Look Out Look In: Social Emotional Challenges Teaching In the Northern Arctic

An Autoethnography

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Abstract

This study used the research method of an autoethnography to reflect on the life of a beginning educator living, teaching and surviving in the Northern Arctic. This study explores the social emotional challenges that a beginner teacher went through after she had left the familiarity of life in British Columbia. In this study, a beginner teacher went into the beautiful and unknown territory of Nunavut to explore and develop her inner self. Through her experiences teaching in the North, she was able to use an autoethnographic lens to deeply reflect on her teaching practices, life style choices and eventually come out of this experience with a positive, rich and meaningful perspective. This beginner teacher was able to look out into the world, in order to look in within her soul to know herself on a deeper and more truthful way.
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to some of the most important people in my life- my family members and my coach Calvin.

I would like to thank my Mom and Dad for always believing in me and always supporting me in the choices that I make in life. Without this support, I would not be where I am today.

I would like to thank my brother, Andrew, and my sister, Anna, for always accepting me for who I am. It is a tough world out there and I am very grateful and thankful that I have the two of you to help me stay grounded and true to my identity.

I would also like to thank my coach Calvin, who not only is my sport coach, but who is also my life coach. Calvin, I’d like to thank you for realizing my potential and bringing out my best qualities in life. Thank you for making me a “mentally tough” person through our extreme hikes at Spatsizi Plateau. Most importantly, I cannot thank you enough for continuously making me a better person.

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Mom, Dad, Anna and Andrew, I want to thank all of you for always making me feel special. I will always remember this poem that we have displayed at home:

No matter what
No matter where
It is always home
When love is there

I cannot be fortunate enough to have such a loving, caring and supportive family. Thank you.

Most importantly, I want to thank Calvin for bringing me to Spatsizi Plateau. I have learned that no matter how rough, tough and difficult life may be there is always a “happy place” that we can escape to in order to heal.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose of Study

In the winter of 2014, my life in one of the small communities of Nunavut was miserable. Both my “internal and external alignment [were] lost” (Quinn, 1996, p.5). Externally, I no longer enjoyed going to work because the classroom situation was extremely hostile. Internally, I felt the majority of my high school students had turned against me. For example, some students broke into my electronic device and stole a private discussion that I had about a particular student and shared it with the rest of the community. It was events like this that influenced my decision to help me select this topic. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use my experiences to look at the social emotional needs of beginner teachers working in this kind of challenging and unfamiliar environment.

Research Question

Based on my challenging experiences, my research question is: What insights have I gained from examining the social emotional challenges of teaching in an isolated northern community?

Context

Qallunaat, also known as non-Inuit, schools came to the Arctic less than 100 years ago. The southern education system was imposed on the existing Inuit practice of education. The whole purpose of schooling was to assimilate the northern indigenous peoples into the “mainstream” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.1). For most of my students, “there was a lot of resistance to classroom life and routine because the school culture was in direct conflict with indigenous modes of transmitting knowledge across generations” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.1). Because I was not mentally nor emotionally prepared to teach in a cross-cultural setting, I often
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felt “unqualified, poorly prepared and limited in [the] resources [that I was given] to help me succeed” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.1).

There was definitely a cultural clash between myself and my students. On the school level, in terms of routines, we wanted our students to be punctual on a daily basis. However, historically speaking, “when an activity took place, it was determined by factors such as season, light, and weather, instead of the arbitrary numbers on a clock” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.3). It got me frustrated because some students would always be late coming into the classroom or showing up only for the afternoon classes. It got difficult to teach in a continuous manner because the students did not have consistent attendance. However, like all the other teachers within the school, I had to learn to accept the Inuit concept of time and do what I could to help reduce the inadequate feeling that the students may experience when they have missed lessons. Another culture clash that we had when teaching the students, was the inappropriate and inadequate curriculum with which we were given to work. Currently, Nunavut does not have its own set of curricula. As a result, we borrowed the Alberta curriculum to educate the local students. In my class, this was a disaster as the majority of the students were English Additional Learners. Inuktitut was the native language spoken by majority of the students in the home environment but we educated the students in English when they attended school. Many of the teachers faced similar challenges as the resource materials were not applicable to the students’ abilities. There was a lot of resistance during lessons because the students were simply confused, lost and overly challenged by the content. This was when “cultural differences become the boundaries between the teachers and the students with ensuing resistance to schooling on the part of the learner (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.5). Behavioural problems started to arise within the classroom. The classroom environment was no longer safe as a small group of
students developed a gang mentality and verbally attacked me on a personal level. Learning became secondary within the classroom, and for both myself and my students the main focus became survival. The students were trying to survive the unengaging curriculum that had no relevance to them, while I was trying to survive their verbal and emotional abuse that came with their frustration regarding the delivery of a “foreign curriculum in a foreign language” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.6).

**Justification of the Study**

Teaching is an emotional profession. As a beginner teacher who went up North, I encountered significant social emotional challenges. However, these challenges were not uncommon. Based on my research, it appeared that many beginner teachers worldwide also face similar kinds of social emotional problems. In the Educational Psychologist article, *Inquiry on Teachers’ Emotions* by Paul Schutz, he stated that “emotions are linked to teachers’ work, development and identity, basically, emotions impact teacher’s lives” (Schutz, 2014, p. 4). Some reports from this article also mentioned that many teachers leave the profession at high rates during the first few years of their career. “They estimated that nearly 30% to 50% of teachers entering the profession leave within the first five years of teaching” (Schutz, 2014, p. 4). Schutz described this emotional teaching in the following way, “emotional labour has been associated with job dissatisfaction, health symptoms and emotional exhaustion, which are key components of burnout and therefore [leaving many teachers the choice] of leaving the profession” (Schutz, 2014, p. 4).

*Inquiry on Teachers’ Emotions* also got me thinking about the teacher-student relationship boundaries in my situation. There were three different types of teacher-student relationship boundaries of which teachers should be aware. The first one was communication
boundaries. “This revolves around what aspects of their lives, teachers are willing to self-disclose to their students” (Schutz, 2014, p. 5). The second one was relationship boundaries, which was the role that teachers see themselves playing in their students’ lives. Some common socially constructed relationship roles for teachers might be “parent, counsellor, or mentor” (Schutz, 2014, p. 6). Lastly, what were “the appropriate levels and types of emotions students and teachers should be sharing in terms of emotional boundaries? “(Schutz, 2014, p. 6) I did not establish these boundaries clearly enough and that was why the social emotional challenges occurred. I felt like my students had invaded my privacy and that they did not respect my individuality.

Another article, *Pre-Service Classroom Teachers’ Emotional Intelligence and Anger Expression Styles*, as cited in the Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice Journal (2012), stated that “anger is a normal feeling which is frequently experienced, which exists at different processes and intensity from minor disappointments to severe exasperation…this feeling is neither good nor bad. What is important is how it is expressed and canalized” (Baltaci and Demi, 2012, p. 2422). I had to suppress a lot of my emotions. My dissatisfaction with my social life had to be compensated on many levels. I used many social media tools to help me maintain the relationships that I had back home with my family members and friends. The cultural clash within the classroom had allowed me to practice regulating my own feelings. As stated by Baltaci and Demi (2012), “emotional intelligence is the person’s ability to recognize self and other’s feelings, to motivate self, to manage the feelings within oneself and [her] relationships” (p. 2423). I did not want the students to see me display anger because I “recognized [these] feelings and [my survival instinct was to] manage them in appropriate way[s]” (Baltaci and Demi, 2012, p. 2423).
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Also in the article by Justice and Espinoza, *Emotional Intelligence and Beginner teacher Candidates*, as cited in the journal *Education* (2007), the article mentioned a self-assessment instrument that provided a scale of specific measures for emotional intelligence. The Emotional Skills Assessment Process skills measures were as follow:

- Interpersonal skills- assertion
- Leadership skills- comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership
- Self-management skills- drive strength, time management, commitment ethic
- Interpersonal skills- stress management, self esteem
- The problematic indicators measured aggression and deference (under interpersonal skills), and change orientation (under self-management skills)

(Justice & Espinoza, 2007, p. 458)

This list of points helped me to identify what I needed to work on specifically in the area of interpersonal skills. I realized that my stress management and self-esteem was greatly affected in my work and personal life. As a result, it led to the social emotional challenges that I experienced because I was emotionally and physically in a constant state of stress. I was stressed from work, stressed from the physical isolation, stressed from having no real connections with anyone within the community and stressed from not being able to think positively. Due to the high intensity stress level, my self-esteem was affected as I felt I had lost a big part of my identity.

With the combination of these supporting articles, I realized that I was not alone in facing the social emotional struggles as a beginner teacher. There were many people in different contexts that have similar experiences. However, it was important for me to explore the social emotional struggles within my context because I was sure that there were many teachers/educators who may have encountered similar struggles within the Northern context and were looking to combat these challenges, in order to help them come out of their experience in a more positive and self-knowing light.
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**Brief Overview of the Study**

Chapter one is the introduction section of my thesis. It gives the reader an understanding of the purpose of my study through reading about the Nunavut context. Chapter two is a literature review of my study. The literature explores what is related to professionalism, student-teacher relationships and social emotional learning and how this has had an effect on me within my personal and professional life. Chapter Three is an exploration of autoethnography as a research methodology. Chapter four presents my story in a personal and professional way, accompanied by an analysis of the situations, giving me a chance to reflect on my experiences. Chapter five allows me to think about what I learned through my experiences and where I would like to take my learning in the future.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review for my thesis focuses on three main topics: professionalism, student-teacher relationships, and social emotional learning. Within the education field today, there was no shortage of research on these topics. However, what made my evaluation of these topics different was that I examined it from a cross-cultural perspective as a southerner working in a Northern Arctic context. Given the unique nature of this perspective, it was difficult to come across an abundance of relevant articles to support these themes. Nevertheless, I believe that I was able to find enough well-credentialed research to support this chapter.

What is Professionalism?

I graduated from the University of British Columbia Teacher Education program in the summer of 2012. It was programmed into our heads that this degree was a professional development program and as a result, we were all going to become professionals once we had graduated. I strongly bought into this idea and I thought very highly of my profession and I tried my best to speak, act and carry myself as a professional in both my work life and my private life. I carried this professional aura with me when I moved up to the Territory of Nunavut. However, through my interactions with certain individuals at my work place, my definition and meaning of professionalism has been challenged on many levels.

According to Shirley Steinberg, educational professionalism “required the ability to research, create, and revise different notions and concepts” (Steinberg, 2005, p. 29). In other words, educators need to be reflective of their actions and thoughts. We need to “revisit our own world and acknowledge what needs to be done for improvement [in order to achieve] professional success” (Steinberg, 2005, p.30) on a daily basis. Professionalism was a theme for me because I had an innate expectation of how I should act and behave in the work environment. I expected my co-workers to present themselves in a similar manner, but was disappointed when
my expectations did not align with the reality I experienced in my workplace. Everything from our dress codes to how people interacted with each other was a new reality. Based on these differences, Steinberg sought to better understand what professionalism was by presenting the idea of what it was not.

Steinburg’s concept of what “professionalism is not”:

- Professionalism is not a skill at all. It is an art
- Educational professionals are not disrespectful of other educators
- Professionalism does not need labels, titles, or certification in order to exist
- Professionalism is not easy, it is not pre-packaged, and it is not predictable
- An educator who wishes to be a professional does not expect to stay safe. He or she takes risks

(Steinberg, 2005, p. 29-31)

The concept of professionalism was defined in many different ways. Based on Steinberg’s list of behaviours, we could only approximate how we should conduct ourselves. In addition, when reading the notes section of Joanne Tompkins’s book called *Teaching in a Cold and Windy Place: Change in an Inuit school* (1998), she mentioned the authors Michael Fullan and Andy Hargraves and their opinions on professionalism along with her own perspective of what professionalism entailed when working in Nunavut.

Fullan and Hargraves shared some interesting points of view on what it meant to be a professional educator. One thing they mentioned was that “in the early stages of [becoming a teacher], communication and what you value is best done through behaviour and example through what you do and who you are on a day-to-day basis” (as cited in Tompkins, 1998, p.125). Due to the historically negative experiences of residential schools that were set up in the Arctic, it was to be extremely challenging for parents and community members to trust the existing school system. As a result, it became imperative for southern educators to be transparent in their actions and words as this allowed students, parents and community members to establish
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a trusting relationship, something I believed was critical in order to communicate more effectively with the southern educators.

One of the patterns that educators developed was to continually give to their students in an effort to establish trust and communication. This one-sided relationship resulted in a decrease in the quality of their teaching practice. As Fullan and Hargreaves stated that “balancing the work and the life is an important protection against burnout. It also leads to more interesting teachers and more interesting teaching” (as cited in Tompkins, 1998, p.126). As educators, we often made the mistake of overworking after a long day of school or even going into work on weekends and holidays. If we considered ourselves as professionals, it was crucial for us to practice the habit of devoting time for our mind, body and soul to rest and engage in activities that would help reduce the stress of the long, demanding work days.

Another factor that contributed to professionalism was how “principals have to really know the teachers they work with and find value in the work and ability of each teacher” (Tompkins, 1998, p.125). Thompkins expressed her feeling on this matter when it came to asking her teachers to know the children that they teach. She mentioned how in a small community the reader might think that this might happen naturally. However, it was quite possible for “non-native teachers and even native teachers who have themselves achieved a comfortable lifestyle to remain untouched by the lives of those around them, even in a small community” (Tompkins, 1998, p. 125). Being a southern teacher myself, it was easy to forget that the way most people lived their lives in the community was different from the way I was living mine.

This last point is important as it exemplifies professionalism as a concept of trust. According to Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink and their article called Resourcefulness: Restraints and Renewal (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), they mentioned that “trust is an indispensable resource for
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improvement” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 508). There are three forms of trust that needed to be taken into consideration when working in a school setting. The forms of trust are as follow:

- **Contractual trust** was expressed through impersonal, objective, and often written agreements- contractual trust required us to meet obligations, complete contracts and keep promises.
- **Competence trust** involves the willingness to trust oneself and other people to be competent and the willingness to provide sufficient support and learning opportunities for people to become competent- delegating effectively and providing professional growth and development for others were strong indicators of competence trust.
- **Communication trust** was evident in human interactions that communicate shared understanding and good intentions. Clear, high-quality, open, and frequent communication were the hallmarks of communication trust. So too were sharing information, telling the truth, keeping confidences, and being willing to admit mistakes. (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p.508)

Trust was the most essential component in qualifying oneself as a professional as it was an important resource. Trust “creates and consolidates energy, commitment and relationships [and] when trust is broken, people lessen their commitment and withdraw from relationships, and entropy abounds” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p.508). When professional educators established trust, there would be an increase of positive energy for increasing student achievement. Overall, trust was the essence of a demanding professional commitment.

Although, there was no set criterion for carrying out professional standards, some of these perspectives were important in supporting my thesis as it helped to explain the viewpoint and characteristics of a well-rounded professional who worked in the North.

**Student-Teacher Relationships**

I was struggling to build relationships with certain students as each and every one of them was different. According to Palmer, “human beings were made for relationships: without a rich and nourishing network of connections, we wither and die...It is a clinical fact that people who lack relationships get sick more often and recover more slowly than people surrounded by family and friends” (Palmer, 2007, p. 67). Often times I felt very alone in the school because I
did not establish the connections with my co-workers or with certain students. Through some of the literature, there was a better understanding of how to establish these connections.

The research article by Lewthwaite & McMillan called *She Can Bother Me, and That’s Because She Cares: What Inuit Students Say About Teaching and Their Learning* (Canadian Journal of Education, 2010) described the importance of teacher-student relationships in the Nunavut context. The authors of this article mentioned the attitudes that educators needed to portray was “culturally responsive teachers who respond to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance and learning styles of students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 142). As educators, we needed to assume that students come to school with a set of beliefs and understandings from their life experiences and the role of the school was to not “ignore or replace these understandings” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 143) but to distinguish these valuable experiences and to incorporate it into the formal classroom settings. This study placed heavy emphases on how “both contemporary and traditional knowledge strengthens the richness of the [educational] experiences provided for students” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 144). Based on this study, there were a few key components to successful interaction for teachers and the Inuit students that could improve the student-teacher relationship in this context. The first response was that teachers themselves believed that they were primarily responsible for contributing to a positive learning environment. However, often times, non-Inuit educators also believed that the negative learning environments was fostered by elements others than themselves over which they had no control. These elements included the influence of school administration, the community, or the students themselves. This attitude tends to manifest into a “me and them” frustration mentality at the classroom level. In addition, the teachers who accepted their part in the relationship were
more likely to “make more progress in establishing a positive learning environment” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 147). As well, an educator who established an open dialogue with their students’ expectations also contributed to the foundation of building a positive learning environment. A two-way open channel communication demonstrated “a secure, well-managed learning setting…that [allowed students] to speak truthfully of expectation, disappointment, and success” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 151). These values strongly aligned with the “Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles of tunnganarniq (respecting others and relationships), aajiiqatigijnniq (ensuring all aspects of community development are fostered through decision making through collaboration and consensus), pilimmaksarniq (development through practice and action ensuring members of the communities are full and meaningful partners in community and social development activities) and, piliriqatigiinniq (working together for a common cause)” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 151). Another factor that was important was the personal relationships that Inuit learners established with their teachers and that they believe the teacher should be part of “the team” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 152) meaning that effective educators should create an emotionally warm and personal classroom environment.

In addition to Lewthwaite & McMillan’s point of view, another study done by McCarthy and Benally on the Classroom Management in a Navajo Middle School. Theory into Practice (2003) also looked at the mismatch of attitudes, skills and behaviours that Navajo First Nations students brought to the school and the expectations that the school had on their behaviour. This article demonstrated the challenges faced by non-Navajo teachers who taught in a cross culture setting and what strategies needed to take place in order to strengthen the student teacher relationships. This study had discovered that Navajo students who “seemed to [have] an inner
strength in the traditional...belief system that defined them and their position in the world... appeared to be more resilient and were able to cope with adversity in the classroom” (McCarthy & Benally, 2003, p. 297). However, based on the observations of the researchers, selected classrooms had indicated that some students had demonstrated off-task behaviour such as talking, fooling around and lack of engagement. These observable problems were often times linked to unrealistic teacher expectations of “how long students are able to stay focused on independent seatwork and culturally mismatched instructional activities” (McCarthy & Benally, 2003, p. 299). All of these off-task behaviours led to a breakdown of the student teacher relationship that I had experienced when working in Nunavut. Nevertheless, the authors mentioned a few solutions to improve these behaviours. These solutions include getting students to work in small groups that were activity-based and hands-on. This allowed students to construct their own knowledge and how they would like to portray their knowledge. The article mentioned that majority of educators sincerely wanted to understand the needs of their students in order to have a more effective classroom relationship. However, a mismatch of teachers’ expectations and student’s attitudes had put both parties in an “at-risk situation that made it difficult for them to [both] succeed. It puts teachers into at-risk situations that made it extremely unlikely that they would be able to increase on-task behavior and the academic performance of their students” (McCarthy & Benally, 2003, p. 301) and it made it difficult for students to enjoy the classroom environment which in return caused the tension between the students and teacher. In order to resolve the student teacher tension, “teachers must understand the characteristics of the students coming to school, value their culture, and be able to build on the strengths students bring with them, both managerially and instructionally” (McCarthy & Benally, 2003, p.303).
Social-Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning was defined as “ability to get along with others”, possessing “social technique” and “comprehending the personalities of others” (Mayer, 2014, p. 29). This was important to me because it embodied all of my experiences working in the North.

Social emotional learning could be understood more closely through the lenses of personal intelligence. According to J.D. Mayer, “almost all psychologists agree that personality represents the overall organization of a person’s psychological life; they agree that our personalities emerged from our motives and emotions, thoughts and intelligences, social skills and self-control- the larger mental systems that make us up” (Mayer, 2014, p. 36). Relative to others, people who were high in personal intelligence were more highly motivated in themselves and could influence others better in their lives. As well, people high in personal intelligence could relate to others and their circumstances better in more helpful ways. According to Mayer, “personality’s job is to do business with each neighbouring area: to manage the individual’s physical health and safety (in the case of the brain and body), to find decent settings to be in, to engage in situations so as to get things done, and to draw on group alliances for protection, companionship and a sense of identity. To get these jobs done, personality must act in each realm and as we act, the signs of our behaviour become visible in the neighbouring regions. People who observed us could pick up signs as to our health or stress levels from our faces and bodies” (Mayer, 2014, p.50). When the situation within the classroom got tough, I was in a state of constant stress and the students could sense my discomfort. The way my personality came across to many of the students and their parents was probably cold and unwelcoming. They interpreted my stress level as a sign of dislike for them and for the community and in return, they presented aloofness in their attitudes and behaviours. I then interpreted their behaviour to mean that the
community “did not care about the education of the children” (Tompkins, 1998, p. 23). As a result of these perceived perceptions, the vicious cycle of untrustworthiness began which did not help in building a strong, trusting foundation.

As human beings, we all want to seek happiness and avoid suffering as these were basic human needs and concerns. The question that Mayer asked was that “if we grant that people do differ from one another, isn’t it impolite to point out these differences?” (Mayer, 2014, p. 8) We could easily feel hurt if someone pointed out our shortcomings and unjustly characterized our personalities. Often times, I had a hard time listening to the information that my students were telling me. I reacted defensively to all their comments and took everything very personally. “My self-perceived inadequacy- based on judgements- drove me out of a community, but it also meant I joined a new one where I felt more comfortable” (Mayer, 2014, p. 10). There were many factors that contributed to my decision to leave the north, but a few of the reasons included the fact that I was not able to flourish in my work environment as I was unable to carry out my perceived concept of professionalism and build the necessary connections with certain students. What embodied all of these struggles that I had encountered was one thing: patience. According to Tompkins, “patience involves understanding change, the nature of change and the nature of people. Patience understood that people can ‘only’ be what they are at the moment, that change happens in small steps, that people often backslide, and that people cannot change everything about themselves at once” (Tompkins, 1998, 115). I was not patient enough with the students, parents and community members, the new environment and the challenges that came with the job, but most importantly, I was not patient enough with myself. Patience involves people working together towards a common goal and not creating fear if they could not immediately obtain it. “Once people start to fear that they will be punished for the risks they take in reaching
for a vision, they will stop moving and trust will have been broken down” (Tompkins, 1998, 115). I took many risks in my teaching approaches, but many of them seemed to backfire when the students responded negatively. As a result, I stopped trying because I had a fear of failure. What I needed to do was to give myself the time to critically understand my inner personality. To do so, I needed to understand my hidden thoughts and desires, but more importantly to come to know myself on an intimate level.

Kenneth Leithwood, Alma Harris and Tiit Strauss offered an approach to improve teachers’ emotional performance through their article *How to Reach High Performance* (Leithwood et al. 2010). The authors mentioned that “emotions play a significant part in effective leadership and that the emotional dimension of a leader’s work is critically important in moving a dysfunctional culture forward and establishing the belief that high performance is a real possibility” (Leithwood et al. 2010, p. 260). Their research demonstrated a significant number of teacher emotions and how it had an effect on teaching and learning outcomes such as “individual and collective teacher efficacy; feelings of job satisfaction; level of organizational commitment; morale, degrees of stress or burnout, or engagement in the school or profession; and trust in colleagues, parents and students” (Leithwood et al. 2010, p. 260). Teachers who hold high expectations of themselves and others were more likely to engage in “activity based-learning, student-centred learning and interactive instructions” (Leithwood et al. 2010, p. 261). The problem was that I did not believe in myself. I did not felt like I could make a difference in my job because my sense of self was weak. However, through this article, I have learned that “effective leaders know that people are not their best asset; they are their only asset, so the need to nurture, develop, and strengthen relationship is at the very core of what good leaders do”
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(Leithwood et al. 2010, p. 261). What I needed to do was to strengthen my relationship with myself and believed that I was worthy of making change happen in small but significant steps.

Summary

These articles have assisted my understanding of the themes that I have chosen to examine within my autoethnography. This was done in conjunction with an analysis of the concepts of professionalism, teacher-student relationships and social emotional learning, along with my diary. All of this was used to deconstruct the realities that I faced as a beginner teacher working in the Arctic.
Chapter Three: Using Autoethnography as Method

My experience of working in Nunavut has been an extremely personal and emotional journey. Selecting autoethnography as a method to analyze my personal encounters was a perfect way for me to understand my role as a teacher in dealing with the social emotional challenges of the North. In this section of my chapter, I have come across substantive research on autoethnography and would like to share my findings in order to make sense of this methodology and demonstrate why it was applicable to my thesis. The researchers that influenced me the most included Heewon Chang and Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner.

What is Autoethnography?

According to Heewon Chang in *Autoethnography as method* (2008), autoethnography was a method that “self-consciously explores the interplay of the introspective” events (Chang, 2008, p. 46). Autoethnographers would “personally engage self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history and ethnographic explanation” (Chang, 2008, p. 46). Autoenography was not just about focusing on self alone; it helped the researcher search for understanding of others from a culture/social perspective through the self.

Autoethnographers “wanted to concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography was a method that accommodated “subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The method of autoethnography helped us expand our minds and perceive the world more openly.

The benefits of autoethnography lie in three areas:

1. It offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers
2. It enhances cultural understanding of self and others
(3) It has a potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building

(Chang, 2008, p.52)

The Process of Writing an Autoethnography

Autoethnographies were written from the authors’ retroactive and selective perspective from past experiences. Usually these experiences were collected using hindsight. Autoethnographers tend to write about “epiphanies” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) that they have experienced and created them into a published document. Epiphanies were “remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The epiphanies tend to reveal the “intense situations and effects that linger — recollections, memories, images, feelings—long after a crucial incident was supposedly finished” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). In the field of Social Science, when publishing autoethnographies, the researchers were required to analyze their experiences. According to Chang (2008), some researchers may choose to focus on a broad scope of their lives and others may zoom in on a more specific topic (Chang, 2008, p.49).

The Product of Writing Autoethnography

Autoethnographers were designed to bring “readers into the scene” particularly into thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to “experience an experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Sometimes autoethnographers may tell a story using a first person perspective especially if they have personally observed or lived through an interaction. A second person perspective may also be used to bring the reader to a particular scene to witness what the author was experiencing. A third person perspective was another method that could be used to
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“establish the context for an interaction, report findings, and present what others do or say”

(Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

**Approaches to Autoethnography**

There were many different ways of autoethnographic writing. In this chapter, I have decided to address two writing styles which include personal narratives and therapeutic writing. I incorporated the personal narrative and therapeutic writing into my chapter four story analysis using a combination of these two writing formats.

According to Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011) personal narratives were stories about the author who viewed him or herself as the phenomenon and wrote about their academic, research and personal lives. This type of writing style was the most controversial form of autoethnography because it was often not connected to the more traditional analysis of scholarly literature. A personal narrative helped to understood “a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Therapeutic writing consisted of writing personal stories of the author in order to make sense of themselves and their experiences. The purpose of therapeutic writing was to help the author understood their relationships, “reduce prejudice, encourage personal responsibility and agency, raise consciousness and promote cultural change” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), but most importantly, “give people a voice that, before writing, they may not have felt they had” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).
Critiques of Autoethnographies

Autoethnography was often criticized for being too artful and not scientific enough. For example, autoethnographies could be classified as too “aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) and as a result, it often got criticized for not having enough fieldwork and observations. When autoethnographers used their personal experiences as field notes, their data was considered to be biased and self-centred and did not often fulfill the social science requirement for scholarly obligations of “hypothesizing, analyzing and theorizing” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

The method of autoethnography was to look at subject matter from different point of views. As stated by Ellis, Adams, & Bochner (2011), “these different views are "not issue(s) to be resolved, only" instead they are "difference(s) to be lived with” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011).

When one was conducting an autoethnography, they should avoid the following points:

1. Excessive focus on self in isolation from others
2. Overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation
3. Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as data source
4. Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives
5. Inappropriate application of the label “autoethnography”

(Chang, 2008, p. 57)

Writing My Autoethnography

I took into consideration what Cheng, Ellis, Adams, & Bochner have indicted were challenges to autoethnography. In this chapter, I have utilized this method to avoid the “excessive focus on self in isolation from others” (Chang, 2008, p. 57) by presenting my story using characters other than myself. “Overemphasis on narration” (Chang, 2008, p. 57) was avoided by supporting my stories with detailed research analysis. I kept a written journal which documented my personal teaching experiences on a daily basis which helped avoid exclusive
reliance on personal memory and recall. Based on my research of autoethnographies, I narrowed Chapter Four into two types of writing styles. The first writing style was a “constructive interpretation process” (Chang, 2008, 140). It resonated with me because these were emotional events out of which I could construct meaning. According to Chang (2008), “constructive interpretation is when my personal perspectives are added in all steps of research, whether in data collection where certain memories are selected, in data analysis where certain themes are probed, or in data interpretation where certain meanings are searched” (Chang, 2008, p.140). I have decided to select specific social emotional challenges that I have encountered as part of my analysis for chapter four. In doing so, I was able to analyse my stories through the specific themes of professionalism, teacher-student relationships and social emotional learning. This writing style “interweave(s) stories from the past with ongoing self-discovery in the present” (Chang, 2008, p.140) which parallels exactly my healing process in trying to make sense of my experiences.

The second writing style that supported my Chapter Four analysis was the confessional-emotive writing process. This writing process allowed one to “free[ly] expose confusion, problems and dilemmas in life” (Chang, 2008, p.145). All the events that I have encountered were dilemmas that I had while I was teaching the higher grade levels. As a result of incorporating this writing style, I was able to expose myself in a vulnerable way in order to “open a door to readers’ participation in the stories” (Chang, 2008, p.145). These two writing styles have allowed me to share my personal experiences with my readers. Not only that, it also allowed me to reflect deeply on my stories in order to make sense of them.
Chapter Four: Autoethnographic Stories and Analysis

These events were the most difficult social emotional challenges that I encountered while teaching in Nunavut. I presented these situations in an uncensored diary format followed by an analysis through the lenses of professionalism, student-teacher relationships and social emotional learning. The names of the students, parents and community members have been changed in order to protect their identity and confidentiality. I have chosen deliberately to tell my story with a slightly removed stance.

First Day of School (What are Appropriate Relationships?)

Today was the first day of school. It had been a long week of getting the classroom set up. I had nine students that came into class in the morning. We had more girls than boys in the classroom and they all seemed to be good students based on the fact that they were all pretty shy and not extremely loud or out of control.

The first thing that I did with the students was to pull out some chairs and make a circle so that we could introduce ourselves. I went first, I told the students my name, which community I had lived in last year and that I had played badminton since I was eleven years old. I even went to the Canada Winter Games and competed for Team B.C. I thought that the girls seemed impressed by my accomplishments, but they did not have a lot to share afterwards because most of them were shy when you put them on the spot. The only thing I knew about the whole group was that one girl liked to play basketball and another boy liked to play soccer.

Then we spent the rest of the morning cleaning up the classroom and moving stuff into the storage room. I had the boys do most of the heavy lifting and the girls helped organize things around the classroom. I also had a lot of fun getting to know a particular student. I had her charging the cameras and organizing the different camera parts for me.
After recess, the students and I decided to play basketball for our Physical Education class. When we went into the gym we had a shoot-out for picking teams. Once the teams were picked, the students were really into the game. However, a couple of the girls decided to sit out. One girl wanted to go outside for a smoke, but I mentioned to her that she was not allowed to leave the class because I was responsible for her during class time. Instead, the two girls started circulating around the gym, looking for a chance to exit out of the building. Before they had a chance to do that, I went up to them and made the rules very clear. I stated that they have opportunities to smoke before school, recess time, lunch hours and after school time, but they were not allowed to go outside during class time. The girls nodded and agreed to the rule, and then they went to sit back down again. Meanwhile, the basketball game fell apart when the majority of the students were asked to help the shop teacher with loading materials into his skidoo.

Right before the lunch time bell rang, a situation occurred. One of the girls became very verbally abusive by using Inuktitut to insult me, making comments that I could not understand. When class was over, I had a private talk with this girl by telling her that I did not say mean things to her in my language and therefore, she should not do the same thing to me. I also told her that if she does it again, we could all go into the principal’s office and she could explain to him why she was insulting me in front of the rest of the students. She apologized and I had to reinforce my boundaries around my authority. She seemed to get the idea because her attitude improved in the afternoon, when she returned.

In the afternoon, I gave the students a writing assignment which was titled “All About Me”. I quickly realized that the junior high class was at a very low literacy level. The girl that
was charging the camera earlier and another boy within the class were the only students writing and reading at grade level and the rest of the class was writing and reading at around a Kindergarten to Grade one level.

As a result of the students’ low literacy level, I told the students that if they needed help with spelling any words, they should not be shy to ask for help. I also admitted to them that I am not the greatest speller myself and therefore, as a class, we can learn to work together to spell certain words. I made it clear that there was no shame in not knowing how to spell everything because none of us were perfect human beings and we were all here to learn together.

I met a male student for the first time in the afternoon and I rapidly picked up on the fact that he had extreme Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and as a result it would be a challenge for the students to focus if he was constantly disrupting the class. The (ADHD) student sat down amongst the other boys. I figured that if I did not separate him then he might take control of the entire class. I physically moved his desk in front of the white board so I could keep an eye on him. I realized that this student’s academic abilities were extremely low as I had to write out his thoughts on the board in full sentences and have him copy it into his writing book. It was great because the (ADHD) boy could not distract the other students while he was busy copying the sentences down. I challenged a couple of the higher ability students by requesting that they write in complete sentences and in short paragraphs. I wanted to challenge those two students in order to maximize their engagement.

In the last two blocks of the day, I had the senior grade students attend my English class. I had introduced myself to the students by telling them three things about me. There were
different kinds of characters in the classroom. One girl was very talkative, but everyone else was less social. It was a challenge to get the students to speak in public about themselves, but when the suggestion was made for the students to express themselves on paper, they appeared to be more comfortable. The talkative girl was a very strong writer, but she also had a lot of negative attitudes. When she asked to go to the bathroom, I declined her request and she got extremely upset. She kept on complaining in Inuktitut, but I just ignored her. She kept on saying she might get a bladder infection, but I mentioned to her that she should have gone during our ten minute afternoon break which had happened five minutes ago. I did not want to give in to her complaints and I could tell that she did not have to go to the bathroom that badly; rather it was an excuse to go for a cigarette break.

A mature male student came late into the classroom and made a huge scene because he had an audience and was getting attention from the other students. I did not react to the things that he was doing. For example, giving cigarettes to another student, pulling his lighter out during instructional time, walking in and out of class and making a big deal about everything. I immediately reported his actions to the principal and he agreed to have a talk with this student.

I really appreciated the fact that the principal constantly circulated within the school to ensure that all the staff members were managing their classrooms. Overall, it was a good first day of school as I felt that the principal was a very supportive leader who would make working with the students a lot easier.

First Day of School Analysis

First day of school was always nerve racking for me. As a new teacher entering into a new northern community, my idea of a leadership role that I would be playing was to follow “an
indigenous interconnected system [that was] about cooperation, relationships, humility, patience, and sharing” (Benham & Murakami, 2013, p.150). I wanted to be open and transparent for my students because it was important to allow them to know who I was as an individual and what my values and beliefs were in order to establish trusting relationships.

I wanted to show my individual passion for teaching through the following:

- Learning and living with integrity that sustains traditional values and principles and at the same time learns from the contemporary rivers of the current times.
- Having a primary concern for community and place (both physical and spiritual)
- Developing sensitivity and sensibility to the thoughts of other people, that is, it is not about you or me, but it is about relationships.
- Clearly understanding and articulating individual and collective roles, responsibilities and relationships.
- Building respectfulness, which requires a deep understanding of the complexities of social networks.
- Being the link between the traditional and the contemporary, and between and across communities within and external to the indigenous world.

(Benham & Murakami, 2013, p.154)

However, even though I knew that it was important to establish appropriate relationships, I struggled with this concept right from the beginning. I did not have a strong sense of “self-identity” (Palmer, 2007, p. 13). This had to do with my “shadows and limits [as well as my] wounds and fears” (Palmer, 2007, p. 13). I was trained as a primary elementary teacher, but in this situation I feared the unfamiliar age group, the unfamiliar curriculum, but mostly, I feared that “I did not know myself [therefore], I could not know who my students [were]” (Palmer, 2007, p. 3). There were many different characters that I encountered on the first day of school and it was overwhelmingly complex. I did not know where to start the relationship building process. It was uncomfortable to be in front of this age group and knowing that I would be teaching them for the rest of the school year made me feel intimated and uneasy. As a result of this uneasy feeling, I immediately, “distanced [myself] from students and [the] subject to minimize danger” (Palmer, 2007, p. 18). However, what I had forgotten was that “distance made
life more dangerous by isolating the self” (Palmer, 2007, p. 18). I was able to establish relationships with some of the students, but I was unable to open up to the majority of them, for example, the verbally abusive girl from Physical Education class, the boy with ADHD and the mature male student in the afternoon because “outwardly, I [pretended] to make my performance seem relatively smooth and accomplished, but inwardly, I felt anxious and fumbling and inept” (Palmer, 2007, p. 28). I was struggling to keep control within my classroom, but these rules were unequal. I insisted on the rules with the verbally abusive girl, but allowed the mature student to engage in inappropriate behaviour.

Bathroom Power Struggle (Establishing Relationships Appropriate to the Teacher Role)

Roughly three months into the school year, the classroom dynamic had shifted drastically. During the last block of one of many English classes, I felt like it was never going to end. The whole classroom environment had shifted because this one particular student, Zoe, was extremely negative. Before class began, I was asking another student about her Arctic Winter Games passport application because I was chosen to be team Nunavut assistant coach for the sport of badminton. Instead, Zoe and her friend kept on yelling different information at me. This made it very difficult for the passport girl to answer my question, but then I realized that I should have just talked to the passport girl in private. When class started, the students were engaged in catching up on their missed work from previous classes. Then Zoe started to put all her energy into distracting the class. She had disturbed the others within the class by making a few comments in Inuktitut and this made it difficult for the whole class to concentrate. For the remainder of the class, I got into a power struggle with Zoe. First, Zoe asked me if she could go to the bathroom at her own house. Even though I declined her request, she challenged my answer and kept on asking me why. Then I told her to ask the
principal for permission, and if the principal agreed to her request, then I was willing to comply. Zoe took my suggestion literally. She was about to walk out of the classroom and then I had to follow her out to the hallway. She then demanded that I ask the principal for her. I responded by stating that if she wanted her request to be granted, then she would have to ask the principal herself. Then after a few moments of back and forth arguing, I finally gave in and told her that I would ask the principal for her. Unfortunately, the principal had gone to the Health Centre to deal with some other student matter; I was unable to get the support that I needed.

As the other students continued to write down their notes, Zoe was making comments about me in Inuktitut. I finally went up to her and asked her why she had to be so negative all the time. She responded, stating that she was not being negative. I stated that we were both here to do a job and we should try to get along. She did not like my comment and got upset and made some other nasty comments about me in Inuktitut.

When the principal came back from the Health Centre, he dropped into my classroom and I told Zoe that she can ask the principal the question that she wanted to ask earlier. Zoe blushed and said never mind. Throughout the remainder of the class, the principal pulled each and every student out individually and asked them about my classroom situation. The principal mentioned to me that one of Zoe’s friends told the truth that she had been mean to me recently and she was working hard to stop her negative actions.

**Bathroom Power Struggle Analysis**

The bathroom power struggle with Zoe got me thinking about the article “Inquiry on Teachers’ Emotions” (Schutz, 2014) as it mentioned teacher-student relationship boundaries in my situation. There were three different types of teacher-student relationship boundaries of
which new teachers should be aware. I would like to focus on the second one, which was a
relationship boundary. The relationship boundary was the role that teachers saw themselves
playing in their students’ lives. Some common socially constructed relationships roles for
teachers might be “parent, counsellor, or mentor” (Schutz, 2014, p. 6). Because I did not have a
well-established relationship with students like Zoe, it was challenging for both of us to value
each other as individuals. I wanted to be a mentor for Zoe because academically she was capable
of completing her work independently. Socially, she was a bright and sharp individual. However,
with a lack of mutual understanding, Zoe and I ended up creating a “low-trust school
environment” (Grogan, 2013, p. 307) within the classroom. In this situation, I should have
explained to Zoe why I did not want her to leave the school grounds when class was in session.
Maybe “the knowledge that others care reduces one’s sense of vulnerability [and could] increase
social affiliation” (Grogan, 2013, p. 308). Technically, I was responsible for her safety and well-
being during that particular time period and I should have expressed my concerns to her in a
more logical manner instead of getting into an argument with her.

**After School Talk (Professionalism)**

After school, my co-worker came into my classroom because he wanted to have a chat.
He shut the door behind him and asked me how I was doing lately. I responded by claiming that
there has been some drama between some of the girls and I, which he already knew about. I
also told him that I had been very tired because there were lots of things to do, but not enough
time during the day to complete them. Then my co-worker shared his assumption that I would
not be returning back to school the following year because I had a hard time with the girls. I
responded by letting him know that I had not decided about next year yet. My co-worker then
use this opportunity to intimidate me by mentioning I should watch my back because the
Department of Education Authority (DEA) members would not renew my contract if our students fail their Alberta English exam. (Nunavut currently does not have their own set of curriculum and in order for students to graduate high school they needed to complete the Alberta English Exam). The DEA viewed the student’s failure as a reflection of the teacher’s inability to teach them appropriately. I responded by stating that the students’ abilities were not a complete reflection of my teaching ability. He agreed and warned me sternly that this was one of the criteria that the DEA members took into consideration for hiring practices in the following school year. I thanked him for his comment and told him that I needed to get some work done.

**After School Talk Analysis**

In my opinion, my co-worker was extremely unprofessional. According to Grogan (2013), “the level of trust among the members of a school community makes an important difference to the way they work together” (Grogan, 2013, p. 307). I thought that my co-worker displayed his concern in an undermining way because it did not feel like he was trying to assist me in improving my already stressful situation. Our working relationship had already gone sour prior to this conversation, and this further aggravated the issue. I did not react to his worries because in my opinion, it was evident that he wanted a negative reaction. As a professional, I was capable of displaying “social intelligence which included the “ability to get along with others”” (Mayer, 2014, p.29). In terms of getting along with my co-worker, I tried to be respectful and to acknowledge what he said because I had to work with him. Over time, my relationship with my co-worker became more distanced because we simply did not share the same educational values or beliefs. For example, I did not believe that students should be allowed to engage in after school activities unless they had shown a commitment in making the
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effort of coming to school on a regular basis, displaying a respectful attitude and completing their tasks within the classroom. When I reinforced this rule within my classroom, some of the students would turn to my co-worker and easily convince him that they were completing all the qualities listed above. Instead of supporting and reinforcing this rule to the students, my co-worker would forcefully tell me to allow these students to join my after school programs. This made me feel that my standards were not being respected by the students and my co-worker.

Trying to Make Things Work (Social Emotional Learning)

It had been a difficult struggle trying to work with Zoe, but I decided to have a heart-to-heart talk with her to try to improve our classroom situation. In English, I told the students that we would be doing some reading and summary writing. The students were fairly engaged in this process, but once again Zoe was trying to distract the class. I ignored her behaviour as I did not feel like getting myself into another power struggle with her. When I was done reading the book, I pulled a couple of the struggling students aside to help them with this assignment. Zoe wanted to type the summary and I agreed. However, she quickly lost interest and this also affected her best friend’s ability to stay engaged. I had to change my task halfway through because the entire class had been affected by Zoe’s negativity. The other task in which I wanted the students to engage was to work on an inquiry-based project focusing on the students’ own topic of interest. I tried to repeat the instructions several times, but I kept getting interrupted by Zoe. Instead of talking over her, I wrote the instructions on the board and reminded the students to think about their topic for the next class.

At the end of the class, I pulled Zoe aside and told her that I needed to speak with her. She thought I wanted to address homework for when she would be away on her medical trip. We talked about her homework along with her behaviour within class. I admitted to Zoe that
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English could be a fairly boring subject, but it is important to learn it. I asked her what her favourite subjects were and she expressed that she liked Math and Science. Then I suggested that she could have the freedom to write more on Math and Science related topics. I also asked her if she was interested in music. Zoe agreed that she had an interest for music then I mentioned that music could also be a topic of interest for her to explore within her writing.

**Trying to Make Things Work Analysis**

Having the talk with Zoe was challenging. I had to role play the situation with one of my counsellors in order to conduct this conversation with Zoe. It took a lot of courage to discuss my concerns with Zoe. I was afraid before the interaction. As stated by Palmer (2007), “if we peel back our fear of conflict, we find a third layer of fear, the fear of losing identity” (Palmer, 2007, p. 38). Even though I could not anticipate how the conversation with Zoe would go, I was fearful that she was going to question my teaching methodology, my skills, my values and beliefs and essentially my existence as a teacher. I feared because I was about to “encounter something foreign” (Palmer, 2007, p. 39-40). I was concerned but, more specifically, I was fearful of opening myself up to personal attacks. Zoe could probably sense the unauthenticity within me and she was also reluctant to open her authentic self to me. “When we are so far from our own [province]…we are seized by a vague fear and an instinctive desire to go back to the protection of old habits” (Palmer, 2007, p. 39-40). In this particular situation, even though I had the intention to try to refocus Zoe’s attention back to her own learning, I did not feel confident or comfortable of showing Zoe who I was wholeheartedly. Our interaction was very shallow and business-like. There was no real human touch to the interaction because “my self-respect was gravely wounded, and I knew whom to blame: it was the fault of the Student From Hell” (Palmer, 2007, p. 44). I was far away from home and from my support group of family and
friends. I could not rely on my support group and all I had was my insecure self. I did the uncomfortable process of initiating this conversation with Zoe, but I slipped back to what was comfortable to me, which was to focus on the academics rather than trying to repair or build a relationship with this student. In theory, I knew that without a strong personal connection, learning would not be able to take place. However, I was unable to put this theory into practice because I had my own internal insecurities that I needed to overcome before I could commit to building a genuine relationship with Zoe.

**A Hole In the Wall (Social Emotional Learning)**

Today was a much better day as my stress headache had gone away. Even though I slept uncomfortably last night, due to some Arctic Winter Games related issues with passport girl, I was still able to have enough energy to attend work.

After buddy reading with the grade 3’s, I had the students work on their projects. All of them were doing a great job of copying down the criteria, except Josh. I kept giving Josh options and chances. I gave him the option to either work by himself or join a group. He was reluctant to make a choice, so I finally selected a group of girls that he could work with. Josh was upset with this choice because he wanted to work with his best friend. I encouraged him to start writing down the criteria for the project, but he refused. I pulled him out of the classroom and he was reluctant to come, but he eventually did. I told him that he was doing so well before Christmas and asked him why his attitude was completely different now. He responded by stating that the work was boring. I agreed with him that school could be boring, but everyone else was doing the work except him. Then I gave him the option that he could either get back to work or I would give his mother a call. He responded “who cares” and I replied by stating that “I care, and I care about your education”. This comment triggered his anger: he punched the door
three times, punched a hole in the wall, got his stuff then walked out of the school grounds. It was an interesting way to relieve his anger as I witnessed a previous student doing the exact same actions a couple days ago. Josh seemed to be copying the actions of the other student, which told me he needed to resolve his problems by modeling other people’s behaviour. Our school counsellor gave Josh’s mother a call and I was happy because I had support from the school counsellor and my principal.

The passport girl finally came in to the school to fill out her passport forms. I got stressed with this situation; I felt that this process was costing my sanity because I had just finished dealing with Josh’s anger condition. My principal had offered to help the girl fill out the passport forms until it became too much of a chore because she was reluctantly doing it. Passport girl even gave me a glare when I asked her to refill a certain section of the form. At that point, I felt unappreciated and hurt.

My afternoon class was not that smooth because Zoe was being very defiant and I was feeling like the students were all going against me. A couple of the girls did their work which was fantastic. However, Zoe sat there and did nothing the entire time. She gave her mother a call and told her that she wanted to go home to use the washroom. Through the phone, Zoe’s mother demanded that I give her permission for her request. I felt that Zoe was using her mother to get what she wanted. However, I was glad that class time was finally over today because the hostile environment was difficult to be in.

**A Hole In the Wall Analysis**

There were many times where I had to question whether I was in the right profession or not. Moments like this made the “classroom [appeared] so lifeless or painful or confused, and I
am so powerless to do anything about it” (Palmer, 2007, p.2). Josh’s incident was a significant reflective moment. I assumed that Josh and I had a connection with each other based on his academic progression prior to this incident. However, this incident made me feel that the “enemy [was] everywhere: in those students from some alien planet, in that subject I thought I knew, and in the personal pathology that kept me earning my living this way” (Palmer, 2007, p.2). In this moment, I finally conceptualized the fact that Josh, the passport girl and Zoe were all students that had personalities, personal contexts, background and experiences that I had never dealt with before. Their attitudes were a foreign concept to me and I did not know how to react to it in these particular situations. Josh’s hole in the wall was a symbolic representation of my bleeding heart. As stated by Palmer (2007), “teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves to teach; the more heartbreaking it can be” (Palmer, 2007, p.11). I reflected on this moment quite a few times because I knew that deep down I enjoyed being in the teaching profession. I enjoyed being with young and hopeful people who were curious to learn and discover new possibilities. I enjoyed learning side-by-side with my students. Yet, I did not enjoy these difficult social emotional challenges that I felt I was dealing with inadequately. I remember stepping back and asking myself: “Is this what teaching is all about?”, “Do I have to go through these emotional struggles just to be a teacher?” and most importantly, “Is this worth the stress and anxiety?” In this moment “I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am” (Palmer, 2007, p.14) and acknowledging that I too have limitations and more questions rather than answers to my concerns.
Today has been a very rough day. I was still feeling the stress from the passport situation from previous days and I felt like I was about to explode.

After recess, I went into the office to talk to the principal about passport photos and I was frustrated because he mentioned to me that self-made photos would not be accepted by Passport Canada. As this conversation was going on, one of the students came to me and stated that I needed to be with the students in Physical Education class in case someone got injured. I raised my voice and told him that I would be there as soon as I could. Both the principal and the school secretary sensed the tension from my tone of voice. After losing my temper, I went and sat in the gym and I tried to calm down while I supervised the students.

In the afternoon, I went straight to the principal’s office and apologized for losing my temper in public. Josh’s mother had heard about my temper incident and immediately wanted a meeting to talk about the hole punching situation involving both the school counsellor and my principal.

I was extremely worried about the whole situation during class time that day and the students seemed to sense my nervousness. I told the students that I wanted to apologize to them because they were correct about the fact that I should have supervised in the gym the entire time. I also admitted that I was taking on too many extra-curricular activities which were causing a lot of stress to my mental health. The students seemed to understand that I was sincerely sorry for losing my temper.

The after school meeting with Josh’s mother was emotionally draining. Josh’s mother blamed me for Josh’s reaction. She mentioned that her son’s behaviour started within the
classroom. It was a difficult meeting to sit through because I felt attacked. However, I was glad that the school counsellor and principal supported me and that they told Josh’s mother that we were trying our best to keep some of the boys separated because it made life in the classroom challenging when the boys got off track. I presented my side of the story by stating that I was trying my best to not have Josh work with his best friend because there was history of them not being able to work together. Then Josh’s mother defended Josh’s best friend and asked why some students had to be excluded?

This incident provided me with important insight because what hurt me was the fact that although I cared about Josh’s education, Josh still lost his temper and then his mother blamed me for his reaction. At this point, I did not think the reward was great enough for me to stay at this school the following year because if caring and giving 110% of my effort to my students resulted in parental complaints, then it was not a worthwhile use of my time and my passion.

Overall, it was a rough day, but I was glad that I had survived it. I really missed home. I believed that life might be easier there, as I would be able to have people that I could socialize with and support me whenever I needed it.

**Blowing Up Analysis**

I had been suppressing my emotions for a prolonged period of time. I had significant anger and negativity within me, but I kept it all inside. As supported by Baltaci and Demir’s study on *Pre-Service Teachers and Emotional Intelligence and Anger Expression Styles* (2012), “anger is a normal feeling which [was] frequently experienced, which exist[ed] at different processes and intensity from minor disappointment to severe exasperation and to which
physiological and biological changes accompanied” (Baltaci & Demir, 2012, p. 2422). Based on the perceived lack of appreciation, I was in a constant state of anger. There was a sense of a loss of control in creating a learning environment that was safe for everyone. There was a sense of failure in making human connections based on a teacher not making the “emotional bond that [was supposed] to exist between [me] and [my students]” (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p. 63) as I was pre-occupied with my extra-curricular activities.

I have a tendency to take on many activities in order to make myself feel accomplished. In doing so, I put myself into high stress situations. With a combination of not being able to make connections with my students which resulted in a hostile classroom environment and the high stress extra-curricular activities, I was unable to control my frustration and this led to the unprofessional behaviour of losing my temper in public.

I have reflected deeply on this incident and thought about what I could do to improve my practice. According to Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, and Hensley (2012), I needed to become more of a self-authoring knower. A self-authoring knower who was capable of carrying out the below specific characteristics:

- Are reflective about themselves and their context
- Evaluate their own actions according to internal standards; except and accept conflict (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, and Hensley, 2012, p. 6)

When it comes to losing my temper, I realized that I was occupied with too many extra-curricular activities. I was stretching myself too thin and had neglected the main purpose of my job, which was to be a classroom teacher first before anything else. Shortly after the Arctic Winter Games, I stopped doing all my extra-curricular activities instead; I focused on teaching and maintaining the relationships that I already had with some of my students. Work became less
stressful because I was able to focus on establishing and refining my practice instead of all the other things with which I was involved.

As for the meeting with Josh’s mother, I have evaluated my actions according to my internal standards of what I believed was best practice for Josh’s learning. I did not expect the reaction that I received from Josh. Initially, it was hard to accept these criticisms, but now that I have had time to reflect on it, I have come to accept that it was a demanding challenge. I had the best of intentions as I wanted to make Josh the best person that he could be and have him feel empowered by his own accomplishments. My delivery could have been a lot gentler with Josh and I should have read the situation more skillfully and left Josh alone to either work on something else or just have a cool down period. Maybe Josh had a rough night with certain family issues, or maybe Josh was bullied in the morning before he came to school. I was not sensitive to Josh’s emotional needs as I was too focused on his academic improvement. What I needed was to develop a two-way communication with Josh and observe the “non-rational, nonverbal, and unconscious elements” (Grogan, 2013, p. 17) of Josh’s body language, which might have helped with avoiding the emotional blow up.

The iPad Incident (Relationships)

One of the girls and her friends wanted to teach me a lesson. I had stepped out of the classroom to photocopy an assignment for one of the students who had missed the previous class. While I was out of the classroom, three of the girls thought that it would be entertaining to go onto my iPad. Between the three of them, they were able to figure out my password and went into the message section of the device where they saw a private conversation that I had with a friend about one of my students. In the private conversation, I was expressing how disappointed I was in that particular student because she did not have her passport paper
LOOK OUT LOOK IN
completed for the upcoming Arctic Winter Games. The reason I was frustrated was because the Arctic Winter Games was hosted in Alaska, and in order to enter Alaska, all participants were required to provide a valid passport. This student waited until the last minute to complete her paper work and it was rejected by Passport Canada, as a result, we had to go through the process again in order to ensure that she got it completed right the second time around. However, this student simply gave up and did not want to put in the effort of completing the passport papers anymore. She not only gave me attitude when I was offering help to her, but she blamed me for her paper work being rejected the first time around. Out of frustration, I was venting to my friend about the passport situation and how I felt I was being taken advantage of and not being appreciated for all the hard work I put in. I also mentioned how angry I was with this particular student who blamed me for her lack of commitment and poor time management skills in getting her own papers completed. The three female students found this part of my conversation and decided that they would copy and paste this information onto their Facebook pages. As well, they emailed a copy of this conversation to all their friends and relatives in town. The message spread like a virus within less than 24 hours.

**The iPad Incident Analysis**

This event was one of the things that led to the deterioration of my physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. I was definitely “traveling naked into the land of uncertainty” (Quinn, 1996, p.12). In this particular incident, I had no idea what the community members were going to do to me. I was living in fear when I found out about this situation and I was unsure if I would make it through until the end of the school year.

When I found out which students had taken my conversation and were using different social media sites to spread the words, I felt extremely angry and frustrated, but mostly violated.
LOOK OUT LOOK IN

My principal gave me the option of confronting the girls in person and that he would fully support me in giving them a talk about stealing and violating personal items as well as cyber bullying. However, I thought about this option and knew that this confrontation would not work with the girls because we did not have the support of the community. The talk would only make the situation worse and the girls would only resent me more than they already did. Life in the classroom would only become more difficult and miserable. I made the decision to go with the “peace and pay” strategy (Quinn, 1996, p.20) by not addressing this issue to the girls directly, but by addressing it to the class as a whole. The girls laughed when I brought up the issue of stealing information from a personal device and how it was an offensive action. They did not take it very seriously and I tried hard not to react to the response received from them. I felt I was “dying, not physically, but psychologically” (Quinn, 1996, p.21). I [became] deeply frustrated and eventually [I] quit trying” (Quinn, 1996, p.21). For example, I quit trying to smile because I could not find anything joyful to smile about. I quit trying to engage in conversation with my students and my co-workers because I was afraid of being verbally attacked or having my words used against me. Mostly, I quit trying to initiate any sort of learning process for the students and instead I continued on with my day by “going through the motions” (Quinn, 1996, p.20) in the hopes of finishing the rest of the school year without any other problems.

Intervention (Professionalism)

This morning did not start off the greatest. The passport girl’s mother came to my classroom and demanded that I explain to her why I was complaining about her family. She told me that she would remain upset until I gave her an explanation. I told her that the principal, she and I should have a conversation about this situation after school as I did not want to make a scene within the classroom.
Back in December, my principal and superintendent knew that I was struggling within my classroom. In order for them to provide me with full support, they decided to send an education consultant from Ottawa to offer personal and professional counselling services to help me get through the remaining of the school year. The consultant arrived in my classroom during the Physical Education period. The consultant and I were able to have a heart-to-heart talk. I told the consultant about my car accident, which happened during the previous school year, and that the situations that were going on within the classroom were not nearly as difficult as having a near death experience.

In the afternoon English class, I had the consultant observe my classroom and it was more relaxing because the girls were behaving better as they were more mindful of what they said and did. Academically, we got all the work done that I had hoped to accomplish, but behaviourally, it was still a hard place to be. I was calm and respectful like the consultant mentioned, but I did not enjoy myself as much as I had with my morning students. One of the girls was being hard on me with her attitude because she demanded the answers right away to the many questions she asked. Zoe and her friends were passing notes to one another while I was going over the listening assignment. I stopped Zoe from being distracted by specifically asking her some questions related to the listening activity.

I received some feedback from the consultant and principal the following morning. It was nice to hear that the consultant thought that I had a strong and calm presence in the classroom. She mentioned to me that I should slow my speech down in the senior level English class because this might help the students stay calm and they might be able to follow my instructions more clearly. I confessed that it was challenging to slow down sometimes because I
was in a high intensity and high stress situation where I was being attacked from all sides. However, I agreed to slow my speech down and continue to be respectful, and I would start calling the students out on their disrespectful behaviour more frequently. I also believed that I should reinforce the students to stay in their assigned seats in order to break up their alliances.

**Intervention Analysis**

Because of all the emotional struggles that I had been encountering since December, the Superintendent of Schools suggested that a consultant be sent up to observe my classroom in February in the hopes that she would provide valuable professional counselling to help me get through the rest of the school year. The superintendent seemed to understand the importance of “mak[ing] others feel strong and capable” (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p. 68). In my opinion, the superintendent was a great leader because he knew the need for personal development and I felt empowered because he was able to “listen, understand, and challenged me to do more” (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p. 69) within this situation.

The consultant was extremely supportive and the services she provided were extremely effective. Now, after some research on emotional intelligence, I know that there was an *Emotional Skills Assessment Process* that individuals could use to assist them in learning information by using thinking (cognitive) and feeling (emotional) systems to help them understand the skills that teacher may apply when facing challenges (Justice & Espinoza, 2007, p. 458). The process was a self-assessment instrument that provided a list of specific measures.

The Emotional Skills Assessment Process skills measures were as follows:

- Interpersonal skills- assertion
- Leadership skills- comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership
- Self-management skills- drive strength, time management, commitment ethic
- Interpersonal skills- stress management, self esteem
- The problematic indicators measured aggression and deference (under interpersonal skills), and change orientation (under self-management skills)
LOOK OUT LOOK IN

(Justice & Espinoza, 2007, p. 458)

From this teaching experience, I believe that my interpersonal skills needed major improvement. Both my self-esteem and stress-management needed to be very strong because “teachers with low self-esteem can feel the stress of any little thing that may go wrong with students, colleagues or themselves” (Justice & Espinoza, 2007, p. 460) and this exactly described the situation.

When Justice and Espinoza (2007) talked about interpersonal skills, stress management, and self-esteem, this directly related to areas that I needed to improve. In terms of stress management, I exercised at least two to three times a day in order to help me reduce the stress level at work. Friends were invited over to share meals because it became apparent that food tasted a lot better with company. Most importantly, I read a lot of books to temporarily escape the isolating reality of the North. For self-esteem building, multiple verbal positive reinforcements were used throughout the day in order to remind myself that I was worthy as a human being.

Mid-Term Exam (Social Emotional Learning)

Today has been a very interesting and stressful day. In the morning, I was conducting the senior grade level English midterm exam. Everything was fine until the students told me that my co-worker had mentioned to them that they did not have to attend school in the afternoon. I had to clarify this notion with my co-worker and the principal. My principal had asked me who had brought up this idea and I had mentioned Zoe’s name along with others. This was a trigger for my principal as he got extremely angry and yelled at Zoe and forced her to come out of the classroom while everyone else was startled. Zoe did not know what she had done wrong and I did not expect the principal to react the way that he did.
After recess, Zoe’s mother wanted to talk to me, but I could not talk to her right away because I had a class that was writing exams. I got the secretary to help me supervise the class. However, this did not work out because by the time I had everything arranged, Zoe’s mother had already left the school. Instead, Zoe’s father came into the school and started to yell; he swore and threatened the principal in the office. It was a coincidence that the RCMP officers came and did a school visit that day and witnessed the violence that was going on within the principal’s office. Zoe’s father wanted to talk to me, but my principal protected me by claiming that I had a class and that I needed to supervise. In the end, I never had a conversation with Zoe’s father.

In the afternoon, Zoe’s brother came into my classroom and started to question me and asked “Do you treat your students like this down south?” I told him that we could have the conversation in the office as I was not comfortable speaking to him alone. He agreed and we went into the principal’s office to have a discussion. Zoe’s brother thought that we were treating Zoe unfairly. Then the principal stated that we could not disclose any information to him as there was a long history behind this whole situation. Zoe’s brother got even more upset and stated that “Why do you have to focus on the past? We live in the present and the future!” I repeated exactly what the principal had said to him. This statement got him even more upset and he mentioned “I am sorry because both of you will get kicked out of this community soon”. My principal told me not to worry about his comment because he said the same thing last year when another student was having a difficult time in school.

Everything was fine in the last two blocks until one of Zoe’s other friends gave me attitude and made a racist comment stating how “Chinese I was”. I had to kindly ask my
Inuktitut co-worker to translate her comment for me. My co-worker even apologized to me for this students’ comment. When I went back into the classroom, I told this student about how her behaviour was unacceptable. She then asked me if she could go get a drink, go to the washroom and then retrieve her jacket. I told her that I would not give her these privileges as she did not deserve it. I told her that she needed to apologize before she walked out of this classroom. She dropped off her paper, coughed, then stated “Sorry” in a quiet manner then walked out.

**Mid-Term Exam Analysis**

Even though I was not the one who lost my temper in this situation, it was important for me to share part of the responsibility for this incident. As discussed in one of our classes, “wins belong to the team and losses belong to the leader” (J. Ansell, personal communication, March 27th 2015). My principal and I have been through some tough situations throughout the entire school year and it was important for me to support him because I knew that he was under a tremendous amount of stress dealing with my work-related issues. In this particular situation, “leaders and constituents alike felt passionately committed to a cause, and they were willing to suffer through the tough times that came with doing something difficult and demanding” (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p.101). I was ready to take full responsibility for the situation because I knew that this would lessen the stress load for my principal. I also wanted to prove to him that I was a team player. As a team player, I would be willing to endure the challenging social emotional stress that occurred from this situation. I was psychologically and emotionally ready to take on the upcoming verbal attacks that were coming our way. I was even ready to be asked to physically leave the community. Essentially, I thought my teaching career in this community was coming to an end.
Furthermore, when the racial comment was made by one of the students, I felt as if this situation had turned into a personal one. I was being criticised because of my ethnicity. I have not encountered anything as racially blunt as this situation and it was extremely uncomfortable because now that I felt like I was being targeted for something over which I had no control. This situation made me feel that “teachers make an easy target, for they are such a common species and so powerless to strike back” (Palmer, 2007, p.3-4). I did not know how to respond or react to her comment. I was hurt because I grew up in a multicultural community; I did not expect to receive this level of racism.

The Blame Game (Professionalism)

This morning was tough. One of the girls came to me first thing in the morning to ask me what her mark was on her English mid-term exam. I gave it to her and congratulated her for getting the highest mark in the class. She was upset because she got 85%. I mentioned that she had done a fantastic job, but she reacted by throwing her exam back at me and walked away cursing and swearing in Inuktitut. I did not have the energy to go after her and instead I called the school counsellor and asked him to talk to the student.

Another student’s Alberta English exam mark came back and she thought she had passed, but in actuality, she failed. My co-worker told me that she looked extremely upset. This student’s mother came and saw my co-worker about her daughter’s results. My co-worker told her the bad news and the mother immediately blamed her daughter’s failure on me. I explained to my co-worker that it was the system that had failed her.

The Blame Game Analysis

Currently, Nunavut does not have its own set of curricula. As a result, we borrowed the Alberta curriculum to educate the local students. This was a disaster as the majority of the
students were English Additional Learners. The resource materials were not applicable to the students’ abilities. There was a lot of resistance during lessons because the students were simply confused, lost or overly challenged by the content. This was when “cultural differences become the boundaries between the teachers and the students with ensuing resistance to schooling on the part of the learner” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.5). In this particular situation, the first student did amazingly well on the exam given that English was her second language. However, the second student’s learning became secondary within the classroom priority as her main focus became survival. The second student was trying to survive the unengaging curriculum that had no relevance to her, while I was trying to survive her verbal and emotional abuse that originated from her frustration regarding the delivery of a “foreign curriculum in a foreign language” (Berger, Juanita, & Moller, 2006, p.6).

**Suicide (Social Emotional Learning)**

This week was my last week before the school year was over. However, today has been a very sad day. As I walked to work, some of my students were walking in the opposite direction. I asked them if they were skipping school and they told me that school had been cancelled because someone had committed suicide.

**Suicide Analysis**

A statement made by Ishaya really stood out to me in this particular situation. The statement goes like this:

“Are you willing to see differently or to be wrong even if you strongly think you are right?...most of us, however, stubbornly cling to our positions and beliefs because to us they represent truth, and over time these ‘truths’ become valued treasures. Reality does not work like this because it has nothing to do with belief or ‘perceived’ truths. It does not care what you think! It does not care whether or not you are close to your goal. It does not care if you understand a single thing!” (Ishaya, 2014, p.2)
My perceived belief was that this suicide incident was difficult to digest at the end of a challenging school year. I was looking forward to the year-end celebration of the Kindergarten graduation followed by a community feast. I wanted my year-end school experience to be a positive one so I could leave the community feeling optimistic and joyful. However, the suicide incident did not carry out my valued opinions or goals. The reality of this situation did not just affect me and my emotional well-being. It affected everyone within the community, but all I selfishly thought about was how this event impacted me emotionally. Emotionally, I was drained and had put up a solid wall. I did not want to invest any more emotions with this community. My first entitled thought of avoiding this harsh reality was by leaving as soon as I possibly could. I changed my flight and left in the afternoon on the last day of school. All I thought about was leaving. Physically leaving the community was a metaphor for leaving all the pain and hurt behind. I was going to leave my broken soul behind in order to move on with my life. As stated by Kouzes & Posner (2010) “it [took] more than toughness to keep going when the going gets tough. It’s also vital that you find purpose and significance in what you do” (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p. 35). Things were tough and I had put up a good fight to survive until the end, but I needed to leave in order to rest the already tired and wounded soul. I felt like I could not give much more of myself to my students even though that may have been the moment where they needed support the most. I selfishly only thought about my needs at that moment and nothing else seemed to matter. Reality appeared to be uncomfortable and miserable and my best defense against it was to leave the situation.

**Summary:** As a beginner teacher, all of these experiences were new encounters. I was unsure of how to handle certain situations. However, after analysing these events I found them to be extremely valuable towards my own personal and professional growth. As stated by James
Kouzes and Barry Posner in *The Truth About Leadership* (2010, p. 23), “challenge is the crucible for greatness…great achievements don’t happen when you keep things the same. Change invariably involves challenges, and challenges tests you. It introduces you to yourself. It brings you face-to-face with your level of commitment, your grittiness, and your values” (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p. 23). The experience of teaching in the north has transformed my outlook on life and my teaching career. I have a much greater understanding of what values I hold as an educator and where I would like to take this learning into my future encounters.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

I began my journey in Nunavut as a new and inexperienced teacher. I left the comfort of my home, support group and familiar environment looking to seek out an adventure. Going to Nunavut has been a life changing experience on many different levels. Socially, I was challenged because I did not have people who knew me and my character. Academically, I was underprepared to teach the students because they were “as large and complex as life” (Palmer, 2007, p.2). Emotionally, I was “walking naked into the land of uncertainty” (Quinn, 1996, p.1) because I was unsure of my abilities when performing at work, unsure of how to conduct myself in social events and I certainly had to question my own character on many occasions. My life was going through change. “The pace of change had [me] snarled in complexities, confusions, and conflicts that [had] diminished [me]” (Palmer, 2007, p.3). However, I knew that in order to make the best out of this chosen life path, I needed to undergo “deep change” (Quinn, 1996, p.6). Deep change that allowed me to understand that “as the world around us changes, we lose our sense of alignment…[however], we needed to alter our fundamental assumptions, rules, or paradigm and develop new theories about ourselves and our surrounding environment” (Quinn, 1996, p.7). In order for me to understand my Northern teaching experience, it was important to look into what research has to offer on my chosen themes of professionalism, student-teacher relationships and social emotional learning.

The research that I have conducted has helped me construct meaning about my time in Nunavut. Under professionalism, it was important to remember what Fullan and Hargraves shared on what it meant to be a professional educator. One thing they mentioned was that “in the early stages of [becoming a teacher], communication and what you value is best done through behaviour and example through what you do and who you are on a day-to-day basis” (Tompkins, 1998, p.125). Verbal communication was as equally important as one’s actions. Our students
may not remember the things we said to them; however, they would remember the actions that we took to accomplish certain tasks. Professionalism also included having a balance between the professional and personal life. As stated by Fullan and Hargreaves that “balancing the work and the life is an important protection against burnout. It also leads to more interesting teachers and more interesting teaching” (Tompkins, 1998, p.126). Working in the north had many challenges, but the most important thing to remember was to allocate time to rest and reflect on one’s teaching practices and interactions with students, parents and community members. Teaching was not always about giving, it was also about knowing my personal limitations and how much I was able to provide for my students before encountering the feeling of burnout. The last essential component of professionalism was trust. Trust “creates and consolidates energy, commitment and relationships [and] when trust is broken, people lessen their commitment and withdraw from relationships, and entropy abounds” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p.508). Trust was the most significant component in forming any relationship. My most significant realization was that I did not trust myself. I had doubts about my own teaching abilities which led to the challenges that I had within the classroom. However, the way that I have learned to rebuild trust with myself was by knowing my capabilities and my limitations. By being honest about what I was able to accomplish as a beginner teacher has led me to the path of becoming a much more self-aware professional.

In terms of student-teacher relationships, it was important to be “culturally responsive teachers who respond to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences and performance and learning styles of students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (Lewthwaite & McMillan, 2010, p. 142). I have learned that by interacting with my students and getting to know them on an individual level has helped me established a tremendous amount of trust with them. I
have also learned that with the students who I did not have a great relationship with, the best way to resolve the student teacher tension was by “understand[ing] the characteristics of the students coming to school, value their culture, and be able to build on the strengths students brought with them, both managerially and instructionally” (McCarthy & Benally, 2003, p.303). Every student was unique in their own way. Even though I was able to connect with the majority of the students on an individual level, I was not able to connect with them all. Through this experience, I have learned that we may not have a connection with every student we have taught, however, the best approach was to continue to support those students in areas where they needed guidance and help them reach their maximum potential.

Social emotional learning was important because it embodied all of my experiences working in the North. What embodies all these struggles that I had encountered boiled down to one thing: patience. According to Tompkins, “patience involves understanding change, the nature of change and the nature of people. Patience is understanding that people can ‘only’ be what they are at the moment, that change happens in small steps, that people often backslide, and that people cannot change everything about themselves at once” (Tompkins, 1998, 115). I was not patient enough with the change process that was happening with my students. I expected witnessed instant results academically, socially and behaviourally from them. When the change process happened in the slow speed that it did, I interpreted the unhurried change as a form of failure. The sense of failure came in the form of my inabilities to deliver the curriculum effectively, as well I felt like a failure when I was unable to connect with certain students on a deeper and more personal level. However, after leaving the North and having the chance to reflect on these experiences during my Masters of Education program, I came to the self-realization that I was not a failure. This experience was a character building practice and it had
pushed me to develop many different realms of my personality and the way I perceived and react to different situations. I also came across this letter from my UBC practicum advisor which reminded me why I had chosen the teaching profession in the first place. The letter was presented as follow:

Dear Tina,

It takes courage to get up, to meet the day and to accept that you may not have answers to that which unfolds… There is no answer key when one is a teacher of the human heart. May you always find the courage to teach.

Love and light,

Anita

(A. Bramhoff, personal communication, June 20th, 2015)

The main reason for writing this autoethnography was so that it could serve as an example for new teachers in unfamiliar and difficult situations. One of the best pieces of advice that I received from my counsellor was to leave the North. This advice came to me not because she thought I was weak and incapable of teaching, but she thought that I needed a break from the North in order to reconnect with my support group and most importantly myself. I was grateful for receiving this advice and it was a weight-off-the-shoulder moment when this option was presented to me. What this recommendation has taught me was that there were many paths in life. I recognized I could only withstand certain amount of challenges on my own before I have to return to the familiarity of my own comfort zone. There was no shame in admitting to myself that the challenges were beyond my abilities, but the most significant lesson that I have learned was coming out of this experience as a much psychologically stronger, emotionally tougher and socially more stable individual. Hopefully this autoethnograph could give guidance, direction, and help for new teachers in finding support in their new teaching careers.
References


