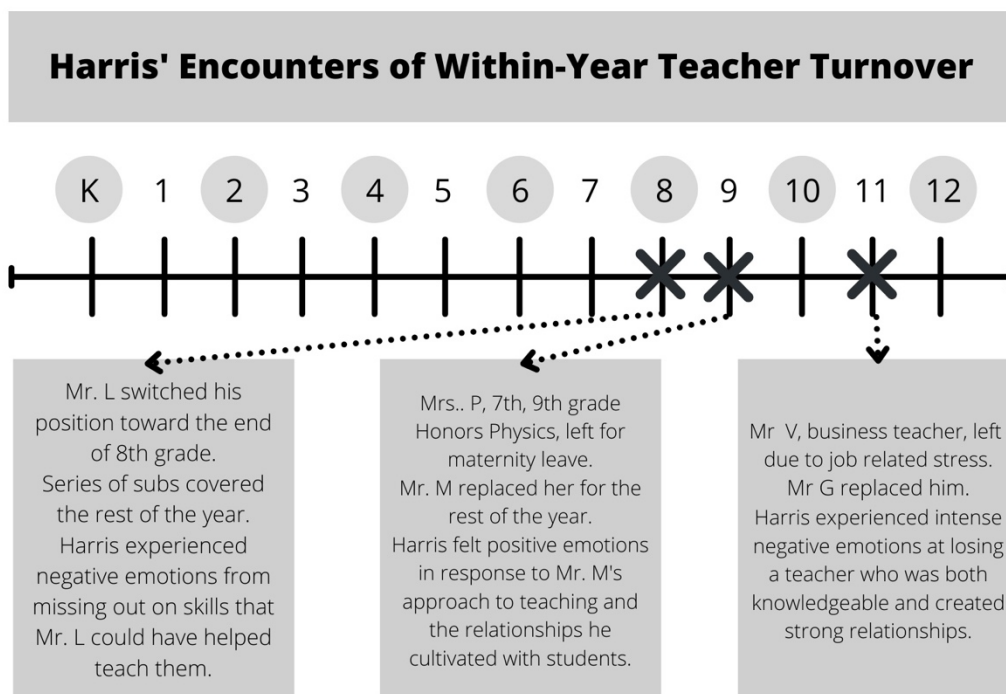
Unfortunately, in Sterling’s next encounter of within-year teacher turnover, far more negative emotions surrounded the new teacher’s arrival. Sterling admitted that although she appreciated her 7th-grade social studies teacher, Ms. J, a bit more than other teachers because “she was nice. I remember her checking in with students each day”, her sudden departure from teaching did not seem to cause Sterling much distress. She stated that she was shocked by its suddenness but that Ms. J had also often talked about loving an earlier career throughout their time together. After a few weeks of rotating subs, Mr. K took over the class, and Sterling recalled how terrible that class became for her. What started out as a slight disruption caused by the departure of Ms. J and the necessity of substitutes turned into outright chaos and constant power struggles. Sterling set a firm delineation between the students who acted out versus students, such as herself, who were trying to stay out of trouble. Mr. K’s approach to management was stern and full of yelling and class punishments. Sterling felt the structures fall apart as she struggled to keep the intense ire of the new teacher’s management attention away from her. She physically moved her desk into a group of like-minded students who just wanted to be left out of the yelling matches and get their work done. Sterling’s account of this encounter felt more like a soldier making it through a battle than a 7th-grade social studies class. Even the way she spoke Mr. K’s name made it obvious that she had quite a bit of disdain not only for how

the class turned into chaos but for his specific role in creating a hostile classroom. It was markedly a negative experience for her within her school history.

Sterling's final experience of within-year teacher turnover was luckily not as terrible as the former but still seemed to cause her some negative emotions. In 9th grade, when Sterling's Honors Physics teacher, Mrs. P, left for maternity leave, she was replaced for the remainder of the year by Mr. M. Sterling demonstrated a clear understanding of why Mrs. P left and was excited for her to have her baby, but also shared that Mrs. P was a strong teacher who challenged the class. Mr. M had a very different approach in that he would give students the answers to the work, then would allow a plethora of time for students to hang out.

I enjoyed it at first, for a week or so. High school was so much work as a freshman, so I admit that I slacked off. But after a couple of weeks, I realized that I had to hold myself accountable or I wouldn't learn anything. The rest of the class enjoyed their free time in Mr. M's class, but I felt that I needed to push myself because no one else was going to do it for me.

Sterling initially appreciated the new teacher's laid-back approach in this encounter but found that it impeded her educational goals. In order to keep learning and challenging herself, she had to resist the temptation to take the answers and spend the rest of class wasting time. As Sterling stated in one instance, "I love being a goofball, but I love learning a bit more". The situation was negative in that Sterling had to demonstrate a great amount of autonomy and restraint, but also because she named that she did not feel as academically challenged as she had with Mrs. P. Her previous teacher had pushed her, in a good way, to learn the content. Sterling expressed that she believes she would have learned much more had Mrs. P been able to complete the school year with them.

**Figure 8***Harris' Encounters of Within-Year Teacher Turnover***Harris**

Working alongside Harris and his encounters of within-year teacher turnover was an enlightening experience due to his highly reflective and candid nature. Even though his emotions ran steadily throughout all interviews and conversations, he shared his inner thinking in great detail for each occurrence of turnover. Though he admitted to being immature and wasting time as a student, each of his examples showcased a young man who was thoughtful and very aware of the dynamics of his teachers.

In his first account of turnover, Harris shared that his technology teacher, Mr. L, had to leave his position in the latter portion of the year to attend to his other role as site technical support. No new teacher took up the position, but rather, the class has a series of rotating subs and various teachers who would cover the class. Harris would never know one day to the next



who would be in charge of his technology classroom. Harris had learned from Mr. L to be self-reliant and to pursue the answers to challenges; in that way, Harris continued to work on a film project he had started and keep himself out of trouble as the rest of the class turned to off-task and disruptive behaviors. Although he said it was fine, he expressed negative emotions, specifically disappointment, around not being able to continue learning skills from Mr. L.

Harris' subsequent encounter was an interesting one to analyze, given that another participant discussed the same situation with very different emotions. Harris also had Mrs. P for 9th grade Honors Physics. He also expressed similar thoughts about Mrs. P as a teacher who challenged the class. In addition, he echoed the same sentiments about not begrudging Mrs. P for leaving, given that she was having a baby. Where Sterling found Mr. M's approach to the class challenging due to being too laid back and therefore having to keep herself on track, Harris revealed in his relationship with Mr. M. Cautious throughout our interview to honor Mrs. P's teaching, he lauded Mr. M's actions of creating a space for Harris and his friends to visit during lunch as well how he structured class. "I think students just want to get the work done. Mr. M didn't draw things out for no reason. Plus he gave us time back to unwind. It was good motivation to get things done". While I carried with me my own view on this approach, it was important to remind myself that in this situation, where I hadn't been directly privy to the instruction of this class, for Harris this was a very positive interaction and relationship that developed with the new teacher. As Harris would remind, it was not that his relationship with Mrs. P had been negative in any way, but with Mr. M he found a teacher that he connected with and who created a space for the personal within the teacher and student relationship.

Harris' very recent encounter of within-year teacher turnover was the most pronounced as far as the devastating reaction which occurred following his teacher who left. No matter what we

discussed during any given conversation or interview, the subject would inevitably turn back to this recent encounter and how much Harris missed his teacher. At the start of our interviews, it had only been a month since his Business teacher, Mr. V, had resigned his position and been replaced with another teacher, Mr. G. When Harris described hearing the news that his teacher was leaving, the sadness he felt was evident on his face and body language. With Mr. V, he had found a role model not only for the content he was learning but for life. “Mr. V really cared about his students and listened. I think more people, not just teachers, could do more of those things”. Harris had a solid relationship with Mr. V built upon the personal connection and respect for the cultivation of teacher-student relationships and Mr. V’s knowledge of the content he taught. “In Mr. V I found a teacher who was a balance of having good relationships with students, but he was also very good at his subject”. Due to this, Harris struggled with Mr. V’s departure and could not help but compare how Mr. V ran class to how the new teacher, Mr. G, changed the classroom dynamic. Admittedly, Harris tried not to keep the comparison in his head, but he said he could not help thinking that his new teacher fell short of his former teacher.

Harris’ encounters demonstrated a combination of both positive and negative experiences. Some stemmed from the relational aspect of teachers, and one stemmed from the teacher as a source of skill attainment and learning. In exploring his stories alongside him, I found that even though Harris had negative experiences with teachers leaving, he still carried positive intentions toward teachers and his relationship with learning and school in general.

### **Thread Three: Student Experiences Revealed That Context and Teachers Mattered**

As detailed previously, one measure that helped support my analysis of these experiences was to utilize the visual arts as a means of processing. After reviewing transcripts or notes, it was

a common practice for me to pause in the work and, holding these stories within, I would watercolor. The process of water coloring itself and the subject I captured during this time, sunsets and sunrises, became increasingly meaningful as the threads emerged and began to weave together. There are many rules or guidelines for water coloring, but one of the most important is letting one layer dry before you paint on the next. Otherwise, the colors will bleed together, and you might lose definition or shape. I had to give each step time to process. With so much data collected through narrative inquiry, this concept translated well. Sometimes, a story had to sit with me as I reflected on the temporal, spatial, or social lenses and the research questions that I was asking. In Vivo codes would come to the forefront, then disperse into the background. It was essential to sit with the stories and let them process.

### **Figure 9**

#### *Water Color Memo*



The watercolor journal I created during this time was full of one theme: sunrises and sunsets. Those were the perfect topic for this particular medium as the gradients and swirls lent themselves to how the water ebbed and swirled. After my tenth or so painting, I began to see a connection between this subject matter and the stories that I was trying to analyze and process. In

my last interview with Sterling, she said something that solidified the metaphor I had created in watercolor and was coming through as a thread through the stories. She was comparing her 7th-grade teacher who left to another teacher she had at the time and the differences in the relationships between the two.

If my theatre teacher would have left, especially like that with no warning, I would have been wrecked. Devastated. That class and that teacher I loved, so I'm glad she never left like that. It matters who leaves. I mean, it matters based on the subject they teach. If you like that subject, then it matters. If they leave without telling you, then it matters. But what's important to one person might not matter to another. Like my friend in second grade was so upset that our teacher left. I didn't mind as much because music wasn't a passion of mine...yet. It matters if you like the teacher; if there's a relationship there. Or if things get worse after they leave, like with Ms. J and Mr. K. That can make it matter more.

Her insight made me question the subject matter I was painting anew. How was within-year teacher turnover like sunsets and sunrises? I thought about the instances of turnover where the participants felt like their situation got worse after their teacher left. It was like a sunset that bright colors fade into darkness. It is over and gone and exists only in memory, leaving only the night. Then I thought about the instances of turnover where the participants felt as if their situation improved with the new teacher. The emotions were like a sunrise, the dark turning to light and providing a space for hope and new beginnings.

For within-year teacher turnover, each of the participants spoke to this sense that the context of the teachers from the subject matter they taught, or if they left without warning, or how the new teacher took over was significant to the impact it had on them. This context,

however, was potentially different for each individual. One person might view a sunset as spectacular; another may view it and dread the night. One person might view a sunrise as a new beginning, and another might view it with hesitation for what the day will bring. The subjective nature of these based on context inspired the analysis of this final finding.

### ***Points of Understanding***

Across all three participants, there was a theme of understanding why teachers left for specific reasons. This understanding seemed to be the undercurrent for compassion for these instances with teachers.

Though John seemed to present himself as the least emotionally attached to his encounters of within-year teacher turnover, he did express a sense of deep understanding within two of his stories. He shared a sense of understanding for why his teachers left for the first two encounters in 2nd grade and 4th grade. His second-grade teacher left because she had a baby and went on maternity leave for the year. His music teacher left in 4th grade in order to retire. John's reflections of each were full of the justification for their departure and understanding the cause of why they left. Even with his music teacher, whose traditions and care for his students John missed very much, he reflected that "it made sense. He was old, and it was time to retire". It was difficult for John to let this teacher and the rituals he had created go, but he could approach it with a level of understanding.

This sentiment was echoed across all encounters where teachers left due to life changes such as maternity leave. For Sterling and Harris, who had the same teacher who left during their 9th-grade year because of maternity leave, this was evident for both students. They had an appreciation for why their teacher was leaving and wished her and her newborn well. Even in circumstances where the participants missed their original teacher, they were able to balance

their level of frustration as well as create a space for understanding and compassion for their absence. This ability to understand reflected the importance of sharing the context of turnover for students and them finding some ability to more holistically understand the turnover rather than not being given any information about why the teacher left.

Even Harris, whose recent encounter of within-year turnover occurred in the month leading up to our interviews, showed this same understanding when he learned why his teacher was leaving. He was more than disappointed that his teacher would be leaving but repeatedly showed that he wanted his teacher to do what was best. This sense of strong relational ties revealed that even if this situation were not more life-situated like a maternity/ paternity leave or retirement, Harris knew that it was in his teacher's best interest to leave based on the stress he has been experiencing. This showed Harris' deep connection to his teacher and sense of well-being. Just as his teacher, Mr. V, had gone out of his way to check in on Harris' social and emotional health, Harris had the same regard for his teacher.

The establishment of the relationship between teachers and students provided the most chance for hope in these situations. That teachers and students could reach understandings about one another that gave space for more allowance between the two was an encouraging finding. At least for the participants involved here, what predicated these relationships seemed to be a sense of individual connections and fondness for various factors.

### ***Individual Preferences***

Throughout all of these stories, these students shared a sense of preferences that would underpin whether relationships moved from the more positive to negative or vice versa between the teachers who left and the new teachers that replaced them. Several factors have been shown to influence the establishment of positive teacher and student relationships that connect

interpersonally (via teacher warmth), substantively (via content and tasks assigned by the teacher), and pedagogically via the teacher's communication of subject matter (Martin & Collie, 2019; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Subject matter seemed to be one area named throughout all participants. The content being taught seemed, and whether students had an affinity for it, to be a starting place for good relationships. For Harris and his technology and business teachers, the sense that these were people who were not only teaching content that Harris liked but also that they were viewed as highly knowledgeable seemed to be the initial start for Harris' relationship with both teachers. Sterling's reflection about context and her example from 7th grade demonstrated the explicit role that subject matter played in these encounters.

However, comparing her and Harris' encounter of within-year teacher turnover in their 9th grade Honors Physics class revealed how preferences for instructional approaches also mattered for students. The subjective nature of subject matter and how each student might be impacted differently played out across the participant's stories, but most clearly within this example.

For Harris, his learning style seemed to align with teachers who had a more exploratory approach to instruction. His technology teacher in 8th grade utilized a problem-based approach where students were given room to solve a problem by experimenting with newly learned skills. Harris appreciated both the agency developed by the self-selection of problems and solutions and the freedom his teacher allowed to do so. This style also seemed to be present with the new teacher for this 9th grade Honors Physics class. The teacher gave them work, and although this case seemed much more centered around work completion rather than problem solution, Harris still seemed to appreciate the freedom allotted by this teacher. "He was laid back, but I did really

well with getting my work done then having time for my own things”. Harris enjoyed both the content and how it was taught.

For Sterling, however, she had a fondness for the subject, as science had always been an area of strength and interest for her, but she did not work well with the laid-back approach. She missed the challenge that the teacher, Mrs. P, had brought to their instruction. Sterling felt that she was not learning as much because the class became more about work completion and checking things off a list rather than mastering content. She found that she had to master a sense of self-discipline to move through the subject matter and could not rely on the teacher to push her academically. These two experiences highlighted how each student might experience the same situation in very different ways. It also highlighted how the same situation might be taken positively for one student and negatively for another. While this finding was an important realization, it did add to the conundrum of how to best approach the teaching and learning act when so much of relational work comes down to individual preferences.

### **Discussion**

Throughout this inquiry, I worked alongside three participants who shared a range of encounters and experiences about within-year teacher turnover. The research questions were designed as starting points to explore this phenomenon.

- Q1 How do students who have encountered chronic within-year teacher turnover describe their educational experiences?
- Q2 In what ways have those experiences influenced their beliefs about teacher-student relationships?

In designing interviews and analyzing the data and restorying their narratives, the answers to these questions, expressed in the findings, have ramifications for both past stories as well as futures ones of teacher turnover. The participants’ stories did not belong to the past, as the



lessons they carried with them through each experience had built and continued to build who they were as students and people relating to others and their teachers. There was a moment in our last interaction with Harris where this realization was lived before my eyes. “I’m seeing more examples as I’m saying it out loud. Mr. V really changed me and he keeps changing me in good ways. I’m reaching out to more people because of his influence. I’m communicating with more teachers, because of his influence. He’s not technically my teacher anymore, but he’s still teaching me”. In this research I lived the concept “No one leaves a narrative inquiry unchanged” (Clandinin et al., 2016). It was as true for participants as it was for me.

Though this research stemmed from very personal experiences and questions, it became clear the more explicit ways this research might have more widely considered ramifications through the analysis and the findings. “For narrative inquirers, it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 122). The stories that were unfolding throughout this inquiry space resonated within my own experiences and were touchpoints of larger issues of teacher and student relationships. Throughout this inquiry, the reflective action of *back-and-forthing*, to move in and out of moments within the individual experiences to the broader awareness of all three participants to the even more extensive scope of this phenomenon of teacher turnover in general. The lens would zoom in and zoom out constantly through restorying and analyzing this work. Each view was important, just as each justification for the work is essential. Each tells a part of the whole story and cannot be separated from the other, just like the thread of a single story cannot be unentangled from the knot of a person’s whole story. In appreciating and articulating each justification, I found it helpful to move from the personal to the practical to the social justifications in order to reflect

best the sense of starting zoomed in on the small, then zooming out to the larger and more nebulous.

### **Personal Justification**

For the majority of my doctoral journey, I knew that I wanted to focus on the impact of within-year teacher turnover on students because I had witnessed it so many times as a teacher who has stayed. Being a teacher who left her position within the same school year I conducted this study was not planned, but it lent me a perspective on the issue and these stories that enriched the inquiry. When I accepted my new position at the school where I presently work and where this study was conducted, I learned that I would have to teach for a few weeks into the first quarter until a replacement could be hired. I did not mind teaching, as I love teaching English and working with 9th graders. What caused me unrest was how to handle my departure. The beginning of the year is ideal for new relationships and getting to know students and them getting to know me. How do you begin to develop temporary relationships? My administration advised me not to tell my students that I would be leaving until they hired a replacement for fear that students would not behave in class if they knew I would only be their teacher for a little while. I regret following that advice as the first few weeks of the quarter carried on, and I put on a kind of farce where I played the role of their 9th grade, year-long English teacher.

When the new teacher was hired, I had to tell my students. I told them that I was leaving to take a position that the school needed to be filled and one that aligned with my passion as an educator. I told them that they were all wonderful students, and the hardest part of this decision was that I would not get to be their teacher. Some of them showed immediate understanding and said they would miss me, but they were excited that I would get to pursue this ideal role. Others

were outwardly disappointed and questioned if I really had to leave; they told me all the traditions of mine they would miss.

When the new teacher started, I was insistent that she should observe the classes first and get a sense of how the classes worked. Not because I wanted her to copy me, but because I wanted to give a sense of what students were used to. I encouraged her to take what worked and make it her own. She was brand new to teaching and needed some kind of starting place. Over the course of a few weeks, she transitioned to teaching while I took a literal backseat in the room as an observer. When it was my final day, I remember telling the students that I cared about them very much and wanted to keep hearing about the amazing things they would accomplish in their freshman year. I told them that they were in good hands with someone who valued relationships first. Then I walked out of the classroom for the last time as their teacher.

I worried so much about leaving them right. I did my best to learn about them and build relationships, but I still kept a bit of a wall up, knowing that I would be leaving them. I remember rehearsing what I would say to them when I told them the news, wondering if one way of saying it would be better than another. This work helped reveal that each student would feel this experience differently, predicated by their past experiences of teacher and student relationships and the lessons learned therein. I had some power to make this encounter as smooth as possible, but I did not have full control to make all students have good experiences of leaving. As a personal justification, this served as a point of closure, knowing that I had left as best I could.

### **Practical Justification**

The imminent storm of teacher resignation was a looming presence throughout this study and the writing of this dissertation. I recognized, especially as I viewed stories with the temporal

lens, that teacher turnover was an issue that could be viewed both proactively and reactively. Clandinin et al. (2007) asserted that addressing the practical justification means to think “how will it be insightful to changing or thinking differently about the researcher’s own and others’ practice?” (p.25). I found that some implications for practice focused on the reactive of what to do when teachers leave within the year.

This work has demonstrated to me that there is no singular way to leave students right. There are too many variables that are out of a teacher’s hands. As I learned with Sterling and Harris, there is no one-fit teacher that will work for all students. Different students are drawn to different subjects and different instructional approaches. There is no one-fit for leaving. I reflected throughout the inquiry about my own story of leaving within the year. I worried about the steps I took in letting my students know that I was leaving and the transition to their new teacher and hoped to create an ideal situation if there could be, of leaving. As I worked with participants, I realized that each student I had more than likely took my departure differently. Furthermore, when I left the classroom on that last day, I handed over that story of leaving to the new teacher. The stories that my former students would create were in her hands based on some things in her control and some things not.

This was an important realization for the practical justification of this work; there are some things within control in these situations and some things that are not. Future practice cannot account for the ineffable elements such as student preferences for content and instructional style. Although teachers, especially those coming in within the school year, can survey their students to learn these things, some elements might be more fixed than others. One element within teachers' control should be informing students about the reasons for leaving, provided such reasons will not harm students. The stories within this work all shared a great

sense of understanding when teachers revealed the reason behind their departure. The stories also revealed a sense of confusion and surprise when there was no warning before the teacher was gone. Although there are some instances where a teacher will need to depart more immediately than others, and sometimes without warning, all care should be taken to prepare students for the departure to allow them time to process the change.

Another consideration for the practical justification of this work included acknowledging the role of the new teachers who replaced those that left. When possible, special attention should be given to who is hired to fill these roles. It should be noted that school hiring practices are mired with different variables that impact who fills roles. The first, being the time of year in which positions are posted, matters significantly to whether high-quality applicants apply and are potentially hired (Kimbrel, 2019). Lee (2020) suggests that certain times of the year are considered more optimal than others for hiring quality teachers, including early spring and summer. For instances of within-year teacher turnover, there is a sense of urgency to quickly fill the position rather than subject students to long periods of revolving substitutes. The second consideration is regarding the location of the school and district. Schools with high concentrations of low-income students tend to have more difficulties attracting high-quality applicants at any time of the year (Lankford et al., 2002; Lee, 2020).

In light of the findings surrounding the academic and relational challenges created around within-year teacher turnover, districts might take even more care in helping to transition new teachers in these roles. If hiring conditions create instances where suboptimal teacher candidates might be the only option, the school site should provide additional resources such as coaches or behavioral support to help prevent the vacuums of learning shared within this inquiry.

## Social Justification

Clandinin et al. (2007) stated that the social justification moves from the smaller picture to the much larger one and that questions “moved to considerations of ‘So what?’ and ‘Who cares?’ within teacher education” (p. 25). By reflecting on participants' stories, this research found themes of challenges around within-year teacher turnover that undergird much more prominent and broader issues within education. Namely, the challenges that arise both academically and relationally and how both might be considered as part of the larger phenomenon of teacher turnover.

The teaching profession is rife with beautiful opportunities to connect and form relationships with students; however, it is also full of challenges. Lack of resources such as time and materials and lack of administrative support (García & Weiss, 2020b; Katz, 2018) are the most common reasons for teacher attrition. Teachers have had to meet growing student academic needs (Piazza et al., 2015) with fewer resources leading to more within-year and end-of-year turnover across the years. Not only this, but teachers have also been grown more *demoralized* as their pedagogies clash with school systems that uphold counterproductive theories of education (Santoro, 2018). These difficulties have been exasperated under the conditions created throughout the COVID 19 global pandemic, where teachers have had to adapt to virtual and hybrid learning and various mask mandates and concern for their own health. In addition, teachers have felt the weighty mantel of going from heroes at the onset of the pandemic to villains in the eyes of the public and press (Asbury & Kim, 2020). Teachers within the stories captured in this research left their positions for various reasons, some that were endemic of the conditions leading to a teacher shortage, and some that were more personal and timely for teachers, such as maternity leave and retirement. With the looming sense of a mass exodus of

teachers, I reflected on how these stories captured what could be on the horizon for more and more students if conditions for teachers cannot be improved.

The impacts of teacher turnover have already been established regarding high costs both monetarily and academically. Relationships matter for teaching and learning, and if that is accepted, then the findings of this work might also provide further understanding for how those relationships might be handled better in light of within-year teacher turnover.

### **Considerations**

The time period through which this research was conducted helped raise the importance of the continuous nature of experience. As mentioned, this work has been conducted at a time when teachers shortages are increasing, and the numbers for within-year teacher turnover have risen due to conditions exasperated by the pandemic. There are stories generated of teachers leaving by the teachers, the students, and the public. I found far too many stories trying to vilify teachers for their choice in leaving. Even after reliving these stories alongside my participants and seeing the more drastic instances where they had to overcome challenges directly tied to teachers' choices, the hope for this work was to bring more awareness about these situations rather than blame. The stories shared within this narrative inquiry were not relived to be a generalizable sample of all student experiences of within-year teacher turnover. This work aimed to create a space for student voice in the literature around encounters of within-year teacher turnover as such a space has been lacking across research. One realization of this work is that the dialogue around teacher turnover has lacked this voice to represent itself as a more holistic presence beyond test scores and academic measures. Another is the importance of giving voice and allowing space to be heard within a narrative. A personal hope was that this work would not be

used as evidence against teachers who choose to leave but rather as a platform to seek understanding and awareness before judgment.

### **Limitations**

This research was limited to juniors who had experienced three or more instances of within-year teacher turnover who went to school within a single geographic location. All of the participants attended the same public high school that had been selected due to occurrences of within-year teacher turnover within the district and my own access to this site and participants. This limited the narratives to a specific locale and could not address how turnover manifests at various sites or types of schools. Furthermore, while these stories captured many reasons why teachers leave and how their departure is felt by students, with the limited number of participants and the snowballing selection process, these narratives cannot comprehensively be used for generalizability. Furthermore, the snowballing process led to participants whom all happened to be recognized as gifted or advanced, all excelling in their studies. When considering all types of student abilities, having students who have excelled at school as participants narrowed the reader's understanding.

### **Future Research Possibilities**

Throughout this research journey, especially as I was working with participants to restory their experiences, I felt a deep appreciation for the insight into these encounters. Especially as I began to see common threads connect between the three participants' encounters and my own, I wondered how these encounters are lived by others. As the current literature demonstrated, within-year teacher turnover impacts schools regarding student achievement, and as this study and other works have demonstrated, on relational levels as well. As these occurrences in schools have already started to become more frequent, and, according to some predictions (Rosenberg &



Anderson, 2021), as if it will continue to worsen, there are some suggestions for future research from foci to various methodologies.

One of the findings within this work was the realization that similar situations can have vastly different interpretations and implications, such as Sterling's and Harris' reactions to same situation. Future research might compare the various sides of within-year teacher turnover, for example exploring the views of teachers who left and the students left behind to compare interpretations of events.

Another area to consider for future research might be to explore more purposefully sites and locations that experience chronic within-year teacher turnover. The research shows that these would typically be sites located in urban areas that often serve students who are under-resourced (Simon & Johnson, 2015). The finding around the context of teacher turnover prompted questions around the systems in place at various schools. Utilizing sites with high levels of turnover might be a chance to explore what supports are put in place by the building, such as administrative support or instructional support, in these instances and compare how students experience those.

Another consideration for future research might be to explore the similarities and differences between maternity leave and turnover. With teaching being a female-dominated occupation and maternity leave being a necessity, it could prove helpful to see how this leave and more permanent turnover are aligned concerning the impact on students. Primarily when maternity leave serves as a proxy version of a teacher leaving for the year and replaced for the remainder of that school year, many of the contexts that exist with more permanent turnover may be present as evidenced within this research.

To explore this phenomenon more quantitatively, future research might more broadly and purposefully locate students who have experienced chronic within-year teacher turnover and utilize such measures similar to the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). Such measures, applied to a more specific population, might yield findings that could be used to further assess this phenomenon with more generalizable results.

### **Final Thoughts**

The purpose of this research was to explore the student voice regarding encounters with chronic within-year teacher turnover and the impact of those experiences on teacher-student relationships. This study used qualitative, narrative inquiry as the methodology that provided the opportunity to explore these stories and provided space to empower student voices.

The relational ethic behind narrative inquiry guided this work as it was through establishing relationships with each participant that I could appreciate the relationships shared within each encounter. The stories created within this inquiry space revealed the participants' keen awareness of relationships to teachers and their peers; this awareness seemed connected throughout each experience and seemed to be something each participant would make a part of them in the way they continued to view relationships. The findings and conclusions of this work centered around academic and relational challenges commonly encountered and the lack of neutrality across all stories; teachers and how they leave mattered to students in small and large ways. These findings have implications for future discussions around teacher turnover in general and improving practices around teacher attrition more specifically. Providing more voices to elaborate on these encounters, and the significance and impact in light of them, might help to shape brighter dawns for students and teachers as they navigate experiences of within-year teacher turnover.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**



UNIVERSITY OF  
**NORTHERN COLORADO**

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**Institutional Review Board**

Date: 11/15/2021

Principal Investigator: Sara Myers

Committee Action: **Expedited Approval - New Protocol**

Action Date: 11/15/2021

Protocol Number: [2110031098](#)

Protocol Title: A narrative inquiry into the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover on high school students

Expiration Date: 11/25/2022

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has granted approval for the above referenced protocol. Your protocol was approved under expedited category (7) as outlined below:

Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

All research must be conducted in accordance with the procedures outlined in your approved protocol.

If continuing review is required for your research, your project is approved until the expiration date listed above. The investigator will need to submit a request for Continuing Review at least 30 days prior to the expiration date. If the study's approval expires, investigators must stop all research activities immediately (including data analysis) and contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs for guidance.

If your study has not been assigned an expiration date, continuing review is not required for your research.

For the duration of the research, the investigator(s) must:



- Submit any change in the research design, investigators, and any new or revised study documents (including consent forms, questionnaires, advertisements, etc.) to the UNC IRB and receive approval before implementing the changes.
- Use only a copy of the UNC IRB approved consent and/or assent forms. The investigator bears the responsibility for obtaining informed consent from all subjects prior to the start of the study procedures.
- Inform the UNC IRB immediately of an Unanticipated Problems involving risks to subjects or others and serious and unexpected adverse events.
- Report all Non-Compliance issues or complaints regarding the project promptly to the UNC IRB.

As principal investigator of this research project, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorizations using the currently approved forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others and serious and unexpected adverse events.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records.
- Report all Non-Compliance issues or complaints regarding the project promptly to the IRB.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after the conclusion of the project. Once your project is complete, please submit the Closing Report Form.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, at 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Please include your Protocol Number in all future correspondence. Best of luck with your research!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael D. Aldridge".

Michael Aldridge  
IRB Co-Chair, University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784



*Silvia Correa-Torres*

Silvia Correa-Torres  
IRB Co-Chair, University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

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**APPENDIX B**

**CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS FOR HUMAN  
PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH**



**CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH**  
University of Northern Colorado

**Study Title:** A narrative inquiry into the impact of chronic within-year teacher turnover on high school students

**Researcher:** Sara Myers, EdD Student, Educational Studies: Innovation and Reform

**Email:** myer1894@bears.unco.edu

**Research Adviser:** Dr. Christy McConnell, PhD, Educational Foundations and Curriculum Studies

**Phone Number:** (970) 351-2438.

**Email:** christine.mcconnell@unco.edu

**Purpose and Background:** An area of schooling I have always cared deeply about is understanding what students experience when they have teachers who leave their positions during the school year. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study is to understand the experiences of students who have been impacted by chronic within-year teacher turnover by allowing them to share their stories about those events. Your child has been recognized as someone who may have experienced this a few times in their schooling career, and as a junior or senior will be able to speak about those events in detail.

A combination of methods will be conducted in order to learn more about your child's perceptions of within-year teacher turnover: interviews, artifact reflection, and artifact development. The first interview will focus on your child sharing their general experiences and feelings about school. The second interview will begin to explore your child's experiences of within-year teacher turnover. The third interview will explore your child's thoughts and emotions around how their experiences of within-year teacher turnover may or may not impact their perceptions about teacher-student relationships. Up to two more interviews might be scheduled to seek clarification and elaboration on what has been shared. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to develop themes. After each interview, your child will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts for clarification as well as accuracy. Interviews will take approximately 45 minutes. Artifacts will be cultivated at the participant's convenience and the creation of an artifact to former teachers will also occur toward the end of the interview series.

If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- Your child will be asked to discuss personal school history and feelings about school.
- Your child will be asked about specific experiences of within-year teacher turnover and your response to those events.
- Your child will be asked to share an artifact which reflects who you are as a student.
- Your child will be asked to create an artifact (i.e.; a letter, a recording, a piece of art) to a teacher who has left their position, whether one of your choosing or a hypothetical teacher.

**Confidentiality:** Participants will be assigned a pseudonym for all analysis and reporting purposes. After transcription, identifying information will be removed. Transcripts of interviews will be kept in a single document on password-protected internet server. All other copies will be



destroyed. In order to protect identity, your child will be given a pseudonym as well as anyone else included in their story as well as the names of any schools. After three years, all data will be destroyed. The consent documents will be kept by the research advisor and will be destroyed after three years of the research completion. The researcher will attempt to maximize confidentiality at all times; yet, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**Risks and Benefits:** I foresee no risks to participants beyond those that are normally encountered when discussing previous classes and teachers. Understanding that sharing some conversations around teachers who have left within the year may be more negative, your child will also be offered support through the school counseling office should they wish. If students feel any discomfort, they can refuse to answer any question and choose to discontinue the interview at any time. No part of this research, or your child's identity, will be shared directly with teachers past or present. Indirect benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to reflect on experiences and the potential for gained insight into helping teachers understand the significance of within-year turnover on students.

**Costs:** The cost of participating in this study is the time invested to participate in the interview in addition to finding an artifact and creating an artifact. No compensation will be provided to you or your student for participating in this study.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me, Sara Myers, by email ([myer1894@bears.unco.edu](mailto:myer1894@bears.unco.edu)). You may also contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Christine McConnell, by phone or email.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if they begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, Office of Research, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Thank you for your time and help with this important work,  
Sara Myers

Child's Name _____	Date of Birth _____
Parent's Signature _____	Date _____
Parent's Printed Name _____	Date _____
Researcher's Signature _____	Date _____



ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Hello!

My name is Sara Myers, and I'm a Doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I've been doing a lot of research around teacher turnover, specifically within-year teacher turnover and how it might impact students. What that means is when teachers leave their positions within the school year instead of at the end of the year. I'm interested in learning how students are impacted by those events, especially when it happens chronically (repeatedly over time).

As a student who has this type of experience, your perceptions and stories are invaluable to this work. If you want to talk with me, I'll ask you to do a series of interviews (at least three but no more than five) with me in addition to sharing an artifact about yourself (some kind of object like a photography, assignment, or social media post) that represents you as a student and create an artifact (a representation of how you feel about within-year teacher turnover to a teacher who has left within the school year, either real or hypothetical). The first interview will focus on you as a student (your overall experience of school), the second interview will focus on your experiences of within-year teacher turnover (what happened and how you felt about it). The third interview will focus on how those experiences may or may not have impacted your views on teacher-student relationships. Each interview will take about 45 minutes. An additional two interviews may be scheduled in order to elaborate on what you have shared, or get clarification and accuracy. As an upperclassman, your time is at a premium, so I would work with you to schedule interviews at your convenience, so they won't interrupt important school business or your personal time.

Participating in this research probably won't hurt you or help you. There are no direct benefits beyond being given the opportunity to share your experiences. Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected.

If you want to talk with me about your experiences of within-year teacher turnover, please sign and date below. Thanks!

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**  
**INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- 1) How would you describe your school history?
  - A) How have you been involved in schools?
  - B) Do you have any favorite moments/ classes/ teachers/ schools? What makes them your favorite?
  - C) In general, how do you feel about school?
- 2) How would you describe yourself as a student?
  - A) What does a typical day look like for you in school?
  - B) When there are challenges in school, how do you react to them?
- 3) If someone were to see you in your favorite class, what would they see you doing?
- 4) If someone were to see you in your least favorite class, what would they see you doing?
- 5) What are your ambitions for after you graduate?

For the next interview, ask participants to bring an artifact that is significant to them as a student and to think about why that artifact is significant or representative of them as a student.

Also let students know in the next interview, we will continue this conversation, but also start to talk about their experiences of within-year teacher turnover.

**APPENDIX D**  
**SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Begin with sharing transcriptions of initial interview responses. Ask for points of clarification and accuracy.

1) What artifact did you select and how does it represent your experience as a student?

A) How does your artifact make you feel?

B) What does your artifact reveal about your feelings toward school?

2) Within-year teacher turnover is defined as whenever a teacher leaves within the school year. It could be for another position, another school, or completely leave teaching. As a student, how many times has this occurred for you?

3) How would you describe the events around the first time you experienced a teacher leaving within the school year?

A) What was the subject?

B) What time in the year was it?

C) How did you learn they were leaving?

D) What happened after they left? Did they stay at the school?

For the next interview, let participants know that we will be creating an artifact: a letter to a teacher who has left within-year. Let them know this can be to a teacher they actually had or to a hypothetical teacher. The letter will not actually be sent to the teacher.

**APPENDIX E**  
**FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Begin with sharing transcriptions of initial interview responses. Ask for points of clarification and accuracy.

1) Focusing specifically after a teacher had left within-year, what do you recall about how you felt about that class?

2) What, if any, challenges were there after the teacher left?

A) Describe if the class was more or less challenging

B) Describe if the new teacher was more or less challenging to work with

3) What emotions come to mind when you recall those experiences after the teacher left within-year?

A) Are those emotions about yourself? The teacher? The new teacher? Teachers in general? Your peers?

4) How would you describe the relationships you have with teachers?

A) How would you describe how your experiences with teachers who have left within the school year have impacted your relationships with future teachers?