Re-vealing and Re-personalizing: A Journey Via Currere from Burnout to Resiliency

by

Heide Heiman

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Faculty of Education

© Heide Heiman, 2018
Vancouver Island University
All rights reserved. This project may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.

We accept this Thesis as conforming to the required standard.

MaryAnn Richards, Thesis Faculty Supervisor
Faculty of Education,
Vancouver Island University

May 22, 2018

Dr. David Paterson, Dean, Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University

May 22, 2018
Abstract

My intention in this study was to weave statistics, references, and studies throughout my story. I have researched extensively on the topic of burnout in special education teachers within their first 10 years of teaching. Studies, reviews, and types of assessments have been analyzed and synthesized along with my own data collected through the methodology of currere. I share with you the overview of the field of burnout and resilience among teachers. I share the difference between stress, burnout, and the link to secondary traumatic stress. I include broad descriptions of theories, research, and elements that add to my knowledge and personal experience. I used the writing of currere to reflect, analyze, and synthesize themes. The research has informed my study to show that I am not alone in my journey through burnout and out of it, and that, the most important thing that I can offer to our field is a personal account that humanizes the previous quantitative research.

*Keywords*: burnout, special education teachers, resiliency, currere, trauma, professional identity, narrative in research, reflection, reconceptualization
Dedication

To Amanda: “My gratitude speaks, when I care, and when I share with others…”

To Alice: For the freedom you have written on my hand; we give you all of the thanks.

To Michelle: You are my family.

A very special thanks to MaryAnn. Thank you for being part of my resilience. Thank you for being my teacher. Thank you for sharing in your own resilience in the face of colons, semi-colons, and comma errors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract ................................................................. iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication ................................................................. iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents ........................................................... v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One- Introduction .................................................. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem ........................................................ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where I was ................................................................. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Study ........................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two-Methodology ..................................................... 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework ....................................................... 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations ..................................................... 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection ............................................................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation and Analysis ............................................... 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance ................................................................. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three-Burnout and the North ....................................... 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four-My professional identity as a novice teacher ............... 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five-The Child Inside the Teacher .................................. 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My past revisited ............................................................. 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six-The secret behind my PTSD ...................................... 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven-Discussion of Resiliency Factors ................................ 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support ....................................................... 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy ................................................................. 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections, Collegiality, Collaboration .................................... 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and Role Models .................................................. 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currere and Ongoing Reflection ............................................. 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8-Conclusion-The Future Projected ................................... 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Study ......................................................... 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References ........................................................................... 85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction: Chapter One

“The task of teaching exposes one’s personality in a way that other occupations do not” (Calderhead, 1991, p. 533).

Statement of Problem

I am being pushed to the limit. I am disengaged. I am exhausted. I want to do better. I have no more answers. I just do not know if I am making a difference anymore. I do not know who I am, where I am going, or if teaching is for me?

The impact of: High case loads, extreme and intensive behaviours, overload of paperwork, new buzzwords that bring heavy changes without guidance, lack of time, lack of funding, lack of resources, traumatic stories, heart strings pulled, and feelings of despair on teachers has led to an increasing amount of research into the epidemic of burnout.

As life always happens, my entire plan turned upside down and I found myself 1200 km away from my classroom, in a new town, a new district, and freshly divorced. I felt lost. This study follows the methodology of currere on a journey to reveal my trauma and resiliency, to expose its impact on my professional identity, with the purpose of creating a narrative that offers new research into teacher burnout. The literature that I reviewed, researched, and reflected upon speaks to the attrition of teachers within their first few years of teaching. “Nearly 50% of teachers entering the profession leave within the first five years.” (Hong, 2012, p. 418). These studies touch on key factors that have both quantifiably and subjectively proven to play a role in the leading cause of attrition: Burnout.

The existing research has generally sought to explain teacher attrition from an organizational perspective with the emphasis on external factors. However, such explanations are limited in fully explaining this phenomenon. This is because decision-making and particular career practices are deeply intertwined with an individual’s meaning-making process and internal value system, which cannot be completely explained by external variables alone. Under the same working conditions, individual
It is important for research to recognize that teaching and teachers are not robotic. That the entire “industry” of teaching is founded upon human feelings, making split second decisions based on experience, feelings, and intuition. The intricacies of how teachers respond to the inexplicable emotional demands of teaching is based on their own experiences, where they came from, how they view the world, and what they bring with them into the space of curriculum. The approach of burnout research must include what is inside the teacher. Teachers expose themselves each moment of the day, vulnerably placing their core values on the table in front of them for children to seize. Teaching is a profession of the heart and the reactions (attrition) cannot be measured without considering the data collected by the subjects- the teachers.

**Where I Was**

The problem is that no one discussed resiliency during my undergrad for my Bachelor of Education. No one mentioned that my own experiences would play a role in my pedagogy and practice. What I wondered is, how do I move through my emotional past and move towards resiliency and a genuine future? I needed to collect data on myself, my practice, and my professional identity as a teacher. I had only been looking at the resilience and the trauma of my students. As I began researching, I identified that I was in a space of burnout. I was feeling isolated within the profession, and behaving as if I did not belong. I felt as if I was not a “real” teacher. I began exploring my perceptions of what “real” teachers were. I didn’t know it in the moment, but I had a skewed idea of what a teacher should look like, act like, and teach like. My perception of my professional identity created an internal tension that I was subconsciously fighting against. I needed to surrender and get out of my own way. My trauma overwhelmed me and I took a stress leave in my third year of teaching.

As Bobek (2002) suggests, “Adverse situations serve as catalysts for the creation of resilience. A teacher’s resilience is enhanced when he is capable of assessing adverse
situations, recognizing options for coping, and arriving at appropriate resolutions” (p. 202). My move from the North, my divorce, and my revealed trauma created the catalyst, and my journey through the process of currere helped me to assess, analyze, and synthesize my present and past which led me to develop and recognize options and choices to move forward in my career.

There is a dichotomy that I have been holding, between what is real and what is my perceived reality that has been constructed based on obscured memories, expectations created from codependent relationships in and outside of education, misunderstood contexts and feelings that went uncommunicated. This internal tension fuelled by my history of trauma, extended into my professional identity, and delivery of curriculum has exposed itself within the reflection constructed by my writing.

Pinar (2015) suggests, “that when we misunderstand ourselves, we misunderstand our world” (p.54). I have misunderstood not only myself, but my purpose within education and within my life. My history has been filled with many fragmented memories considering only partial truths and interpretations that were invalid in terms of constructing meaning that could be used in my present. When I put them together and looked at them from my present perspective, as if I was reading someone else’s diary, I found that I had stripped myself of person and had singled out moments that I partitioned off into sensory stillled pictures which brought meaning into my present actions. I had read and reread Bobek’s (2002) definition of resiliency: “The ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions” (p. 202), and had come to reflect on its meaning; that resiliency is not just something that I modulated on my own because of my personal and intrinsic attributes. I found that resiliency is the strength to go forward through any situation and that it cannot only come from within. I have moved forward through encouragement, support from others, motivation, hope and having role models. These have been necessary external influences for me to come out standing and successful. It is as though I have been trudging up stream my entire life struggling not to fall, fearing that I would fall, and be violently whisked away while
drowning. Through the methodology of currere I see that my struggle and perseverance to continue upstream is my resiliency. The fear of falling and drowning has been lessened by doing this research. The methodology of currere allowed me as a researcher to delve into myself creating data from which to glean new perspective. I formulated my question wondering how would following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience? My goal was that by leaping to the furthest point of vulnerability I would provide a subjective perspective that would be genuinely, holistically sharing a revealed point of view that will bring the conversations usually held behind closed doors in shame, to the arena of academia where other educators can relate, make connections, and begin their own journey through burnout and into resiliency.

Currere created a platform in which I was able to collect my own data subjectively and internally, synthesize how I develop and create meaning and reveal how my pedagogy had been put into praxis. The narrative created from the methodology of currere will contribute to the knowledge and research on burnout and resiliency. I will share in the following chapters my story: My first days of teaching, into my present, and how I will continue in this profession through the future. This narrative will add to our research field by explaining one perspective of all those intertwined variables into one isolated account. My narrative will provide one case study that may raise questions or suggest personal explorations for other teachers. The research field will benefit as I weave the research and literature already published, throughout my story to emphasize that new teacher burnout is a very real concern in the field of special education. This narrative will add to our understanding and discussion of how currere is an extraordinarily beneficial methodology that provides the much needed bridge between facts and feelings that is missing from our current body of knowledge. I will provide a unique and insightful narrative that adds to curriculum theory that can be drawn upon for further investigations. Finally, my story will create an open door of dialogue for other teachers embarking on their own journey of resilience. My research question: Given the internal tension
of my history of trauma and my professional identity, how has my past and my perceived future impacted my present teaching practice? How will following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience?

Although my story will not be yours, and you will not necessarily be able to identify with the details of my journey, my hope is that you will be able to connect with the emotions that I describe. My experiences are my own and I do not speak for all teachers who have experienced burnout. There are limitations to a singular viewpoint within research and my intention is not to generalize a profession, the epidemic of burnout, or to declare my story is the only story. My hope and intention is only that you will find yourself within my feelings and be encouraged to create conversation about your own professional identity and the tension you hold. My hope is that after reading this, you will know intrinsically that you are not alone, and, when you are ready to share your own story, that you find someone to hold space for you.

**Overview of Study**

This study follows a narrative created and constructed by the witnessing of reflections on the past, present and the future. I will discuss and share my time spent in the North, my first placement, how my professional identity as a novice teacher added to my burnout, I link the symptoms of burnout to STS (secondary traumatic stress) and PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). I revisit my past and reveal my vulnerabilities that expose the importance of sharing and receiving help. I go through my present placement and the factors of resiliency that I use in my daily practice. Finally, I will discuss the significance of this study and the importance of the knowledge that has been created. This study will weave narrative with reflection, with knowledge gained by holding space for both subjective and objective observations, and the literature from the field. I will touch on many sensitive subjects that may trigger some of those that read this study. I ask that you take care of yourself, and reach out if you need to.
Chapter Two: Methodology

“The German philosopher Martin Heidegger was interested in turning points. In these moments of turning, *Kehre* in German, we rise above our everyday world and come to see, hear and understand life and being, differently. Eventually we return to the taken-for-granted, but the memories of those turning points remain, turning and turning” (Chambers, 2004, p.10).

Theoretical framework

The research method of currere as introduced by William Pinar (1975) is a qualitative, subjective, reflective, and a post-positivist method of conducting valuable research and perspective. Webb (2015) asserts that currere creates knowledge through critical examination and an “intentional autobiographic reflective process for uncovering and understanding the crafting of my professional identity and practices as an educator” (p.4) and points to the connection between our personal narrative and our teaching profession.

The theory of currere holds many conflicting dichotomies together in one space in order to reveal a true position of a person’s life as seen by the self. Curriculum is every educational experience one has and using those experiences to generate knowledge through a subjective and objective lens is where one sits at the end of currere. Grumet (2015) explains the theory of currere succinctly:

The theory of currere's exploration of educational experience is drawn from humanistic philosophy, phenomenology’s emphasis on the reciprocality of subjectivity and objectivity in the dynamic constitution of human knowledge, and existentialism’s emphasis on the dialectical relationship of man to his situation. This is to say, educational experience can be approached in a phenomenological examination of the relationship of one person to his world (p.45).

Currere is a journey that transcends the experiences themselves and generates meaning upon reflection. Currere is written by stream of consciousness; sitting down, letting the words tumble to the page without judgment, editing, thinking, or analyzing. One writes
currere as if they are observing a movie of their own life and transcribing it onto paper. It is only after the writing has finished and time has been used to distance oneself from the transcription, then we go back and re read what was written. We read it as a new person, because we are already different people since the actual events happened, we are different people when we wrote from our consciousness, and we are different people approaching the writing as if for the first time: juggling subjectivity with objectivity through the use of bracketing who we are now and who we were then, distance and time to process and coming back to formulate meaning and create knowledge (Grumet, 2015). Pinar (2015) explains:

This process of review and analysis is done from a temporal and psychic place that is past the places from which the earlier work was done. It transcends the past, in that I cannot just restate the past; I have emerged from it. I see it more clearly. This process is reconceptualization, an understanding from a higher cognitive and psycho-social place of the ledges below (p. 29).

This idea of reconceptualization and Pinar’s discourse on it was heard at the Xavier Conference in 1974. Reconceptualization was a new concept in the arena of curriculum and brought forth with it a movement that joined empirical understanding of our world (science, political, history) with that of autobiography and the subjective self as potential data (2015). I understand currere adds to curriculum in the same way my bad mood transforms my classroom. We cannot escape ourselves in a field that demands us to give all of who we are to other humans. This is a business of human beings, of feelings, discoveries into the self and we as teachers bring all of who we are with us as we deliver and share content and method and practice. Currere’s framework serves to give objective voice to our past, present, and projected future that balances our understanding of how the world plays a role in our own growth, how we meet that world, and what within us is reaching out to grasp some of that world.
Ethical Considerations

My methodology is subjective and qualitative. The main participant of my method is me: the researcher. I wrote on my own educational experiences, reflected on how these experiences shaped my teaching practice, creating my professional identity and then playing a part in both my resilience and my susceptibility to burnout. I engaged in a personal, reflexive, and revealing methodology, aware of the ethical considerations regarding myself and others from my past and present.

The considerations of self harm that I thought about when embarking on this journey were a constant dilemma for me throughout the writing process. I proposed areas of vulnerability that would be exposed: my flaws, my mistakes, my emotions. I wrote in my first Methodology chapter that I would have to find a place of acceptance within myself that allows me to forgive myself for mistakes made and the impact those mistakes have had on my learners and possibly my colleagues. I said I would practice mindfulness to stay grounded. These were hopeful thoughts to have, and throughout this journey I can say that I have done very well at staying mindful minus a few deep dark well visits... I also predicted that I would experience some re-traumatization during the regression piece of currere and anxiety during the progression pieces. At the time of my proposal I had a loving partner, a home, an established career, a therapist, and a great group of friends supporting me. Throughout the journey of currere, I got divorced, moved 1200kms away to a new place, a new school, a new community, on my own. I was vulnerable, susceptible to an entirely new wave of burnout, and depression. Currere was triggering, but also, supportive. The writing of currere created an outlet. Throughout the reflection process I saw the mistakes that I had previously made the first bout into burnout, and used some of the resiliency strategies that I had learned through my literature reviews. I remained stable, grounded, and continued to be encouraged to move forward.

There are times throughout the writing period where I had many questions about my work being published and the vulnerability and potential harm that could cause myself, my
career, and those in my biological family. Chambers (2015) explains when doing research on oneself there is no escaping the influence, interactions, and connections made to other people, places and shared experiences that must be protected through anonymity and confidentiality at all costs when there is no possibility of ongoing consent throughout the research (p. 2). I looked at my relationships with my own educational experiences: I focused on my personal perceptions of those moments from memory, I reflected on my feelings surrounding those memories in the present moment, I examined the impressions that I got from reliving those specific situations, and determined what types of generalizations and opinions I formed as a result from those reflexive experiences. I analyzed the effects those moments and situations had on my present day practice, and how my values, pedagogy, and identity have transformed as a result. I synthesized emergent themes and concluded attitudes, ideas, thoughts providing a knowledgable narrative that others can relate to and interpret on their own. I focused on my personal perceptions and avoided naming places, people or delving into specifics about others’ experiences. There are identifiable people within my narrative that have directly affected my entire life including both my professional identity and my personal identity. Those people, mainly my caregivers, I believe could be identified by themselves only, even then, I have written my narrative with ethical considerations and ambiguity as first priority.

In the event where a short narrative from my past or present has been reliant on the location, the person or a specific detailed event that can be identifiable, the recognizable details have been omitted or changed in order to preserve confidentiality. I use the term caregivers to lump the number of adults that were present in my life growing up, I use the generalized administrators, or administration to refer to anyone of authority in my career including principals, vice principals, school board administration etc. Chambers (2015) suggests we, “lie in order to tell the truth” (p. 14). I have struggled with the notion of lying, lying by omission, and misconstrued or even implanted memories through this entire process of currere. I make note of it often throughout my reflections. Through deep consideration I realize that lying by omission is a way to set boundaries. We always change our language in order to
create boundaries (whether for confidentiality reasons or the avoidance of unpleasantries), especially when circumstances involve personal details versus professional identity. I have not ever omitted a feeling, an emotion, or a response to a situation in my narrative. I will not reveal certain details in order to remain ethical, and I understand that this may result in different conclusions created by the reader. The reader will be forming ideas, thoughts, and connections based on altered information. This presents a limitation in questioning truth and reality. As this work is a phenomenological methodology, there is no way to be sure my subjective interpretations are grounded in proof, verified by others. I believe that I have been honest with myself. My purpose is to convey emotions, impressions, and the impact of my life’s situations on my professional identity and my journey through burnout. The details are less relevant when analyzing feelings. It is the feelings, emotions that affect actions, these are relatable. The reader is not going to share in all the circumstances of my educational journey, or my life. There are many experiences that I share that are positively un-relatable to most people, however, they show my capacity to be vulnerable. That capacity will ignite inspiration for others to do the same. I still believe as I did when I began this research that vulnerability is part of the purpose: that is, to create conversations that are real, expressive, personal, and prove the value of sharing our deep selves, while providing opportunities for others to interpret, connect with and be inspired by their own journey and practice. I do not believe that by omitting or changing characteristics that could be identifiable will affect the ability of the reader to interpret, connect with, or validate the emotions and impact of those emotions on my education or the data collected within this narrative.

Data collection

My journey through currere has given me the ability to uncover many aspects and themes throughout both my personal journey and my professional identity. The process was filled with both turbulent and serene moments that have given me motive and opportunity for reflection that I believe will have a positive effect on our research within education. Following this methodology has given me pages of written disclosure that follows my educational path.
and is filled with the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional embodiment of what it has been like going through burnout within my career as a teacher. These reflections, memories, and synthesis have informed my practice.

My intention for data collection was very laid out in a systematic approach. I was going to “write every day by free association or with a focused prompt:...one takes special notice of one’s past life-in-school, with one’s past life-with-school teachers and one’s past life-with-books and other school related artifacts. Observe and record. Include present responses to what is observed” (Pinar, 1975, p. 23). I proposed that I would write each day in a journal to develop a linear recount of my connections and experiences with education up to the present working on my Master’s degree. I said I would choose a set day to begin writing about my past and that I would set an end date to finish. My intention was to be consistent, methodical, and on time. My intentions were great, but my ability to be consistent, sustain focus, and abide within the parameters I set were unrealistic. I was not prepared for the amount of energy, mental capacity, or emotional toil that writing about myself would incite.

I wrote in the first person, positing myself both as narrator and subject, researcher, and participant, educator and student. This presented many limitations. The knowledge that this approach did create is one of contextual, relatable, and authentic story that others may draw their own conclusions about and possibly identify themes that they can relate to. One of the aspects of this method is to create a narrative. Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2014) asserts that “story and theory are put into direct conversation, with authors using the vocabulary of theory and the mode of story to create nuanced and compelling accounts of personal/ cultural experience” (p. 90). I have constructed my synthesis to interweave my narrative within the research in the field of trauma and resilience of current studies. My intent is to create a place for re-lived and analyzed experiences within academia. I hope to further the field with new and fresh perspective.

My first free write attempt in the method of currere was done in a coffee shop in July 2017. I closed my eyes and began to type as I thought about the first thing education that
came to mind. I tried to explore what education meant to me, where I was, who I was, without trying to control the memories. After I had written for several minutes, the images seemed to flood my thoughts in snippets, or in stilled images like polaroids being flipped. With those images came different emotions and feelings. After a while I realized that I was sitting tense and my shoulders were hunched, teeth clenched. My body was still holding on to the intense emotions that my childhood experiences had hidden for so long. I wanted to ignore my memories and reveal the themes, patterns or the ability to reconstruct my essential teaching identity. I worried and sat with a different tension while writing: there may not be a commonality among the details of my narrative; who am I writing for? What aspects of my journey are relevant? Does the academic world need this much information about my past? What is relevant? How much is too much? I was struggling to find codes and a way to put all my reading of the literature into what I was writing. This was not the way to approach currere. Pinar says “when resistance occurs take note of its quality and content. Do not force process” (1975, p. 25). So, I continued to write without thinking about the present. I wrote everything I could about the past. My memories were fragmented, but I wrote:

I had different caregivers throughout my childhood and left home at a very early age. I have limited memories of my childhood but, those I do are always associated with the sense of touch, vision, smell, and sound…There are a few foggy memories of being in the basement of our house with other kids and reading books. I remember the heavy feel of a cardboard or even it could have been a wooden paged book. I also remember the colours…I have memories of reading in bed…I remember visiting a school that was in the middle of a farm. I met a woman who was to be my teacher for grade 2. I remember visiting the school in the summer to meet her. I remember hushed voices and conversations between her and my caregivers at the time. I heard whispers and tried to make out what they were saying. I remember intently watching their lips and faces. I had the impression that something was wrong and I was in trouble. I also remember the feeling that my
caregivers (at any stage of my life) never knew what to do with me and that I was always a
disappointment...I remember that year going to scholastic book fairs, reading books and glossy
magazines: the feel of the paper was slick like I could take the ink right off of it and save it for
later. I remember being annoyed that I couldn’t buy them. I remember being told once that the
books I wanted were too hard for me...Another memory that comes up that seems so familiar,
and one that I have replayed to therapists over the years that fills me with hurt, confusion, and
anger, and betrayal. I remember sitting in the corner of my class when everyone else was in
their bird groups. I never remember reading with others.

I continued to write when I felt like it, I forced myself to write when I did not feel like it. I
never gave myself prompts, cues, or directions to follow when writing. I did take deep breaths,
listen to a variety of music, kept myself distracted with all sorts of escapist scenarios, but
always came back to the writing. I did not stick to any of my predetermined dates, start times,
or times to end the writing part of currere. One day, I had nothing left to write. The fourth step
to currere was about to begin. The question was, now what? Where am I going with all of this?
What is the meaning, the interpretation, how is this going to impact curriculum? I was
instructed to re-read all my writing (at this point I had typed over 250 pages of writing) and to
find the themes and code them. I tried using some electronic software that made really pretty
flow charts that meant nothing to me. I did not want to spend time learning a platform to pick
out the meaning behind my own writing. I struggled with finding enough distance from myself
to see me, but close enough that I could find me. Grumet (2015) explains that currere is a
process of phenomenological knowledge of discovery, it is “the process of disciplined
reflection that takes the consciousness of one individual as its data and develops a system of
hermeneutics for the explication of that text...its emphasis is not the reciprocity of subjectivity
and objectivity in the constitution of meanings, its attempts to describe immediate,
preconceptual experience, and the distancing and bracketing required to accomplish these
ends” (p. 50). I was on the right track. In order for me to derive meaning, I had to “climb out” of
my well, look down at the water accumulating there, see my reflection, throw sand and watch
the ripples, fill up the hole, look at my hands before me, blindfold myself and trace the outline of my skin, sit on top of the filled well and whisper to myself, yell at myself, re-dig the hole, look at my dirty hands, and ask myself, who am I and how did I get here? I then met with my supervisor and begged her to give me direction. She did not. We talked, but not about direction. I left my meeting with her inspired and deflated. So, I re-read everything I had written: backwards, then again in written order, then again in chronological order, I read from the bottom of the page. Patterns began to emerge, themes revealed themselves, influences stood out, connections jumped like synapses. I began cutting up everything I wrote and glueing those pieces to colour coded construction paper. I then cut those up and put them into different envelopes. I stepped back and divulged into distraction. I came back and opened up one envelope and began reading the snippets I had glued together. A story emerged: My story emerged.

**Interpretation and Analysis**

Currere created a path for me to follow that gave structure to the free form of writing. I was able to unearth my identity as a teacher and as a 30-something year old woman newly divorced. By writing about my past experiences I was able to arrive at the roots of my educational experiences and gained an understanding of those experiences and growth in my current teaching practice. My pedagogy was grown into a new vision and understanding of my place within education, how I present myself as a teacher and discloser of human experience, and also where my boundaries lie and moving forward how I need to change them. This methodology allowed me to reveal past experiences, how I project to the future, and how my experiences both create and inform my present teaching practices. The research method of currere reinforces the necessity of complex conversations within the current field of education. As Webb (2015) demonstrates, the personal conversations and truth of a teacher can connect emotionally to teachers across the discipline. Her study has influenced me as a teacher and has the ability to influence how other teachers, preservice to experienced can improve on their own practice through the method of currere: critical reflection, the importance of praxis in
research for the development of professional identities and academia. I believe that the subjective data that I have collected, reviewed, reflected on, and analyzed will be as beneficial to our profession and to our colleagues.

What do all these memories and interpreted visions and understandings mean? How would I find meaning within these snippets of unreliable thoughts that could foster resilience in other teachers? Epistemology from a post-positivist point of view claims that, “understanding of individuals' interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 15). Epistemology of currere suggests that knowledge is created and based on the issue that human nature is extremely complex. The journey of currere provided me the means to experience, re-experience, and analyze the choices I have made. Existential epistemological values are created by revealing the core of an individual. “The essence of an individual is discoverable and meaningful, transcending the nothingness that threatens to consume every day existence” (Childers and Hentzi, 1995, p.103). My free writes of the past, present and future provided me another lens to look at my experiences, my existence, and the complex nature of how my character and identity have been created. I transcended my own experiences through currere when I re-read my witnessing of the past as the person I am today. I took three steps away from the experience and saw myself with fresh eyes. I saw value within my story and kept on writing.

Because concrete reality bore insufficient relation to her existential reality and because this incongruent public reality was essentially inalterable, the child focused on what is not there, on fantasy, where the reality tends to be infinitely more diverse and intriguing. When the child is not in the concrete world for increasing periods of time, day after day, week after week, year after year, what begins as an automatic, harmless response takes on an ominous autonomy of its own. Seeing through one’s fantasy to the concrete world becomes exceedingly problematic. One comes to view oneself and others as one imagines them to be, rather than as they are. Such a distortion of one’s
perceptual lens necessarily accompanies this process of the hypertrophy of
fantasy life (Pinar, 2015, p.12).

Pinar suggests above that there is a dangerous realm beyond mere escape by
daydreaming that one can delve into when our reality does not sustain our imagination, the
danger lay when one frequents this realm more often and the lens of reality is clouded by
fantasy and our internal growth and understanding of our concrete world becomes skewed by
exaggeration and the complexity increases when one tries to come back to reality that is
perceived by everyone else. I relate to this dissent into hypertrophic fantasy that, as an adult
has become a codependent nightmare due to attracting and creating relationships that have
been built on the idea of another’s potential. Through the process of currere I discovered that
many of my childhood memories were foggy, potentially altered and skewed because of my
propensity for an escape from reality. What became very clear throughout my writing was that I
had come to understand myself as a student not as I was, but how I thought I was perceived.
Upon my reflection and analysis there were many times where I sat in a dark well with dirt
falling on me, the ground sinking below me, and I had nothing to help myself out except for the
creation of a ladder made with my own hair. That is the vision of many parts of this process.
The reason is that currere opened the capacity to be fully honest with myself. Structure and
consistency fell to the wayside. I wrote when the inspiration hit, I was forlorn, or I had just read
something new in the literature that produced a thought that I had to explore through free
writing. My entries were titled based on what I thought I was writing about: past, present,
future. The titles eventually all became “free write #”. There was no way for me to separate my
past, present and future within one sitting.

Significance

Currere is laid out into the following four steps: Regression into the past, progression
into the future, analysis of the present and a synthesis of these journeys to provide a story
based on one’s truth and perceptions. The methodology needs to be supported by empirical
research and literature, to create a human, emotional, experience perspective that is rooted in
data so that other educators/researchers can relate with on a deep level. By reading someone's journey through currere there is the potential for a connection that can allow the reader to find meaning within their own lives and re-awaken their own experiences that may lead them to discover new aspects of their own practice. The field of education is ready for the advancement of post-structuralist research that will provide our teachers, our classrooms, and our students the emotional connection to others that genuine education requires.

Currere as a methodology has the ability to reach a wider audience within the teaching profession as it makes experience accessible, identifiable, and resonates with the similarities of feelings that most teachers experience at some point in their profession. Currere has provided me a direction and method for myself as a teacher to develop resiliency through personal praxis: Making me aware of my professional identity, helping me to transform it, improving my practice and ultimately, positively impacting students.

Through my narrative I will create opportunities for conversation and discussion about things that we as teachers and colleagues only whisper about to each other behind closed doors or not at all. My narrative will provide facts from research, experiences and analysis from my own reflections to show the symptoms, the descent, and the ascent out of burnout. It is possible that teachers do not talk about their inability to “handle” teaching; they do not seem to share their symptoms of burnout because of fear, shame, and judgement that not being able to “suck it up” carries. My hope is that my research will provide an open door, a ladder out of the well to allow teachers to begin conversations out in the open regarding their burnout and their resilience. Though policy change is usually based on more quantitative, generalizable measures, my hope is that stories like this, of teachers’ experiences and needs, might influence more district wide attention to policy change regarding teaching practices and the reality of the effects of burnout in our profession. A symptom of burnout is that the present day to day tasks are veiled and distorted of their value and meaning because of an overwhelming sensation that there is no longer any hope, substance or value in our efforts (Brunstig et al., 2014). This study reconstructs those day to day moments through the writing of currere and
interpreting the meaning by bracketing and taking a phenomenological view point. This approach unveils the lingering hope that I, and possibly other teachers hold on to, and uncovers the perseverance and resiliency factors. This is valuable knowledge that will add to our field: A direct voice that provides an example of how to discover our inner resilience, and how to reach out and continue to grow our own strength.

The methodology of currere has given me a new found freedom. It has opened up the availability to look inside myself, to understand and describe my internal experience and find a place for that experience within curriculum. I have discovered that I experienced burnout. I also discovered that I have come so far because I have also experienced resiliency. This study has allowed me to identify what my burnout red flags are, and how to continue to foster my resiliency so that I can remain grounded, filled with hope, and continue doing the job I love: teaching.
Chapter 3: Narrative: Burnout and the North

The problem was that no one discussed resiliency during my undergrad for my Bachelor of Education. The problem was that during my undergrad we focused on planning lessons, preparing for our diverse learners, concentrating on sending new curriculum drafts to the Ministry, and saying “yes” no matter at what cost. The problem was, I focused on getting a job regardless of the price it cost me. The problem was that I applied everything I learned from my undergrad in my first year of teaching: I planned lessons by design; starting at the end and working backwards, I incorporated Universal Design for Learning (check out this self paced course designed by the Ministry of Education: http://udlresource.ca ) so that Response to Intervention wouldn’t be necessary; I planned for low, medium, and the higher learners; I planned and integrated all of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences and ways of learning; I created every lesson with Piaget and Vygotsky in mind; I prepared my lessons so that I would be the circus performer at the edge of proximal development ensuring that all my students would be entertained, engaged, and thus, learning. I was excited to be a teacher. I had high energy, passion, eagerness, and ambition to do well. I was full of positivity that I was going to make a difference! I wanted to jump into those classrooms, spend time with kids and be for them the teacher that they needed. I had this idea that being a teacher was all about following lessons, delivering curriculum, and making connections with little humans to prepare them for a beautiful future. To say I was naive is perhaps too strong. I had wanted to become a teacher because I had a non traditional educational experience. I knew that it was not going to be all rosy and pink coloured glasses, playing Elton John every day. I knew there would be those hard moments when I would get down to the level of a student and let them know that I understood, that I had been there too. Then the student would turn around and change into a model, productive member of society. Ok, I was naive. The problem was that no one mentioned the pink cloud I was living in, and, that it was about to burst. The realities of the classroom are far different than
the tele-toon special we think it is going to be. I was walking on my pink cloud, right into my first placement: Special education life skills class in the North.

I began my teaching career without the necessary education that I needed to prepare for what it was like in the Northern community I had found myself in. I was so confident in my ability to plan lessons, but I had not understood that teaching was not just confined to well laid plans, organization, and content. Teaching is involved with so much more. Teaching is not just delivering a script and following through with a scene. Teaching is about giving, caring, listening, helping, healing, guiding, and leaving an overwhelming amount of one’s own energy in the classroom. Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) conducted case studies on novice teachers and the link to burnout and if mentoring and relationships added to their success. Schlichte et al., was the first study that I read on my journey of burnout discovery. This study was the first thing in print that was tangible, quantifiable that said I was not alone, and that I was not crazy. This study should be part of preservice education. Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler’s (2005) study used semi-structured scripts in interviews that were audiotaped and analyzed to reveal themes associated with the role of “socialization and collegiality play in the first year teaching experience” (p. 36). Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) realized “less exciting realities of teaching can be followed by feelings of ineffectiveness, loneliness and alienation from the profession” (p. 36).

When I was dropped into my first placement in the North I found myself entrenched in a world for which I could never have been prepared. Like many other colleagues when I was a preservice teacher, I made a shift in thinking away from me and what I needed, to my students and what they needed. This shift was amplified very quickly my first year of teaching in Senior Student Services. I had found myself sitting in the MCFD office and the local outreach community services conflicted, frustrated, and confused because as I was trying to make connections with guardians or follow plans that I had naively written in IEPs (Individual education plans; https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/
teach/teaching-tools/inclusive/iepssn.pdf), I began to realize that everything I believed about my purpose as a teacher was being torn apart with the reality of the North. Nothing I did could make me feel as if I was connected to my students, to my colleagues, or my new community. I felt lonely and alienated from the dream of what teaching was supposed to be like. I felt betrayed. I felt ineffective.

These feelings of isolation are part of the depersonalization that Maslach (2001) identifies as a key component of burnout. The Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) study reveals relevant, valid data with consistent themes across all participants. Several themes identified through the various interview questions (such as; “To what do you attribute noted problems or difficulties in this beginning experience?”, “What coping skills do you use to meet job demands?”) (Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler, 2005, p. 36) were support versus isolation within the classroom and building, high workload and student-teacher relationships. This study gave a unique view (a personal view, statistics with a voice) into the feelings and personal beliefs of teachers who experienced burnout. The study concluded that “mentoring is an important element in seeking to establish a strong sharing relationship between the mentor and first year teacher” (Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler, 2005, p. 39), training in preservice teachers is important for recognizing symptoms of burnout and to learn coping skills to increase resilience, administrators should not only understand the job stressors but provide significant support to novice teachers in special education settings and collaboration should be implemented and continued to reduce reliance on a “single source of support” (p. 39). These results are expected based on the previous amount of research done in the field (see Zabel and Zabel, 2001; Brunstig et al., 2014; Hong, 2012), however, the subjective interview responses made by the participants is what increase the emotional demand for support and change within the special education field. The responses to the interview questions are what makes this data relatable to other teachers experiencing the same types of burnout symptoms. It is hard to make connections to data and facts that are displayed in a table. But, connections are made to the voices of the participants and this emotional identification is what creates a focus on
similarities that provides the collegiality and support that is missing in the research field. This study reasoned “emotional support is perceived as very important to special educators” (as cited by Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler, 2005, p. 37) and that emotional support is just as important when sifting through the research. Interviewee responses are so emotionally charged that those in the field who are feeling symptoms of burnout but unable to identify or relate to others in their building can read from this study; “I don’t feel supported. I’ve just been placed here and dumped,” (Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler, 2005, p. 38), and know they are not alone and are validated. Validation of feelings is so important to get into a positivist mindset where something can then be done to address the symptoms and issues. Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) go on to transcribe their interviewee’s responses. A teacher who resigned after the first year becomes more than another statistic when she says, “I didn’t have the support I needed. It was almost like I was overlooked. As a person, I feel like I am not important. I am not needed. I have resigned and hope the next person who comes into this job will feel that they are both needed and important” (p. 38).

I had a colleague who I talked with behind closed doors within the “cone of silence”. We were both in special ed at the same school and faced with the same amount of overload and dead ends with regards to being able to keep up with the high demands that were placed on us. My colleague began as sort of a mentor in that, she had more experience in the field than I did and she knew how to navigate the “politics” of special ed within a high-school. We were able to lean on each other when times seemed overwhelming or we didn’t have any answers to the infinite amount of questions we were faced with everyday. The problem was that she was my only connection, and she too was already full fledged into her own burnout symptoms.

I wasn’t introduced to burnout until the middle of my first year of teaching when another colleague mentioned to me that I seemed to be sick all the time. My preservice education did not include burnout, secondary traumatic stress, or ptsd. We hadn’t learned about mentoring, getting involved with your colleagues, or ensuring that there was work-life balance and how to
recognize when taking things home became unmanageable. I remember that we were shown some statistics on retention and at some point I remember rolling my eyes to the idea that teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years. I never thought I would be one of those teachers, or that thought would ever cross my mind. I wanted to be a teacher, I was meant to be a teacher. I had no connection with the statistics and took no heed to their warning. I do know that I often felt within that first year that I was alone, lost, ineffective, in well over my head, and never going to climb the mountain that was my learning curve.

The field of burnout has been addressed both socially and clinically since the 1970s. Burnout was originally attributed to people who were working in the humanist service fields who no longer felt satisfaction in their jobs and were experiencing high levels of fatigue (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). In the 1980’s research took a serious interest in burnout and the first assessment survey was created. The Maslach Burnout Inventory was originally created for those in professional care fields and has since been modified (the second design of the MBI) with educators in mind called the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES). A third Inventory has been created as research and studies have advanced both the interest and empirical evidence that burnout is not just a theory but an epidemic for those working in all types of jobs. The third MBI-GS (Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey) is only slightly revised from the two previous inventories created. The Maslach survey assesses three dimensions of burnout: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) are the leaders in burnout research and theory and have a clear accepted definition of burnout:

What has emerged from all this research is a conceptualization of job burnout as a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment. The exhaustion component represents the basic individual stress dimension of burnout. It refers to feelings
of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources. The cynicism (or depersonalization) component represents the interpersonal context dimension of burnout. It refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to various aspects of the job. The component of reduced efficacy or accomplishment represents the self-evaluation dimension of burnout. It refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity at work, (p. 399).

This definition still holds today and is often referred to, relied upon and used as the basis for research studies.

I increasingly felt exhausted, emotionally depleted, and stressed because of the placement I had taken: A new town, a new environment, culturally and economically, a special ed department that I had no experience in, and the feeling of my pink cloud evaporating.

Poverty and low economic viability had pervasive impacts on my classroom. My learners didn’t come to class and their parents or caregivers didn’t seem to see that as a problem. I would sit in my space that was an awkward mess of several desks put together, asking myself; “how did my learners expect to get anywhere if they didn’t come to class?” It never occurred to me that my learners were not cognizant of their own expectations. My goal became centrally focused on how to get those students into the room (and stay, although, I didn’t even recognize at that point that the stay part was another issue altogether). I valued rule following, the code of conduct, and demanded that those expectations be followed. I bought into the system of education. I associated obeying with success. I did not take into consideration that all my learners at that time had an intellectual disability, some had comorbid FASD (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) or ASD (Autism Spectrum disorder). I did not understand that all these negative factors limited my learners’ understanding of who they were, the ability to make good or healthy decisions, and live life to their potential, let alone learn functional academics and following rules that had no association with their lived reality. I did not understand that hope was not in their
vocabulary. I did not understand that my understanding of epistemology, my interpretation of success, my values of what education is and my own approach to teaching, my methods and practice (which were barely even developed yet), had to change drastically and dramatically if I was going to connect with my learners and be of benefit to them. I began by never “kicking out” my learners, or learners that were not on my class list. I stopped asking for late slips and became grateful that they made it to the class (I was not about to send them out again for an arbitrary piece of paper—something I had previously abided by because that was the “policy”). I had never questioned authority within my profession prior to those first few days in my first classroom. I had begun welcoming all students in each day, each block.

My intention and purpose within teaching began to take a shift. I changed my thinking around what was my purpose as an educator? What should I be teaching? How important is content? Should I be focusing on the development of executive functioning skills like time management, task initiation, impulse control, planning, prioritization, persistence, sustained attention? What was I assessing? How was I assessing? Did my assessments match the learning objectives? I began to believe that part of my purpose as an educator was to help learners understand how to make good decisions and how to communicate them, how to problem solve and maneuver through life as it presented itself. I began to believe as I still do today, that my purpose is to present options, help develop choices, and prepare students with the tools, strategies and abilities to be the best version of themselves and to teach them to pay their gratitude forward. I had (and still do) found that this is an extremely large undertaking not only when working with teenagers, but working with teens who face so much adversity, impacting their ability to both make good decisions and to communicate their needs, all within a system that didn’t appear to want “us”. As an educator, I of course, wondered how to help my learners move past their emotional barriers in order for them to learn literacy and numeracy as this is educations’ primary goal. What also happened was a clear cut symptom of burnout: I
was not prepared, I felt inadequate, I no longer had confidence in my teaching practice, I no longer had any self efficacy. I wondered if I was too young, too new, too inexperienced to work in special education.

Burnout in special education teachers has been thoroughly researched using large and small scale studies including replicated studies that “examine changes that may have occurred due to an evolution of the field:” (Zabel & Zabel, 2001, p.128). In Zabel and Zabel’s study 300 teachers in 1998 were given a questionnaire that provided demographic information including age, experience in both general and special education and their classroom and school demographics. These teachers were also administered the MBI-ES which is the updated version that was used in a previous study. The MBI-ES includes reflective statements that determine “personal feelings and attitudes about one’s job conditions” (Zabel & Zabel, 2001, p. 130). The results of the study compared the previous research (conducted in 1982 by Zabel and Zabel ) and the current study including age, teaching experience in general education classrooms and special education classrooms and the three key dimensions of the Maslach survey. The recent study showed a significant difference in age of participants, where, the current study had 85.6% of participants were over the age of 30 and the previous study’s participants were 44.6% the age of 30 and under. The current study showed no correlation between age and the three key dimensions of burnout where the first study had shown “significant negative correlations between teacher age and scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization scales” (Zabel & Zabel, 2001, p. 131). This study also showed that “There were no significant correlations between the amount of regular teaching experience and scores on either the Emotional Exhaustion or Depersonalization sub scales” (Zabel & Zabel, 2001, p. 131).

This study showed “that teacher age, amount of preparation and experience are not as important factors in the experience of professional burnout” (Zabel & Zabel, 2001, p. 138). In the last 16 years, this study clearly needs to be readdressed as the attrition has increased, younger, inexperienced teachers without the necessary qualifications are being thrust into
special education classrooms that are isolated and overwhelming. This study has shown quantitative evidence that despite changes in collaboration, administration support, and education principles and pedagogy, burnout is still very real and attrition is still an issue.

It is interesting that Zabel and Zabel (2001)'s study showed to be no correlation between age or regular teaching experience and burnout, where Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014) prove a high risk for burnout in special education teachers in the US by synthesizing special education burnout studies from 1979 to 2013, and Bowels and Arnup (2016) address the problem of early career teachers who experience symptoms of burnout who contemplate leaving the profession. Current research (Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane's, 2014) has shown there is definitely a correlation between age, experience, and burnout but also, that there is another factor that trumps those variables, and that is resiliency.

Resiliency is described by Bobek (2002) as “the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions” (p. 202). Resiliency is not necessarily a personal and intrinsic attribute that certain people have or not have. Resilience “is a complex construct resulting from a dynamic relationship between risk and protective factors” (Beltman, Mansfield and Price, 2011, p. 186). Resilience is necessary if special education teachers are to maintain a quality of job satisfaction, effectiveness, and connections to students.

Because I was dropped into a new position for which I was not qualified, I was increasing my chances for burnout. As Bobek states: “That new teachers be competent in the subjects they teach may seem obvious, but it is critical for promoting resilience” (p. 203). It is obvious that a teacher be specialized in the role they take on. But, I wanted a job and no one wanted to move to the North. Career competence and skills are among the main corner stones of building resilience and preventing burnout.

I was on week one of my career, I had no skills in special ed, no previous knowledge in dealing with students with extreme disabilities and had never lived in a rural, remote, reserve town in Northern BC. Being the precocious, ambitious, curious, and, driven person (teacher)
that I am, I read every single Ministry manual on special education, policies and procedures, writing IEPs, behavioural interventions, executive functioning skills, curriculum packages geared towards learners with disabilities, life skills lessons. I took online courses through POPARD (https://www.autismoutreach.ca), POPFASD (https://www.fasdoutreach.ca). I went to every Professional develop opportunity that was offered within student services, I stayed up late reading journal articles, forums, blogs and manuals. I got up early to go to school to develop curriculum, systems, and programs. I am a voracious reader to begin with and I exceeded my expectations on the amount I learned about special education in BC that first 2 months of my placement. I wrote IEPs, I incorporated the new BC curriculum drafts, I involved parents and caregivers and school based team. I applied positive behaviour interventions (https://www.pbis.org), did FBAs (Dawn Reithaug) and created BIPs (http://www.pbisworld.com/tier-2/behavior-intervention-plan-bip/), I designed an entire program around self regulation strategies (I adapted my program from http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html) and replacement behaviours for my students so that they had the tools and strategies to exist within their own trauma; whether fight, flight, or freeze responses. I tried to teach my students tools to learn how to “combat” the internal traumatic war that their brains were consistently fighting. My students all had ACE’s (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and I used Kristin Souers and Pete Hall’s (2016) book Fostering Resilient Learners to help guide much of my practice. My learners needed structure, consistency and routine, compassion, and proven research based interventions in order for them to learn their triggers, their feelings, their needs, and strategies for self-regulation. My learners had complex emotional disabilities. When these aspects of modulation are learned, students build the confidence they need to start addressing their academic progress. Souers (2016) has read, analyzed and conducted numerous studies that show that children who have adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s or traumatic childhood events) show “powerful negative effect on student’s readiness to learn” (p. 20). It is well proven that if a
person is in the flight, fight, or freeze area of the brain, they are not able to take in new knowledge or learn functional academics. The program and classroom that I developed helped to mitigate the negative factors that my learners faced and created situations of momentary successes: Emotional regulation, increased attendance, the ability to use “I statements”, to recognize motives and antecedents of their actions and behaviours, increase in literacy and functional numeracy, and an increase in socialization among their classmates. We celebrated the small achievements and the progressive journey of healing and learning. I began to believe that the primary need of my learners and all learners, was that of belonging, to feel safe, feel worthy and feel like they are part of something rather than an isolated entity in a vast universe of “others”. These are the same characteristics that the research says teachers need in order to build resilience and stay within the profession.

Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014) reviewed and synthesized articles and studies from 1979-2013 that focused on special education teacher burnout in order to identify if “those who teach students with ED appear to be especially at risk [for burnout]” (p. 684). The review’s process was multi-tiered using electronic searches with specific inclusion criteria and several different readings and analysis. The result of the determined studies that met the inclusion criteria: The three key dimensions of burnout according to Maslach, special education teachers working in both public and private schools, data is quantitative and clear, occurred in the US between 1979 and 2013, were 23 studies. Bowels and Arnup (2016) looked at creating a study that would show teachers within their first 10 years of the profession and resilience. The study included research questions that addressed gender, age and years of service to the amount of resiliency within their job situations, also, questions that addressed the association between adaptive functioning, gender differences, and resilience (Bowels and Arnup, 2016). The study included 160 teachers who were within their first 10 years of teaching. The participants included both male and female identified and ages from 22 years to 52. The methods in this study were empirical self-report questionnaires. Rather than using the MBI-ES, a resilience
scale (Resilience Scale for Adults; RSA) was used that measured five aspects of resilience that were measured using a Likert scale (Bowels and Arnup, 2016). In order to identify correlations between resilience and adaptive functioning, the Adaptive Change Questionnaire (ACQ) was used. The methods are justified in terms of consistency, discriminant, and convergent validity, well-reviewed methods that have been used in clinical and nonclinical samples with success (Bowels & Arnup, 2016).

Bowels and Arnup’s (2016) and Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane’s (2014) purposes were clearly stated; however, Bowels and Arnup’s (2016) did not go into great detail or even define the three types of typology or the significance of them on resiliency. Bowels and Arnup (2016) did show quantitative evidence that identified generalities regarding early career teachers and the link to burnout especially in regard to special education teachers. Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane’s (2014) review was able to identify significant gaps in the research and provided valuable recommendations for the field’s further study. Both studies drew valid points in conclusion regarding the setting of high stress, high demand work environments/classrooms and lack of effective professional development can have a huge cost on teacher’s ability to be resilient. Bowels and Arnup (2016) proclaim that the symptoms of burnout that are created due to lack of resilience need to be addressed and the system itself needs to be changed as it is “potentially dangerous to the teachers and the students in their care” (p.160). Both studies concluded that previous research have shown the amount of empirical evidence claiming that there is significant teacher burnout (specifically, as stated by Brunsting, Sreckovic and Lane (2014) among special ed teachers who teach learners with emotional disabilities, various disabilities, and ages within a resource classroom and between the ages of 13-19) that leads to a huge decrease in teacher retention. This study demonstrates the association between resilience and burnout in teachers, synthesizes the need for future academic conversations and investigations into the need for interventions that address prevention for burnout symptoms; however, they have emphasized research obtained through knowledge creation which demonstrates a need for subjective, qualitative and unique research.
Case study, using qualitative interview methodology to identify subjective insight into burnout has been a relatively new approach to epistemological research within the field of educational burnout among special educators. Previous research indicates that there is significant correlation between novice teachers, teachers who do not have specialty training and are inserted into a specialist role and an emotional connection between burnout and resiliency. The following case studies research different types of risk and protective factors that impact resiliency and attrition due to burnout. Previous research asserts that burnout in special educators is a result of several factors including (but not limited to): lack of administrative support, isolation from colleagues and general education teachers, limited experience and education in the field, overwhelming paperwork, high case loads, adverse childhood experiences, emotional and behavioural disabilities, self-efficacy, job satisfaction and a lack of resilience (Zabel & Zabel, 2001). The links between resilience (which is attached to personal experiences and self-efficacy) and the experiences of burnout among special education teachers have increased the types of research conducted. Objective and quantifiable research has determined that burnout is very real and affects not only educators but the entire educational community including the students. My research fits into the subjective, nominalist identification of knowledge that focuses on the personal experiences, reflections of the participants (teachers) to create information that explains and exposes the personal feelings, beliefs, and values that are attributed to the experience of burnout and resiliency.

Nothing I did during my day could lessen the feeling that I was drowning, that I wasn’t accomplishing anything. I would have one good day with a student, and the next three it would seem that they had gone backwards instead of forwards. Incidents would happen at home or in the community that would have a negative impact on my students and we would go back to intolerable behaviours, disengagement, and an overwhelming negativity that would linger in the air. Lack of community supports and funding prevented even the slightest changes to happen. I would go home and feel as if I was useless. I would find myself asking: What is the point? I can’t change anything here? This is pointless.
Job dissatisfaction, cynicism, ineffectiveness and a lack of accomplishment are all symptoms of burnout (Maslach, 2001). This lack of self-efficacy is the belief behind low resilience. Hong (2012) asserts that “those who have a low sense of efficacy believe there is little they can do to change the problems they perceive, and thus put forth less effort and do not strongly persevere when difficulties arise” (p. 420).

Hong (2012) conducted a study that focused on resiliency and burnout through psychological lenses of self-efficacy, beliefs, values, and emotions. Hong (2012) also used semi-structured interviews with 14 people who had five years or less teaching experience half of whom had left the profession and half who had stayed. Hong’s (2012) study “employed in-depth interview techniques, so that teachers can freely discuss their innate beliefs, emotions, and values during the time in which they are struggling in the teaching career (leavers) or successfully performing their teaching (stayers)” (p. 422). Hong’s results are in line with previous research both done via quantitative and qualitative methods. The results showed that a strong administrative support and organization, high interest or connection to the topic taught or students they worked with and a sense of collegiality all played an important role on those who stayed in the profession despite a large workload, high emotional or behavioural disabilities or exhaustion. Those who left the profession felt many of the same connections towards content and student relationships but also had a significant difference in their emotional burnout and their personal views of themselves as teachers. Those who left the profession in this study revealed “that the teacher believes the cause of the problem is internal and stable to the individual, and not easily changed or controlled” (Hong, 2012, p. 430). Those who left believed intrinsically that there was nothing left to do and that they were part of the problem! This study showed that there are significant differences between teachers who stay in the profession and those who leave (even when the situations are very similar), they “showed different resilient attitudes and responses to challenging situations” (Hong, 2012, p. 431). Hong (2012) mentions that personal beliefs, values, emotions and self identification play an important role in developing resilience.
Chapter Four: My professional Identity as a Novice Teacher

When I went to the North and began my first placement I was 30. I had been married for two years to a man 10 years older than I. This would be the second time I lived in a tiny hamlet in a reserve town. I was still struggling with my identity as a 30 year old woman: What that meant, felt like, and looked like. My entire life I had always been in conflict with my insides matching my outsides meaning: My feelings of perceived gender and articulating them via clothing and my hair, representing my creative, and fervent attitude with my intellectual capabilities (my tree planting-vagabond roots with my newly professional career and married status). My intermittent gender dysphoria and sexual identity created a bell curve of androgynous to flamboyant hair styles which changed almost as often as I blinked! Through my hetero-percieved-relationship I fought with how to “fit” the mold of a wife married to a man and still represent my queer identity. I took my new position as an opportunity to deliver a persona of androgynous professionalism and bought an array of collared shirts, fitted dress pants and blazers with a feminine style comfortable shoe.

To the observer I began my Northern placement as a white, middle-class, privileged, outgoing, and confident woman. To the observer I moved to the remote BC North, Native community to work with underprivileged, intergenerational traumatized First Nation children in order to assimilate them into Western culture. To the observer, I was seen (and told) that I went to the North to “save the Natives” (this is a quote from one of my first students on my first day). My reality and the truth as I saw my career move from Vancouver Island was, the North was hiring. I did not reflect on what it would look like moving to the North and working within a small, tight-knit community that was home to several different reserves. I did not have the insight to understand how the look of my white skin, the confident (perhaps arrogant) stance of my shoulders as I walked and the abrasiveness (which I thought at the time was assertiveness) with which I talked would impact not only my students, but my colleagues and myself as well.
I found myself a little ashamed that I was doing so well and could afford so much (my own vehicle, my own home, the little extras like Kleenex, paper towel, and toilet paper, or, cheese). This was the first time in my life I was not under the poverty line. I was ashamed because I had begun to take for granted what I had, and my gratitude for how far I had come in my own life financially, had weaned. This played a role in how I looked at my students in the beginning: I assumed that they were eating breakfast, had a lunch, and would be eating dinner. I assumed that they had clean running water at home, heat, blankets, and clean clothes. It soon became apparent that addiction, violence, and abuse were a frequent manifestation of poverty and the intergenerational trauma that was found in the community. In the beginning of my placement I ignored the experiences of my learners because I just wanted to present on being a professional teacher, there to teach a lesson in math.

My students couldn’t relate to me. I had a difficult time figuring out how to be comfortable when I was thinking of how I looked and how I should act based on my expectations of what I thought a teacher was. Something was wrong each time I stepped into that classroom. I could feel it and so could my students. It did not take me long before I could no longer keep up the “charade” that I was holding onto. I was restricted by my blazers and dress pants. I hated wearing makeup (which I was doing everyday). I hated even more getting up early to put so much effort into looking the way I thought I was supposed to. My (or my laziness) took over and I started to reveal who I really was. I needed to have these students feel safe, I needed to feel safe and the only way I knew how to do that was to try to connect with them. I started wearing t-shirts and jeans. I revealed my tattooed arms and took off my wedding rings. I instantly felt more comfortable. My tattoos are representative of my journey in life; they are all my art that speak to a piece of my history, and by revealing them, I was sharing myself with my learners. I was also opening myself up to criticism from my colleagues, parents, and other professionals I dealt with on a day to day- preconceived biases about people with tattoos-
and I put myself in a place of vulnerability that I had not expected. I am not entirely sure, even after reflection if my colleagues took me less seriously because I was a brand new teacher with no experience, or if it was because I was covered in “ink”. It was probably a bit of both, either way, I felt apart from. I was also the only identifiable queer adult in the building, and although I never experienced any type of harassment, I felt like there was no one I cold connect to. I was young, in a building with experienced teachers who had for the most part all grown up in that tiny town. The more distance I felt from my colleagues in the staff room, the more focus I put into connecting with my learners.

As I became more comfortable, I used slang words while talking and modelled that those words were not appropriate (I did this for no other reason at the time except that I still had a way to go in my own professionalism and would stop myself out loud in using inappropriate language). I began to mingle among my students instead of standing at the front of the class, I ate lunch with them, we began making breakfast together. Questions started nonchalantly regarding my “sleeves.” My tattoos seemed to break the ice and allowed my students to slowly interact with me. This interaction created a connection between just a few students and myself. Before I knew it, word spread among themselves and all of a sudden I was “ok,” and I was accepted.

I then started talking about myself and where I came from. I started sharing details about the struggles I had growing up. I shared stories so that they could relate to me. This is when things really started to change for both myself and my learners. I believe that when I started sharing personal details about my less than “typical” childhood, my students began to change for the better, their behaviour got better somehow, they listened to me, they started to talk to me; this is also where I pinpoint that my descent into re-traumatization began. Our personal view of ourselves and our professional identity helps us to create emotional boundaries and establish resilient attitudes (Hong, 2012). I was developing my identity as a
teacher, a role model, and balancing my personal beliefs, stories, and identity with my professional one. I was reexamining my pedagogy and where I fit into curriculum.

Hong (2012) states that those who set emotional boundaries with their students were better able to manage stress and the overwhelming pressure and demands of being a novice teacher. Emotional boundaries were not within my vocabulary.

*I said yes to everything that first year. I said yes to everything that my administrator asked of me; I said yes to any colleague; I said yes to students; I said yes to parents; I said yes to my community; and, I said no to myself.*

I was not prepared during my teacher education with the skills necessary to foster resilience. Bobek (2002) declares “to develop resilience, new teachers must be lifelong learners, willing to venture into areas that may challenge their current views of themselves and their practice” (p. 203).

*My pedagogy included my belief that I was a life long learner which encouraged my move to the North, in areas unknown. I had always taken risks with no hesitation. The problem was that I was not prepared for the reality of the North. I was not prepared for the emotional roller coaster that is teaching. I was not prepared for the amount of disambiguation between my own beliefs about the world and the reality of the community I had moved to. I was not prepared for the amount of dissociation I would require to keep myself unattached, and I was not prepared for the experience of re-traumatization.*

No one educated me on secondary trauma (Caringi, Stanick, Trautman, Crosby, Devlin and Adams, 2015). No one told me that because I experienced trauma and abuse as a child myself, that I lived through the world of addiction and that I had adverse educational experiences, that becoming a teacher may have negatively impacted me, that being a teacher may bring up all my own past experiences and that I would relive those feelings over and over again. No one told me that there was a great chance that I would develop burnout quickly, deeply, and painfully. I could not even research or learn about burnout or resiliency because I
did not know the concepts existed. No one told me any of the potential side effects because I told no one about me.

I shared a little about my past with a Professor during my BEd and the response was, “do not tell anyone, it is none of their business. Be professional. Set boundaries between your personal life and your school life.” I took the advice of that Professor to heart. I didn’t tell anyone about myself. I didn’t invite anyone in. I did not share my experiences, and I was determined to create a new identity: Present a new truth by creating boundaries between personal self and my school self. Those boundaries did not last long. I could not as I said above, “keep up the charade.” I felt like I was acting. I needed to share who I am and where I come from because that is what makes me, me. I shared much of my story out of sheer desperation and overwhelming conflicting emotions often to my detriment, shock from colleagues and lesser, responses of admiration or relation that left me feeling more alone and without a solution. I was naive, I had no filter, I desperately wanted to do a good job.

Clearly not only was I not dealing with the trauma from my new job, I was not even recognizing that it was an issue. My students were almost all affected by intergenerational residential school trauma (Bombay, Matheson, Anisman, 2014) that didn’t seem to have a voice, or healing within the building or the community. My learners were all in my classroom because of their inability for inclusion. My learners all had a school district designation, adverse behaviour and had arrived at my classroom: A perceived educational dead end.

I yearned to tell them all that it would “be ok”. I knew from my own experience that it probably wouldn’t “be ok”. The parents and caregivers of many of my learners experienced first-hand residential schools and still suffered (without reconciliation) from the trauma of those experiences. This trauma was not often talked about with my learners. Many of my learners’ parents and caregivers did not come to the school or to the Band hall where we held parent teacher meetings. I was ambitious, naive, and headstrong. I decided to travel to my learners’ homes myself to meet their caregivers. I travelled to the different reserves on my own time, my
own gas, and much emotional expense. I did this in the awe (and sometimes horror) of other teachers who had never ventured up the “north road” and my principal always suggested I take someone else with me. I didn’t. I was confident these parents wanted to meet me and talk about how I could support their children. Some parents were excited, and thankful that I had made the journey to see them, that I cared enough to come to them. Many were not inviting. I saw the poverty and often I saw a lot of neglect when I visited homes. I came to understand a depth of sadness that I had long buried within my own memories. Going to students’ homes crossed so many boundaries that I had never known existed. It complicated so many things: When I would have to send a student home, suspend a student because they were a danger to other students, but knowing that going home was not the safest place for them. I would have to choose the safety of many students over the unknown safety and well being of one student. I became familiar with the horrifyingly emotional decision making process of calling MCFD and having a child removed from their from home. That part of my job triggered many things within me including memories of my own home experiences. It began to take a toll as I took those feelings home with me at night. I started to re-live many of my own horrible memories and eventually (within around 18 months in that position), the flood gates opened and I was bludgeoned by the emotional waves of burnout. I had not the experience, or proactive praxis to have set up boundaries around my own past. I thought those memories, that trauma had long been therapized away.

Hong (2012) suggests that teachers who stay in the profession despite emotional adversity have learned that “setting emotional boundaries with students can be a useful strategy for teacher resilience” (p. 434). This proposes that I needed to establish a way to recover from my own emotional trauma and move towards resiliency so that I would have a genuine future teaching. I am aware now that I saw myself in my learners. I was affected by their pain, their suffering, the struggles, the lack of hope, and the emotional extremes that my learners faced, and in turn that I was forced to re-experience all over again.
I was giving all of myself in order to please my administrators, add to my resume, build my career, and connect with students. I had focused on making my students feel safe, but I did not feel safe. I tried to offer a welcoming atmosphere but I had barely anything left to give. I would offer my learners food, but not eat myself. I helped my learners include DPA in their everyday routine, but the most physical workout I gave myself was walking to and from my jeep to the building and home. I would tell my learners that each block was a new chance for them to make good decisions, yet I would hang onto what happened yesterday and bring my past with me in every breath. I took on roles that I was not qualified for: Therapist, social worker, counsellor, mentor, reliable adult/ aunty. I did not provide myself with the necessary boundaries to step back and reflect on my actions. I did not engage in the same interventions or strategies I provided for my students. I ignored the tools I had learned to help myself through my own battle. I instead, shoved, and lived in denial within my walls in attempts to escape my own fight, flight, and freeze reactions. My walls did not hold for long. I was not able to celebrate my own achievements, or how far I had come in my own life, or the positive influence I had brought to my classroom. I focused only on negative outcomes when learners did not “make it” and became depleted and discouraged. I took things personally; I began to resent and judge the system and my own practice. I sat within myself feeding my fear that I had made a very bad choice in becoming an educator. I threatened several times to quit. I took more and more time off. I became physically ill. I truly believed that I had failed as a teacher. I started seeing a psychotherapist. I was diagnosed with STS (Secondary Traumatic Stress) and PTDS (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). I took a leave of absence from my job.
Chapter 5: The Child Inside the Teacher

Caringi, Stanick, Trautman, Crosby, Devlin, and Adams (2015) conducted a study in the field of public school teachers that addressed potential factors that mitigates secondary traumatic stress (2015). Prior to their study there has been limited research in the connection between secondary traumatic stress and teachers. Secondary traumatic stress is when teachers who are exposed to traumatic events, the emotional burden of their students, either by hearing or seeing about it, impacts one’s own emotional reactions and therefore becoming traumatized themselves by: Helplessness; an overwhelming urge to help students; or from a teacher’s own traumatic history (Caringi et al., 2015). Trauma and stressor related disorders including PTSD and STS are categorized in the DSM-V as either direct or indirect exposure to trauma, either details or events: PTSD and STS are caused by exposure or reminders (either direct or indirect, via others or memories) of trauma that are persistently re-experienced. Caringi et al., researched the literature of secondary effects of people who worked in the mental health field, had exposure to trauma (primary or secondary), and found that continuous stressors led to an increase of developing STS (2015). Although there has been a tremendous amount of research conducted on STS and PTSD within mental health, first responder, and medical fields, there is limited research that has been done on teachers. Borntrager, Caringi, Van Den Pol, Crosby, O’Connell, Trautman, and McDonald (2012) did a study that showed the STS reported by mental health and medical workers and STS among teachers were parallel! This suggests that there is an increasingly high need for further research to be conducted on STS among teachers and to find factors that prevent and treat this exposed phenomenon. Since 2012 there have been various quantitative studies conducted that reveal a link between the high demands of the classroom, high workload, increased class sizes, poor collegiality and low self-efficacy (all the symptoms of burnout) and the exposure to students with emotional or traumatic disorders and experiences (Caringi et al., 2015). Caringi et al., provide one of the first qualitative studies on STS among teachers; offering “the perspective of teachers with more in-depth context and understanding of their experience” (p. 246).
I did not know who to talk to. I felt ashamed talking with my administrators. I did not want my colleagues to think I couldn’t “handle it”. I did not want anyone to know that I was drowning in the tears of my past that was brought on by the tears of students. I also did not hear anyone talking about their own stress outside of my department. Talking within my department I felt as if stress was just a regular daily occurrence. I thought that the lack of support, large class sizes, (limited “programs” for “our” students), few EAs, limited elective courses, and a high need for community support that just didn’t exist was just part and parcel within special education due to cutbacks. I thought that there was a normalcy that I just was not strong enough to handle within my department. I felt there was a limited amount of experience that I could draw from because everyone I felt “safe” enough to talk to were also navigating their own stress and possible burnout symptoms.

Caringi et al., (2015) provides a study that shows in their findings that “educators are deeply impacted by the trauma experiences of their students, which has impacted their interest in remaining in their professions” (p. 254), and that collegiality, support, perspective, and mentoring can diminish STS. Caring et al., (2015) had 300 participants from school staff that included teachers, EAs, school counsellors and administration from 6 public school including urban, rural and American Indian reserve communities. All participants volunteered to participate in STS training throughout the study. The schools were all identified as having a high percentage of children who had experienced ACE’s (adverse childhood experiences). Caringi et al., (2015) used deductive and inductive approach with rich descriptions from qualitative interviews (which 256 people participated in) that had both semi-structured and additional clarifying questions. The interviews were analyzed for content, collection of rich data, data triangulation, member checking and coded into themes: Trauma type, organizational culture, personal characteristics of teachers, and personal history of trauma. This study reviewed existing STS theories and literature to ensure relevance within the field.
What Caringi et al., (2015) found with this study were all the things that I had been missing from my first 3 years teaching: Collegial opportunities to discuss stress, outside and inside support to discuss, debrief, and learn from other’s experiences, mentoring (structured, supervised, or, casual). Caringi et al., (2015) also discovered that there are findings that may prevent against burnout and STS: Feeling success with students; students who were positive, motivated, who tried hard, and willing to do their best and work; self care, from hobbies to religion and; mentoring (2015). These mitigating factors were things that I did not have enough of. I felt some success with students but not enough to combat my perceived failures and theirs. I was not able to find enough energy, motivation, or desire to engage in self care, my hobbies, and things that I had always done to make me happy or feel grounded were no longer a daily part of life. I also did not have anyone to mentor me in resilience. I also had the added burden of my own adverse childhood experiences: My own personal history of trauma, that added to the impact of working and sharing with traumatized students.

My Past Revisited

This is the story I tell. It is not fully what happened. It is my perceived truth in order to make sense of and explain my trauma. Although memories are faulty and my subjective autobiographical lens can only see part of the entire story, I am recording witnessed accounts of my past as a different person in the future and I attach my values, and feelings to those events that have been etched in my mind. I use the term perceived truth as an acknowledgment that my memories and my interpretations, re-witnessing, and synthesis of those memories may not hold within them all the various perspectives that would make them whole stories, also that some of the names, places, genders have been changed where consent could not be obtained. As Chambers says “to lie in order to tell the truth” (2004, p. 14) is our way of protecting ourselves and others while still remaining true to the story and the message we are trying to impart.

I am bracketing my experience from a phenomenological perspective, I am observing the daily routine of my past life, and my present practice that is normally overlooked and I am
“seeing it as it is” (Pinar, 2014, p. 23). I am creating boundaries to observe and protect myself, take agency over my trauma and, maintain my resilience. The feelings, interpretations, and identifiers that shaped me are all honest accounts as I have revisited them, and the reality I use as a basis to determine who I am and who I want to become. I share this story to create connection, empathy, and a vision with whom others can identify. Classroom and staffroom settings we are separate from others. As Pinar states (2014), “the knowledge we can gain from the observer’s point of view [is] distant, partial, and of limited reliability” (p. 22). I chose to share my story to open up the platform for dialogue and to insert myself into curriculum. “Curriculum changes as we reflect on it, engage in its study, and act in response to it” (Pinar, p. 41). I want to create space for others to feel that they too have the right to be vulnerable and share their own story. I share my story to explain what I believe were part of the aggravating factors that led to my burnout and my desire to leave the profession. The premise of my story is that we are not isolated entities within four walls of a classroom, and that our lives do not begin and end when we put on our professional identity. As did Chamber’s master’s student, I too, through this process have “healed her own lonely heart, and she told her truth, a certain kind of truth” (2004, p.15). Curriculum has become for me an action that I can show. Curriculum is a “social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope” (Pinar as written in Hare and Portelli, 2005, p.41).

I was born in March 1983 which makes me an Aries, if that information is important to you. It has been important for me as a tool to try to relate to people. I have always had a hard time relating to people. I still have a hard time relating to people; however, I am more adept at identifying with how people are feeling in the moment, rather than who they are and where they come from. This identification of feelings, of being able to crouch down to where someone is feeling and say, “hi, I know how you feel. You are allowed to feel this way, I am here”, is the root of empathy and the connection needed to help foster resilience.

My first free write attempt in the method of currere was done in a coffee shop in July 2017. I closed my eyes and began to type as I thought about the first thing education that
came to mind. I tried to explore what education meant to me, where I was, who I was without trying to control the memories. After I had written for several minutes, the images seemed to flood my thoughts in snippets, or in stilled images like polaroids being flipped. With those images came different emotions and feelings. After a while I realized that I was sitting tense and my shoulders were hunched, teeth clenched. My body was still holding on to the intense emotions that my childhood experiences had hidden for so long.

*I was reading at an early age and always had access to books in my house. I do not remember at that age being encouraged to read but I also do not remember not being encouraged.*

*My first memory of school is in Kindergarten and I remember faking sleep during nap time and watching other kids with their eyes closed. I remember the teacher coming to me and telling me to close my eyes and lay back down. I remember tossing and turning on that hard carpet and some type of blanket that felt scratchy on my skin. I was hot and did not want to lie down.*

*I remember wooden blocks and knocking them over. I remember reading Charlotte's Web in Kindergarten and perhaps over hearing at some point an adult saying my reading was advanced but to be careful about me reading things I did not understand. The memories are hazy but the impression I am left with was that I was "smart" and adults around me had to "be careful." I am filled with this sense that adults were scared of me for some reason, or that, I was a puzzle that they could not figure out.*

*I still identify that I present as a puzzle to other adults. I felt as if I was always an outsider in my undergrad, and during my preservice placements in terms of interacting with my peers. It was on a surface level (my own inability or willingness to engage with new people plays an important role in this). I still feel as though there is a space between me and my colleagues. The resistance to talk with others and to avoid getting my needs met, asking for*
help and isolating are responses to stress. These examples are the actions we take when we are in the fight, flight, or freeze response mode (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 29).

_I remember in grade one I broke my right arm and had a cast and could not print. I remember having a lady that wore skirts who had a chair next to my desk and would write for me-wait, she also kept flipping the pages somewhere but I wanted to be on a different page. I got mad._

_I remember being in a different classroom with round tables-just one and there were only two other kids in the class with me. There was a lady with us but she was not speaking. She was moving her hands to talk. I was learning sign language. I remember painting in this class on a huge easel and I could use my fingers. The paint was smooth I used blue, green, red and orange. I dipped my fingers into each colour paint and wiped my hand across the paper which felt rough and bumpy like toilet paper or paper towel I did not like how the paint moved on the paper so I smeared it with the whole of both my hands._

_I still to this day have no idea why I was in a class learning sign language. I was told of course that I was never in any special class. I often wonder if the school just took it upon themselves to try to give me the most of my education and moved me to wherever they thought I would be most productive, or out of the way? I know I was in a special class, I remember that round table and I still remember some of the signs. There is no reasonable explanation for me to have made it up. There was no You-tube or hard of hearing tv show, there was no friend or family member that I can remember who was hard of hearing. Yet, I know that this happened without any evidence. This is the biggest concern for me regarding validity of my witnessing events from my past. The facts and details may not be the full truth. I know that what is important are the emotional impressions those memories left on me. I believe that those little moments that impress themselves on our brain are what shapes our entire perception of the world and it takes our entire lives to filter through the things we are told, what
we see adults doing, the rules and dichotomies that society impose on us and our own witnessing of the present.

I also acknowledge that a consistent theme up to this point within my memories is of control and when that control was lost- anger. In retrospect, I was confused a lot of the time. I already had a strong personality and will. I interpret my confusion and anger as a defence mechanism. I was already a child that had gone through adverse childhood conditions but had no voice or understanding. I know that as I moved throughout my education that I was viewed as defiant and not “living up to my potential”. My attendance was poor, my coursework suffered and my health was always in a state of decline. All of these behaviours impacted the way I presented myself, interacted with my peers, developed my own identity, and how my brain developed.

Souers and Hall (2016) wrote a book that was designed for teachers to address childhood trauma within the classroom. They have created an in-depth guide for teachers to respond to children who have been affected by trauma and to foster their resilience. This book laid out details of studies that have been conducted over the last 15 years that describe how prevalent trauma is in our society and how it affects the developmental brain. When I read this book I immediately identified as being a student described within it’s pages rather than the educator who is working with those students. One in three children grow up with what Souers and Hall (2016), define as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). These ACEs are aligned with the DSM-5 (2013) revisions of the description of PTSD. That trauma is not just categorized by fatal events or extreme abuse and neglect, but can include: “Substance abuse in the home, parental separation or divorce, mental illness in the home, witnessing domestic violence, suicidal household member, death of a parent or a loved one, parental incarceration, experience of abuse (psychological, physical, or sexual) or neglect (emotional or physical)” (p. 17). These ACEs were revealed in several studies through surveys in the States in 2011 and 2012, gross findings: 35 million US children have experienced at least one type of childhood trauma, 52% of children ages 2-5 have experienced severe stressors, child abuse is reported
every 10 seconds in the US, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among children 12-17 (as cited in Souers and Hall, 2016, p. 19). The defence mechanism that I had created was in response to the trauma and stress that my body and brain had undergone. My flight, fight, and freeze responses were always on alert and I permanently lived in a state of alert. “When children are exposed to complex or acute trauma, the brain shifts its operation from development to stress response, which can have lasting repercussions” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 21).

I remember being in grade one (we were at desks now) and I remember being seated next to this girl that was playing with her hair all the time and had a sour face and a squeaky voice. I do not remember liking her but I do remember that we were friends. I remember having to share a basket of markers and getting mad that someone always took my thick pencil. I remember sitting on my chair with my feet and my butt resting on the top of the back of the chair. I remember getting yelled at often from the front of the room but have no recollection whether or not the teacher was a man or women.

This attachment to certain writing utensils still follows me to my classroom. I have my own jar of pens and pencils that I write with. No one may borrow my personal pens. They flow the right way, the feel of them is comfortable. I cannot write with another pen. I get too distracted if the way the pen touches my fingers or the paper is scratchy, or jarring. My students think it is funny that I have my own set of pens. What is not funny is how frustrated, distracted, and discouraged I get if I have to use something else to write. It will throw my entire day off. This is a direct example of how my brain has found little things to maintain control and how this need has persisted into adulthood.

In 1990 my family moved to a tiny little road in the country. I remember visiting a school that was in the middle of a farm. I met a woman who was to be my teacher for grade 2. I remember visiting the school in the summer to meet her. I remember hushed conversations between her and my mom and maybe my Oma as well. I heard whispers and tried to make out
what they were saying. I remember intently watching their lips and their faces. I had the impression that something was wrong. I also remember always feeling that my caregivers just did not know what to do with me.

I have another memory of being told that I read too much and that books just filled my head with ideas. I remember this memory as if it was yesterday. I have replayed this memory to my therapists. This memory fills me with hurt, confusion, anger, and betrayal. I also remember that year going off to private rooms with different adults and doing reading. Each of those times I felt like something was wrong. I also acknowledge that this was the year that I overheard a conversation between my caregivers and other adults in the school about autism.

Because of being privy to a conversation that was far too complex for my age and understanding I held onto that word autism. I didn’t know what it meant other than different. I thought it was a bad word. I didn’t know if it was being used to describe me or explain me. I do know that I was not diagnosed with autism (although being on the spectrum is something I have considered for myself many times over the years as a way of explaining many of my behaviours and thinking). I also know that because of this conversation and other events that would happen the following year I inherently thought that secrets were being kept about me, and those secrets were bad.

The next vivid memory I have is grade three when several different things happened. I remember learning my multiplication tables and division. I remember being forced to use this hard rubber thing on my pencil because I did not hold the pencil the right way. I remember HATING that hard rubber. I remember figuring out how to hold the pencil my way even with that stupid rubber thing on it. I remember a lady sitting with me at the table eagle eyeing me to hold the pencil the right way. I still do not know to this day why the way I hold a pen is wrong. But I remember feeling wrong, not good enough and embarrassed.

I remember that year "being tested." I remember being tested at least 2 times. Each time I would go through the "staff room" doors and sit at this huge oval table that was made of
a dark wood and too high for the chair they gave me, plus the chair was covered in an itchy red/maroon coloured fabric and was uncomfortable and gross to me. I still cannot sit on fabric chairs.

I was recently in a district Learn Support Workshop and spent a few minutes wandering the big room while my administrator watched me. I finally found what I had been looking for, a chair without fabric. A hard upright 1950’s wooden chair was more comfortable and attractive to me than sitting on a chair covered in scratchy fabric. I just shrug it off now, not worrying how it looks. I am not going to sacrifice my ability to pay attention because I look like a weirdo who can not self regulate at age 34.

I remember squirming in the chair and moving in the chair because it was too low for the table and it itched, I was in shorts I think because I can remember the feel of the carpeted chair on the backs of my knees. I remember there were two adults there I did not know, my grade 2 teacher was there too! I do not remember a caregiver in the room. The next thing I remember is making shapes with blocks that matched the card I was given, I remember having to name a bunch of pictures and read some words that were very big and then the words increased and got smaller and smaller. I remember reading so much I was getting bored. I remember colours of some sort and remember writing something. I remember being asked all sorts of questions like I was on Jeopardy. I remember being excited and I also remember getting angry but I do not know why. I remember that I had to go into that room again that same year but I can not remember what we did the next time. I remember going to the doctor who was a silly man who did not wear shoes and always chuckled and winked after he talked. I remember that doctor was very jovial and happy. I also remember I started to take medication in grade 3 to “help me be better”.

I remember in grade 4 the year after my “testing” that I got to go to a special school in another town once a week for the day where we could learn about anything we wanted and there was all sorts of older kids there too! We could build anything and if we needed something
that we could not find there, "they" would get it for us. We went on so many field trips at that school. I remember how much it sucked though because I still had to go to grade 4 at that school in the field.

I was isolated from my peers. I often formed stronger bonds with the adults in any school building then I did my same age peers. Zabel & Zabel (2001) define resilient children as those who have had traumatic experiences, but persevere through them because of high intelligence and “the ability to find support systems in the form of adults who take special interest in them” (p. 137). I formed bonds with the teachers who smoked cigarettes out back (I was smoking since age 10), and the one teacher that taught me how to subtract a different way than everyone else who smoked a pipe behind the portable and never got me in trouble when I smoked my rolled butts. I know that I still have a systemic reaction when I smell pipe to this day and it reminds my body and brain of belonging and acceptance. I know that I yearned from the gravity of being to belong and to make adults proud. I knew that I wanted to do exactly what adults wanted me to, that I wanted to show them I was obeying, I wanted to be a good “normal” girl/ student. I hated getting in trouble and was often confused as to why I was. I remember that I was often called precocious or too big for my britches and that I had a sense of wit and sarcasm that was borderline inappropriate for a child my age. I wonder if that is what made adults uncomfortable.

I am thinking about the things that took place in my life that set the foundation for my insight, wit and sarcasm. I know that I have a serious lifetime of abuse from early infancy until well into my teens. I know that my home life was unstable in the emotional realms (there was always food on the table and a roof over my head…) but the tension in my childhood home was volatile at best. I had different caregivers at different times. I know that the meds I was put on for my ADHD interacted with the meds that I was on for my migraines (later to be found out were caused by food allergies) and that I knew from a young age that meds were a way out of the present. I also know that self medicating was always an answer to solve any problem in my home. I also know that by the time I was 10 years old I smoked the butts of the cigarettes
my caregiver left in the ashtray and that the “meds” from the doctor and the bathroom cabinet were not enough to make me feel whole.

The first time I self medicated with the intention of escape was the summer after grade 4. I had come home from an extended trip to Germany to visit “several” relatives that lasted a majority of my grade 4 school year. I was under the bridge by the creek and I remember taking off my shoes and putting my feet in the water and being able to feel the pulse of the rocks speaking to the tadpoles. I remember that for the first time in my entire life I felt content. The fear of my trauma seemed to dissipate and I felt a freedom that I did not have words for.

I mention this because, from grade 5 onwards my educational experience was supplemented with mood and mind altering extra curricular activities. This is one of the areas that I am vulnerable around. Why mention this aspect of my journey? Why is this important? Does the academic world need this much information about my past? Upon reflection I believe that this is one of the most valuable aspects of myself that I can share. I can divulge that I intentionally escaped reality as often as I could and tried to accomplish school while doing so. I believe that escapism is something that many students face whether for traumatic, emotional, or situational reasons. Students are trying to navigate their many feelings and circumstances and creating resilience in the process. This escapism that I describe looks the same as the fight, flight, and freeze responses that we often see in the classroom. These are the defence mechanisms being triggered in order to try to control the environment we are in. The more honest I am with myself, with my colleagues and with my students, the more genuine connections I can make, and the less defensive actions I will engage in. I carry no shame from my past.

I also remember from that year that I got in trouble a lot, that I broke my glasses a few times and was often in fights with other people. I also remember running through the field over the fence away from the school. I remember playing hopscotch. I remember sitting on top of the monkey bars and not letting anyone else come up. I remember being mean to others. I
remember getting hit in the back with a baseball bat because I was showing off for Girl-J and her "boyfriend- K" got so mad that she was paying attention to me and not him that he hit me. I also remember telling the adults that I was in K’s way and was not paying attention. I remember not walking for a bit but then being okay again. I do not remember when the going to that special school in the other city ended but I do not remember going to it after grade 6. I distinctly remember taking a great interest in my sexual identity around this time. Grade 7 I went to a different school. I was a bully, I was popular, I was cool.

I was in love my teacher. She talked to me and listened to me as if I had something to say. She talked to me like no one ever had before. She gave me books that no one else was reading and gave me special assignments. I remember very clearly what I read that year (mostly because I have reread those same books over and over again at different times in my life). I read Shakespeare and did a huge project on his plays- comedies. I read Farley Mowatt and realized I did not care at all about animal adventure books. I was given The Giver by Lois Lowery which changed my life! I still read that book. I loved/ love that book. I must have read that book 4 times that year trying to figure out how I could change our world to be that. That book offered me an escape and an alternative reality where there was control, everyone had a purpose. I know those years were so pivotal for me and that I yearned for some control, some purpose, a way to belong.

I was engaged and connected with my content as a learner during that year. Although my behaviours continued to spiral, I distinctly remember going to school without dread. I wanted to learn, to turn the next page, and to talk about the world I had found in that book. I was connected to a teacher, I was connected to the content. Connection to both colleagues and to what we are teaching are proven to be resiliency factors. Being connected with what we are teaching and feeling competent with the content and knowledge we are imparting to our students enables teachers to feel competent and builds efficacy (Bobek, 2002). That connection to content and to that teacher helped me to be engaged and almost excited about
going to school. My inappropriate behaviours at school lessened because I felt safe. Although I still yearned for control because my home life was less than ideal, going to school became a place for me to be more relaxed, and to be free enough to experience a little of what childhood should hold.

I remember after my obsession with the Giver ceased that I had found a book called Dante’s Inferno. My teacher whom I loved asked me where I got it and I told her from the library. I felt trepidation about it but I did not know why. I thought she would say no because half of it was in a language I did not know. I told her I would learn the language (Latin) if that’s what she wanted. I remember her laughter and her response to this day "Read it, write a summary after each section and put it on a poster". I also remember asking her when it was due and her telling me to take as much time as I needed. I read Dante's Inferno, I wrote summaries and created a fold-out poster with images of the Cantos of Hell. I remember keeping my "rough draft" in the book itself and never returning the book to the library. A great deal of my life changed that year. In large part due to that teacher. I remember the feeling of being valued. Exploring things that I wanted to read was encouraged. I remember her taking the extra time to talk with me. I am certain the only reason I did not drop out that year was because of that one connection I made: The feeling of worth that she instilled in me.

Resilience for me has not been entirely intrinsic. Resilience has been fostered by a few adults that listened, encouraged, and made time for me. However slight it may have been to them, it was monumental in helping me to hold on. Modelling, mentoring, and collegial support and collaboration are included in almost every study I have read on increasing teacher resilience (see: Bobek, 2002; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Schlichte, Yssel, Merbler, 2010; Langher, Caputo, Ricci, 2017; Cornu, 2008; Hamama, Ronen, Schacar, Rosenbaum, 2012; Hong, 2012).

I don’t remember much of grade 8 except it was filled with competition, smoking, drugs, parties and reading. I remember always being sent to the office by different teachers who
always had some weird catch phrase to send me there like, "row row row your boat to the office young lady", "leave my class, don’t expect to pass", “You know where you are heading...go head there now!". I also remember the Principal, he was a funny man who was chill. I also remember him asking often what I had done to get under Mr/Ms’ skin this time. I remember him asking me if I liked school. I remember him asking me if I needed anything- like help? I also remember him telling me to keep a book in his office so I at least had something to do while I was there. I remember I read Plato, Kafka, Karouak, Ginsberg, Anais Nin, and Atwood that year and into the summer. I also remember getting a job and leaving home a few times.

The connections that I made with adults in the school that year and the following years shared some characteristics: humour, honesty about my situation; they did not seem to take school (content and passing grades) as seriously as they did creating a connection with me. They did not seem to try to change me. I remember that those adults created a space for trust for me: I believed they heard me when I spoke to them, they did not just listen. Those adults were “on the level”, they did not try to hide the facts or to try to pretend that everything was, or was going too be ok. They seemed to understand that my life was not perfect and that I had bigger things going on than changing into gym strip, or getting to class on time.

The sense of humour, candidness, and acceptance that those adults showed me, created space for me to put down the defence mechanisms, the need I had to control all situations. As I go through my practice today, and reflect on the type of teacher I am, I know that I try to exhibit those same characteristics with my students. I try to be as honest as I can, and to understand that students have so much more going on. I try to hear what student behaviours are saying, “read between their actions”. I give students the benefit of the doubt and try to acknowledge that they are supported by me no matter what. I try to be “real”. I try to give them hope by being honest and helping them to see their options and understand the consequences of their actions. Those adults that I met during those formative years held the qualities that I aspire to having, in order to reach my own students.
In 1997 I went to high school. I did not do well at any of the 4 schools I tried before dropping out in grade 10.

In all of these memories and accounts I have witnessed throughout this journey of currere there are some key things that stand out for me: There are so many expectations put on a student who has a diagnosis, regardless of that diagnosis and whether good or bad expectations, once having a label, you fit into a box; I was always in trouble; I felt like I was a contradiction for adults, a puzzle that they could not figure out; I discovered that I had a great power- the power of attention- getting attention, whether good or bad, I was still getting attention.

I wish that people would have heard all the things that I was never able to say.

In 2001 I met a women whom I refer to as my foster mother. She took me in, gave me love, support, encouragement, allowed me time to heal. I learned to trust her and her wife over the years. Those women helped me to get clean and sober and learn to live a new way. They came to my high school graduation from an alternative school when I was 20. They helped me to get into the Ontario College of Art and Design. I did 3 years in sculpture and installation and curatorial practices at OCAD without completing my degree. I started my Bachelor of Education in 2008 after I moved from Toronto to Vancouver Island, and my Master’s of Special Education in 2016. None of it has been easy. All of it has been worth it. I still refer to those two women as my foster mothers. They are whom I call when I am sad, lonely, or celebrating. They are the people who have taught me unconditional love. They are the primary external influence on my resilience.

Hamama, Ronen, Shachar, and Rosenbaum (2012) show positive links between social support and resilience. Social support from outside of the workplace is essential for grounding. There needs to be consistent, ongoing support and encouragement from familial relationships who share values, can give feedback, be a sounding board, give help when needed, and to provide a reliable structure when away from work. Those adults: Teachers and principal from
my formative years who showed understanding, went the extra mile in honesty to make a connection with me, and who used humour to dispel their authority were important in helping me to feel accepted and valued. Those two women, gave me something that was intangible and something that I had not known before: Belonging. They encouraged me, accepted me. They loved me until I could learn to love myself. That one woman who invited me into her home and her family offered me the freedom to trust someone. She has been a reliable, consistent source of acceptance, guidance and unconditional support. I had hope because of that family. I felt that I was deserving of all that life has to offer. She taught me that I was valuable and worthy. Because of those adults, my “foster” mothers, I wanted to become a teacher and devote my life to helping children learn to advocate for themselves. I strive to give students the opportunity to know that there is at least one person that cares for them, believes in them, and will help them to become the best versions of themselves. I learned that this is what it takes to build resilience. Cohen and Willis argue that “feeling support from others boosts one’s sense of value, self-efficacy… providing acceptance, belonging, stability, and recognition of self-worth “ (as cited in Hamama, Ronen, Shachar, and Rosenbaum, 2012, p. 735). My research question is answered here in that, my past has impacted my present. My reflection reveals the theme of having support and encouragement attributed in part to my resilience as a child. I needed that support then, I need it in my daily practice today.
Chapter 6: The Secret Behind my PTSD

If I look at these memories as if I were a case study, I would declare that I was a student who was probably categorized as an R or an H. Adults probably sat around the School Based Team meeting trying to organize, make plans, identify the problems and figure out where the best place for me was. I am certain that my early caregivers were those who could never be gotten ahold of, returned calls or came to meet the teachers. I was a student that there was no answer for, no place to go, no curriculum to deliver. I fell through the cracks. Knowing all this about my adverse childhood and school experiences makes me invaluable as someone who can reach and connect with students who have similar paths. I have a gift for making those connections with students who need one adult to listen, be honest and be real, and to give them encouragement when others have not gotten through. I share my above story with my students openly and freely. I share the above story with my colleagues. The sharing of my past renegotiates my understanding of professionalism. Being vulnerable, open, and honest is how I have taken agency over my trauma and past and created a new professional identity. One that shows there is room for growth. That there is always hope. If nothing else, that, at least I can get down on my knees and say to a student “I feel you. Let’s do this together” (watch Brené Brown’s: 2013, video on Empathy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw).

The question though, is how do I help other teachers by sharing my story so as to possibly prevent burnout in new teachers? My above story be may equal to trauma that many have experienced already and are not yet able to overcome. Comparing trauma is not my intention, and I honour anyone’s story and support and encourage one’s healing and the fostering of resilience. But, for me, my above story was not enough to explain to myself what happened to me in my first couple years. It did not go deep enough for me, it does not justify the entirety of my PTSD that I was diagnosed with, or taking a medical leave in my 3rd year teaching. It does not speak to the intense emotional upheaval that in part led to my divorce. What I really want to do is open up, spill, and get vulnerable. I want to scream what happened to me so that when I tell you when I first started teaching that I was not prepared you will
understand. I am anxious, nervous, terrified to tell the truth. My truth is ugly. My truth is painful. My truth is a secret. It is that secret that kept me sick, that enabled my burnout. I never shared, so I did not get the help I needed. This is what I want to prevent. I want to have enough courage to share my story so that others can glean some of that courage to share their story when it is needed.

I have shared some of my story with my students as my truth in order to explain my own resilience and to create similarities among us so that they create their own connection with me in order to feel safe so they can learn. I shy away from sharing my details because the facts are too heavy and it is both unfair and irresponsible of me to expect students (especially students with disabilities) to hold such emotionally heavy space. Also, they do not have the ability to hold that type of space from someone who is an authority figure. They do not need to behold me in a vulnerable position where I am placing them in a caregiver role. That is not what I need from them. They need to know that I am a strong and safe capable adult that can hold their space, their feelings and trauma. I lay professional boundaries by omitting my inconsistent and adverse details from my past. Setting professional and emotional boundaries is an essential strategy for building and maintaining resilience (Hong, 2012). I withhold information that is just not necessary for the situation. For example, if I am going to a doctor's appointment because I have chlamydia I would just share that I have a doctor's appointment, the rest of the information is private and not necessary to give. The reason for being absent is legitimate enough as explanation. I am observing my professional and social boundaries. Engaging in healthy boundaries with my students enables me to separate my professional and my personal life which aids in those positive coping skills that creates resiliency (Caringi et al., 2015). That connection is paramount to having trust.

My motives behind sharing my story in this study are to offer the reader support and encouragement to seek help if they too are experiencing burnout. “When I speak of research that matters I am talking about researchers finding the research that matters to them but that also matters for others” (Chambers, 2004, p. 7).
I made it through with the help of others. This story is for those who also feel that they can not share but need to. My hope is that with the help of others and reading this, teachers can find courage to also build resilience and get through those tough times. I want to show you that extrinsic motivation and hope, having a role model (if I can be so bold in thinking that I can be a role model) can take someone’s situation and help to turn it around in order for them to grow their own resilience and be successful. I share only parts of my story without the burden of the details. However, in researching this study with the intention of sharing, describing and getting to the root of understanding of my burnout I feel that it is necessary to share many of those details to describe legitimately why I was so unprepared and to acknowledge the impact of being triggered by my students and the teaching placement I was in. I have been struggling with the tension of being honest, getting vulnerable, telling my truth and the fear that sharing holds. I understand that people lie in order to create boundaries because of their fear. I ask myself what am I afraid of if I share the depths of my story? My experience is deep and fragile. It is challenging for other people to hear some of those details; it is difficult for them to not further question without the proper emotional exploration of themselves and knowledge and understanding so that they do not say something that is going to backtrack my healing. My experiences are fragile, they are my own and they deserve to be honoured. It is hard to honour those experiences if I just drop them in people’s laps and expect them to grasp the depth within minutes when I have had a lifetime of therapy to deal with them. But, being able to share in the most vulnerable way possible the details from my life, I am reclaiming agency over my own story. I can make my own choices about whom I share with and for the promotion of resilience. I did not have those choices as a child, I did not have a voice to share my circumstances. Today I have a voice, I can create my own safe space and I can claim my resilience by making my trauma fit within my present life. In this present moment I can understand that I am entitled to my personal experiences, that I have sovereignty over myself and my story. I can see how my trauma fits, influences and shapes my day to day life and that I present myself as I am because of those experiences. In terms of how I present
curriculum as a human being informed by my past, informing my present presentation of my reality within a classroom, I am trying to create a space for conversation, for connection and identification of feelings. “It is through the telling of our experiences that we can understand and shape our practices. Understanding curriculum as a strategy that transforms experiences into useable knowledge helps us to develop our practice so that it is responsive to the needs of students and to ourselves as educators” (Webb, 2015, p. 5). I share this story as a way to help and to offer healing.

I think that there is an assumption made that the most critical learning is done by paid professionals inside of an educational institution. When I think back to my experiences within the walls of a school building, I remember bits of pieces from a couple of teachers or adults in the building that influenced me and my learning and growth. The experiences of learning that most resonate with me come from outside of school. The teachers I had whom I called various names; neighbour, aunty (although they were not blood related), friends, friends’ parents, older siblings of friends, the post office lady, the different and various places I grew up in- the fields, the city, the creek, under a bridge, the tents, abandoned tractors, tree forts, graffitied alleys, coffee shops, public libraries and art galleries, a park bench, etc. These are the things that I think about when I reflect and deeply ask myself the questions: What did you learn? Where did you learn it? Whom did you learn it from?

I want to talk about where my resilience came from- I want to share the moments that created and molded me into this strong, special and smart human. I want to talk about where and how I learned to problem solve, to process complex problems, how I learned to become adaptable, read people, and, to negotiate my emotions. The deep part of my memories, my weariness, restlessness, abandonment issues, my inability to let people get close to me, and my ability to build thick walls around my being. My story is painful, and carries with it a deep resounding fear of telling it, but I am compelled to put on paper. I want to share because it helps to understand where I am today, what brought me here and perhaps even why I am so
good at my job. I want to share this to help me heal. To bring my secrets out of the shadows. No one seems to talk about those secrets that keep us hidden behind walls. To heal is to be resilient. To share is to project courage and promote freedom.

My resiliency and strength came out of my trauma and developed into the propensity to walk through my trepidation and overcome and persist when moving forward seems like an impossibility.

The experience of currere has led me through an exploration of my trauma, requiring me to tell and retell my stories, confronting the pain and betrayal that has influenced me through my life. What I have learned, and what I recommend for others experiencing burn out is that we each confront the stories from our lives through cycles of regression, progression, analysis, synthesis. The stories are our own, and we have the right to both confront and to speak them in whatever way can help us to heal.

What is important is that I have learned where my boundaries lay. I have learned that there is peace that comes from sharing and revealing our secrets. I learned why and how my PTSD is triggered. This process of currere has enlightened me and allowed me to take sovereignty over my past, my present, and my future. I learned how my resilience has taken shape and how I can continue to foster my strength and perseverance.

Teaching in the North I was face to face with a student who, as she broke down, got vulnerable, shared her situation and experience with me. As I listened to her tell me her tragic tale, all I heard was my own story come out of her lips. I had been triggered. Haydon, Wong, Langley, Stein, and Kataoka (2015) did a study entitled: Preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress in Educators. This study builds the link between burnout, STS, and PTSD. Burnout’s symptoms as described by the Maslach Inventory (2003) are: Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism, and lack of personal accomplishment. Burnout is related explicitly to the work environment resulting in lack of job satisfaction. Burnout and STS share many similar symptoms including those of emotional fatigue and being exposed to vicarious trauma. PTSD is a diagnosed illness that includes the direct exposure to trauma. (Haydon et al., 2015). As
evidenced in my story in the North, I was directly exposed to many contributing factors of burnout: Heavy caseload, limited collegial support, lack of competence in what I was teaching (being a brand new teacher in a remote special ed program with no previous education or experience to work with students with high needs), challenging behaviours, lack of administrative support, lack of resources, and “too many unique demands on one’s time and resources” (Brunstig et al., 2014, p. 683). I definitely qualified as a teacher who was dissatisfied with my job, had adverse affects on my health, and contemplated leaving the profession.

Added to that my “repeated exposure to to adverse details of events” (Haydon et al., 2015, p. 321) from my students checked off the boxes for STS. Then, when I was triggered so intensively by that one student who shared with me her story that seemed to parallel my own, I was diagnosed by a doctor as having PTSD. Haydon et al. (2015) states that, “professionals potentially at increased risk for STS include those working directly with traumatized individuals and hearing the recounting of traumatic incidents, those who tend to be empathetic, females, those with high caseloads of traumatized clients, and those helping professionals who have unresolved histories of trauma themselves” (p. 321). When reading the Haydon et al. (2015) study, I shook my head and began to cry. It seemed that I met all the risk factors. I cried because I finally felt as if what had happened to me and what was happening to me was not because I was a bad teacher, or couldn’t “suck it up.” I finally had an explanation why every part of my being felt as if it was not part of me. I knew that I had to start sharing. I knew that I couldn’t be alone. Sharing my trauma is a way for me to provide a recognizable colleague for others to identify with; sharing my trauma is a way to recover and to heal (Haydon et al., 2015).

This chapter provides me with some answers to my thesis question: Given the internal tension of my history of trauma and my professional identity, how has my past and my perceived future impacted my present teaching practice? It is evident from my adverse childhood experiences that my education was affected. My personality; or the way I approached every situation with caution and distrust. My inability to accept who I was. My immense self criticism. The connections I made with adults that were sparse and filled with
caution. My need for approval yet resistance to it. All these led to a challenging school life and seeped into my adult life and career. My past has influenced my teaching practice, how I present, and the values I hold. My past has changed the way I interact with students. I hold empathetic space for them. How will following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience? I still place undo judgement on myself, search for external approval and fight with internal acceptance. The purpose of me retelling this story is to provide a narrative for other teachers who are experiencing burnout. Sharing my story has been an interrogation of myself inside and out. I have torn through cement barriers that I had defensively built within. I have found by tearing down these walls I have been gifted with a new freedom to build a stronger foundation. I have found a weightlessness that permits me to sit in my own skin with pride, strength, and a hope for a healthy future. This exploration of my own burnout, STS, and PTSD has been worth the fear, pain, and sleepless nights. I only offer the insight that I have gleaned: For new teachers or those experiencing burnout, I offer my revealed lightheartedness. I am here to say that I have built resilience. I am more confident in who I am. I have found a strength with which to listen to those students experiencing their own trauma. I have built agency and advocacy for myself. I have found that the details of my story are not as important as the way I responded and felt in those moments. I am encouraging anyone who may be feeling the effects of burnout to explore their own experiences and use their voice to seek help and support.
Chapter 7: Discussion of Resiliency Factors

“The point of the school curriculum is to goad citizens into caring for ourselves and our fellow human beings, to help us think and act with intelligence, knowledge, sensitivity, and courage in both the public sphere- as citizens aspiring to establish a democratic society- and in the private sphere, as individuals committed to other individuals.” (Pinar, key questions for educators (2005, p. 41).

When I began this process of currere I of course was not able to foresee the insight that I would gain by writing and the healing it would create. When I read my writing now it is as if I am several steps apart from the person who wrote it. I am looking at myself with fresh eyes and able to observe myself fully conscious. Pinar (2015) discusses how curriculum is in need of researching ourselves, to look at our past, present, and future as data that can be analyzed and synthesized. Bracketing is removing one’s self from one’s own point of view without judgement, without interpretation, without changing the events. “The importance of the basic premises of phenomenology: The idea of bracketing what is observed, the typically taken for granted, and seeing it as it is” (Pinar, 2015, p. 23). This bracketing enables me to see how my experiences from my own life, my educational experiences and from my early teaching career have shaped my current teaching practice. My research question, “Given the internal tension of my history of trauma and my professional identity, how has my past and my perceived future impacted my present teaching practice? How will following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience?” has guided me and revealed to me that I am proud of my current teaching practice. I am proud of how I am able to connect with kids. I am proud and grateful and honoured that those kids (many of whom are unable to connect with other adults) trust me enough at least to come to class, and some enough to share with me parts of their story, allowing me to help them through these moments in their lives. I am lucky to have empathy and be in a position where my resilience has enabled me to help my students be successful.
This part of currere, synthesizing all the writing I did on my present (so much writing), is the most exhilarating and the hardest of everything I have done so far. I want to give to my field something of value. I do not want this vulnerability to be wasted. Rereading my laboriously written pages, I have found something that surprises me: I am doing something valuable in my classroom everyday. It may not be traditional but it is valuable: To myself and to my students. I am hoping that this journey of currere will also be valuable to teachers. I understand that my story is unique and, that many may not be able to relate to my circumstances or my history. I truly believe though, that what is identifiable are the feelings. What I need in order to be resilient is encouragement from others, support, intrinsic motivation, and hope. I need to do everything I can to put those things into place. What ever a teacher’s situation, if there are similarities to my feelings, the best approach is asking for encouragement and support. It is essential to my own resilience that I remind myself of my purpose of teaching: To be strong for students.

Special education teachers are at high risk for burnout that results in health problems, resignations, and the resulting attrition of teachers leaving the field. One third of new special education teachers leave the profession after three years according to Langher, Caputo, Ricci (2017). I have already mentioned the stress that special education teachers deal with on an ongoing basis: High support needs of students, adverse behaviours, academic situations that don’t meet the needs of students with challenges, “paradoxes and contradictions, because experiencing failure and acting in an attempt without the guarantee of success are distinctive characteristics of their occupational reality” (p. 122), high paperwork load, administration that is not always supportive due to lack of understanding of the intense support output, lack of resources, deadlines for paperwork, high student numbers with low EA support ratio, scarce collaboration with colleagues, and pressure from parents who are dealing with their own reality of emotional stress due to raising children with special needs (Langher, Caputo, Ricci, 2017). Knowing these risk factors, and having been able to identify several areas of resilience, I began the analysis writing portion of currere in my new position on Vancouver Island. When I entered
what was to become my new space I thought to myself; “How do I want to present? How am I going to feel safe here? What is my pedagogy? Who am I as a professional?” In my previous position where burnout, STS, and PTSD reared its three ugly heads, I hadn’t had any experience, I didn’t know what to expect, it had seemed as if none of my preservice education had any relevance to teaching special education. This time I had the awareness to identify the red flags that suggest burnout is on its way, but also, I had a keen sense of understanding of what makes me resilient. In the following pages I was able to synthesize and answer my key research question: How will following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience?

**Resiliency Factor: Administration Support**

A primary reason that teachers give for leaving the profession is poor administrative support. The relationship between school administrators and new teachers should be a partnership. Respect for and understanding of one another’s roles and a willingness to listen to and learn from one another can make the working environment more positive and productive for both administrators and teachers” (Bobek, 2002, p. 203).

In my new space I am one half of a learn support center. The adjoining room is inhabited by my team teacher and is filled with all the things that one who has been teaching for so long accumulates and displays. Stacks of papers, filing cabinets filled and labeled, posters and student art on the walls, bulletin boards covered with resources and valuable information, plants, computers in cubicles, bright lights, and colour everywhere. It was overwhelming to me and vast contrast to my room which had nothing on the walls, grey cabinets, so much furniture packed into the space that I did not know where to start. The only thing saving me from spiralling into a panic was that there was a balcony off our rooms with a tiny green house and some picnic tables. My first thought was my of joy and gardening, propagating flowers and
growing food! My next thought took away my jovial spirit as I wondered if I would be allowed? I went back into my room and wondered if I could move furniture around, remove furniture (it was so cluttered in there that I could barely think), put some filters on the fluorescent lights, move/mount the projector on the ceiling, remove the faded wall trims, paint the ceiling tiles, or put up paintings and coat racks? I kept thinking to myself that I needed to make a list of all the things I would need permission for.

I identified these thought of needing permission and wanting to have everything sorted out to make myself feel safe as part of my susceptible character that desires the need for permission and encouragement. Even after examination, reflection, and all the healing that I have done, I still seem to need that connection with my administration to accept me, give me permission and yet, provide me the freedom to explore my pedagogy. This speaks to the dichotomy I hold between needing to control my environment and expression and the approval of authority figures. My resilience was formed through the connections I have made with adults who were supportive and in order to maintain my balance and confidence; I still desire that external support.

I was also thinking about what do my new kids need not ever having met them and how important it is for my environment (classroom) to reflect that I want the kids to be comfortable and feel. Everything is about feeling. How am I feeling, how are they going to feel, how can I teach how they are feeling and to hold space for those feelings so they come to a place where they know that my classroom is a safe place for them to feel however they need without judgment? Feeling safe and comfortable is the only way to make learning available.

In order to create an environment that was safe for my students and in order to help them foster their own resilience, I needed to provide that encouraging, supportive, and respectful connection as an authority figure that I also needed for myself.

I made a list of all the things I thought I would need permission for and brought it to my admin. This administration team gave me something that I had not had yet, “YES”. They told
me that (within reason) the answer would always be yes, because they trust their teachers. I was ecstatic. Instead of feeling like I was not prepared, did not know what I was doing and that I would have to be continuously proving myself to my new bosses, they made me feel as if they already had full confidence in me. Starting the semester with the feeling of support was a great way to build the foundation of resilience in my new placement.

Throughout the semester I had several occasions where I needed support, advice, or resources from my admin. Every time the door was always open, the encouragement that I was doing a good job, and the staff meetings filled with food, laughter and appreciation. This admin creates an environment that is welcoming, safe, and supportive, this is a huge factor towards my resilience.

Resiliency Factor: Self-Efficacy

“Self-efficacy has been considered as one of the most important factors influencing individuals' choices of activity or goals, as well as how much effort they expend, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties and their resilience to failures” (Bandura as cited in Hong, 2012, p. 420).

Self-efficacy is built through a belief in competence. Competence is a substantial factor in resilience. Out of field teaching where teachers are in classrooms teaching content or specific needs that they are not officially qualified for is common practice that I experienced when teaching special education in the North as my very first teaching position. I was insufficiently prepared and in such I did a disservice to my students and to myself. Being unprepared for what I was teaching led to my burnout. Those three years with a steep learning curve and the research done in this study gave me the competence that I needed through education, professional development and in class experience to provide a competent curriculum in my new job and have confidence doing so.

I was thinking about why I got hired to my new position on Vancouver Island. Everyone told me that it was impossible to get hired on the island, that you need to be extra special, or, have something that no one else does: Experience, a master's degree and amazing credentials.
This court case that we won: Meaning the BCTF; I do not understand much of it, but I do think that the reason all the special ed positions opened up everywhere is that admin now have to hire specialists for specialists positions which makes me identify as a specialist. I am a specialist. Special Ed, student services is my speciality. I got hired based on need, I will hopefully be re-hired based on my performance like any other job. I say hopefully, because, I no longer hide myself and who I am behind my created ideal professional curtain. I am who I am and I deliver myself to my students and school. I have reconsidered what I view being a professional as. I understand the expectations and how teachers most often present themselves. My vision of who I am supposed to be has been skewed based on a misguided youthful understanding. I know that what I need now and what I needed as a student is to feel comfortable. I want the students to feel comfortable. When students feel comfortable they do not have to worry about the external things that fill their thoughts about: Whether the teacher is going to get mad, be unreasonable in their eyes, or not listen to what they are trying to say. I need to feel comfortable if I am going to be able to listen to them, see them as humans and not as a product that I have to “pass on”. It goes back to the idea of being consistent. I need to be consistent with them. I have to be consistent with myself. I have to stay grounded. Life is hard. Making solid connections with other humans is really difficult. Those solid connections is essential for resilience: For my own and for theirs. I have to be able to trust that I can remain grounded no matter what is going on in their lives or in mine, I can only do this if I am comfortable, I have my art work adorning the walls, plants on the tables, a couch in the corner and I am wearing jeans and my Blundstones.

Throughout the writing about my past I was able to synthesize the moments that built my own self efficacy. The whispered language around me as a child no longer held a mystical and foreboding air of reality for me. I had, through reflection of my childhood seen that I had internally developed competence in myself. The three years in my Northern placement helped me to develop trust: Trust in myself and my own capacity to connect with students and make a
difference in their educational journey. Within my classroom today I talk about persistence, integrity, and perseverance. I share with my students some of the challenges and struggles that I had when I was in school and I always conclude that I got through it! I persevered: I found within myself that motivation and desire to move forward, to try and try again. No matter how hard I fought to get make it to class, get through assignments, and to self regulate, I was able to draw on those inner voices of strength: I can do this, I am valuable, I am worthy, I am smart. I faked it until I made it, and persisted in the face of adversity. Recognizing my increasing resilience by synthesizing this study led to the determination to continue within this profession feeling more self-efficacious.

    I believe internally now that I am capable and that I have the skills that I need to meet these new young minds in this new place. I believe in myself. I know that I am knowledgable and when I do not know the answers, I have the confidence that I can find them. I believe in my own ability to do my job. I believe that I am a qualified specialist. This new position I hold, I hold with high self-efficacy beliefs and this is a huge piece of resiliency that I did not have in my previous position.

**Resiliency Factor: Connections, Collegiality, and Collaboration**

“Resilience resides not in the individual but in the capacity for connection” (Le Cornu, 2009, p. 718).

    In 1996 Cooley and Yovanoff, did a study that implemented peer collaborative interventions that showed a decrease in special education teacher burnout. Peer collaboration, and a sense of belonging in terms of collegiality are primary factors in preventing the isolation that occurs with special education teachers. “Support from the general education teachers in a school is conceived as a key-factor which allows special education teachers to experience greater personal accomplishment…on the contrary, without support, many special education teachers tend to feel isolated and lonely” (Langher, Caputo, Ricci, 2017, p. 123).
In my previous position I found that there was always tension between special education teachers and the rest of the building. I think for the most part that educators take their classes (especially in high-school) and their content too seriously.

As the focus on inclusion increases, the tension between mainstream teachers and special education teachers will continue to be felt. Ongoing dialogue, mutual respect and the understanding that we are all concerned with advocating for our students, will help decrease that tension. We have to remember this is about students. Our approach to all students should be to give them the tools to learn, reflect, and apply competence in their lives.

My case load continues to increase as more and more students register late who have learning disabilities or who are not responding to the lessons in their classes at the same rate and accomplishment as their peers. Students continue to be added to my class, and my responsibility to reach them where they are at and deliver the course content increases.

I understand how frustrating it is for mainstream teachers who are trying to teach academics and prepare students for a university education or a college education when the students do not have the basic foundations. It is the same in English: grammar, syntax, structure of a paragraph and essay, brainstorming ideas, collaborating within a group.

Again, today another student who has low attendance throughout his entire education, anxiety and a learning disability, every teacher has come to me asking for my advice and a solution with red flags that this student is going to fail... the answer comes back to that question that aches my ethical heart: To whom do we give our attention? Do we just ignore this student and pull our resources and give them to another student? Do we give the most help to the students who just need a little extra or do we give a lot of resources to those who need a lot extra but will still not be as successful as community members?

I am lost in this sea of never ending feeling that I and the system continue to fail human beings that will eventually be responsible for my future.
I feel alone, disconnected and like I am being swallowed up by an unknown entity that wants nothing but black curtains and cinder block walls to protect me.

What happened to being fervent, to being encouraged to be who I am and to excel and explore and be free? I do not feel free.

There still situations that bring me down. These are the feelings of despair, isolation, and desperation that lead me to find another career. These are the conversations that I need to share with others. I need to share these things with mainstream teachers and hear that they too are feeling the effects of burnout. Collaborating with other teachers in order to try to find the best solution for these students helps negate those feelings of ineffectiveness and isolation.

The more I sit in at lunch with mainstream departments, the more I feel part of the school, connected to all teachers, and to all students. These are our students and we, together, are a team. Connecting with other teachers and presenting my own vulnerability, frustrations, and brainstorming collectively to find answers that we are faced with day in and day out creates that important resilience that is often lacking between departments. “Fostering productive relationships with people who understand the trials and tribulations of teaching, who reinforce the value of what teachers do, and who offer insight into various options available for dealing with a variety of situations” (Bobek, 2002, p. 203). As teachers we all bring various experience, solutions, and value to our practice. To continue fostering my own resilience I will continue to talk with teachers I normally never see. I will ask them about their day, if there are any students they were worried about, if there is anything I could do to support them in their own practice. I will help them to feel supported, not alone, and that together, we will do the best we can.

I started visiting teachers on their prep to talk about what they were teaching, to give me a better sense of their teaching style, what they were teaching, and struggles they were facing. Hearing others share about the obstacles they come across and the students they don’t know how to help, I started to share back. I did not always feel supported in my pedagogy, but I began to feel comfortable and supported and encouraged by other teachers in my feelings, and
my desire to help kids. There is a bond that teachers have; we are mutually empathetic towards our students. Our communication becomes responsive towards the other, and eventually a sense of comfortability and respect lays way for collaboration (Le Cornu, 2009).

I started actually working with teachers. Collaboration comes in many forms I have discovered. Collaboration can just be a sharing of resources. Other times it is a question posed in desperation about a student or a small group of students. School based team is a perfect example of collaboration with a mutual understanding of the tricky ins and outs that is special education. I have been working with a teacher who teaches academics but had noticed a high level of anxiety in the classroom. We collaborated: I shared what knowledge I had with working with students who have an increased sense of anxiety; I talked about behavioural stressors; I looked up students’ files to see if there were external issues at play; we discussed what and how I could help. I made a brochure that could be incorporated into the classroom before tests, I met with students and told them about the resources I had and that I was available to help them, I went into the classroom and gave a lesson, I held a workshop for anyone that desired the help. The results of the students benefiting from these things are apparent in the increased attendance, higher levels of motivation, and higher test scores. All these benefits came from sitting down, taking the time to empathetically connect, collaborate with another colleague who was feeling like there was no where left to go. We did not have the answers when we started our conversation, and the strategies that we came up with together do not meet all the needs of every student. What did happen, was that I felt I had someone on my team, that I was part of someone else’s team, and that I had someone to turn to when those yellow flags of burnout rear their ugly heads.

**Resiliency Factor: Mentoring and Role Modelling**

“Ultimately, the effective mentor nurtures and acts as a role model who reflects the five mentoring functions: teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counselling, and befriending” (Schlichte, Yssel, Merbler, 2005, p. 36).
In all the literature that I read mentoring is mentioned in almost all of them in some capacity. Making significant relationships within the school building with our peers leads to a sense of connectedness and community. From pre-service instruction to seasoned teachers, everyone needs to talk with someone, to feel like there is a cone of silence where they are safe to talk about their feelings and have someone listen empathetically. Mentoring has been a key factor in mitigating burnout, it reduces feelings of isolation, and alienation. Whether the teacher is officially mentoring you, or if they are just a teacher to look up to because their pedagogy is align with yours, an effective role model or mentor must “exude encouragement, empathy, and compassion” (Schlichte, Yssel, Merbler, 2005, p. 36).

I have had many teachers and colleagues that I have looked up to but no-one that I would consider a mentor. I take bits and pieces from everyone. Everyone that I have worked with has taught me something, given me insight, encouragement, and a sense of community. The problem is that I have to be willing to get close to others. I have to be openminded and be collegial in order to expect it. I have to stop turning down invitations. I need to interact socially in the lunch room instead of always on a work mission. I have to take the time to make trusted friends within my profession so that I always have like minded people who can understand the depths of what we do.

During this synthesis I discovered my need for mentorship. I also realized that this study created that self efficacy, awareness, and the ability to recognize the signs of potential burnout in others. Although I struggle with seeing myself as a mentor for my peers and colleagues, I recognize that because I am walking in resilience, I am actually modelling behaviours to others that could help them with their own path of resilience. I am ready to offer support to others when they need it. I in turn have the ability now to offer space to listen, support, and encourage others when they are feeling the affects of ineffectiveness, isolation, and low efficacy.

Resiliency Factor: Currere and Ongoing Reflection

“Within the curriculum field, autobiographical reflection goes to the heart of praxis and is at the centre of the phenomenological method of currere that focuses on the educational experience
of the individual as reported by the individual” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Tauban as cited in Kransky, 2006, p. 9).

I bring with me a very biased view of society. A society that I never felt like I fit into. I identify with the shadows, the outskirts of mainstream, I feel comfortable in trepidation. I know that I am living a “well rounded” productive, societal acceptable life (for the most part). I know I fit into the “box” of successful. I have a home, I own my vehicle, I pay my bills and am respectful of the law. I have a good job where I make a difference, I earn enough money to feel comfortable providing for myself throughout the course of my divorce. But that’s not always how I feel inside. That is not always who I see when I look in the mirror.

When I go to work, I try to put on this face of “I know what I am doing, I am professional, I am “that” type of adult”… My intentions are always to have boundaries, maintain a filter and subscribe to the image that a special education teacher should conduct themselves with.

Sometimes I feel exhilarated. I feel like I am making a difference, that I am opening up minds to explore and make decisions and opinions on their own. I feel as if I am exactly where I am supposed to be. Then another day hits and I am burdened with the reality of my job. The pressures, the personalities, the principles, the autonomy of others, the red tape, the bureaucracy and expectations, that all fill me with dread, hopelessness, uselessness, and anxiety. These are the things that make me want to leave the profession. These are the thoughts I take home with me at night. When I feel as if I am fighting the entire system, my colleagues, the ministry, my burnout hits and I do not want to face it, I do not want to face the students and tell them there is nothing I can do: I am sorry.

I take a phenomenological stance of my situation, my writings, my reflection. I look at the questions that started this process: Given the internal tension of my history of trauma and my professional identity, how has my past and my perceived future impacted my present teaching practice? How will following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my
adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience? I turn my reflections into praxis. I sit here feeling. Feeling conflicting emotions, fighting against an innate desire for a monolithic answer. My history of trauma holds experiences that force me today to strive for acceptance. This dichotomy of emotions are honest and real. The synthesis of currere has enabled me to recognize that my adverse past and the feelings that still inhabit my core do not need to keep me in a state of fear. My defence mechanism of control is futile. I cannot control my feelings, I cannot control the fear. I am safe. I can keep myself safe. I can reach out to those supportive people in my life that help to heal me through external encouragement. I build my resilience each time I reflect how far I have come, how well I am doing, and that I am able to efficaciously move forward.

*Is all this writing and reflecting and remembering and witnessing about my own resilience? How can this be applied to curriculum? What is the meaning of resilience? How is understanding my own resilience important for my teaching practice? How is this going to be valuable? I know that it is important for me to better understand myself and my journey through education and in turn that will better enable me to create curriculum for students and help them in their own path.*

*I am able to give that love and encouragement and empathy without draining all of it from myself. I often get the recognition I need, the encouragement from my superiors or others I look up to. I can say to myself, this is normal, natural, just feel it, walk through it, move on, carry on, be great for kids. I am not lost.*

*I saw this line today on some sort of social media: Those people who are successful are the ones that do the things that unsuccessful people refuse to do, so instead of wishing things were easier, wish that you were better.*

*This made me think about how is it that I am successful? Am I successful? What will keep me successful? Weekly I have my students write a success reflection. The questions they*
answer are about how they are successful and the steps they take to get there. I ask them to apply those steps to things they are not successful with and see how it changes for them and then reflect back to me. I see them gaining confidence.

I am successful because I do the things that others refuse to do. I am resilient because I chose to be honest. I am successful because I choose to be honest. I am resilient because I choose to go forward and I continue to wish that I am better. I am a better person when I am in a classroom. I know where I am. I know who I am. This is me, this is me successful, professional, making a difference. This is me, and, this is the curriculum I deliver. A curriculum of resilience.

My research questions asks: How will following the methodology of currere enable me to synthesize my adverse past and projected future into a meaningful narrative that will offer an insight into the culture of new teacher burnout and promote resilience? Currere is a reflective process. Webb (2015) describes currere as “an intentional autobiographic reflective process for uncovering and understanding the crafting of my professional identity and practices as an educator” (p. 4). The benefits have improved my ability to know myself, to understand who I am, contributed to my understanding of my own pedagogy, enabled me to construct new ways of teaching, it has improved my instruction and my ability to engage with my students and my colleagues. The insight that I have generated is the paradox that my narrative leaves me vulnerable, and gives me the strength I need to be resilient. My narrative reveals tensions, dichotomies, that internally have both modulated and negated my self efficacy. The process of currere has provided me with the courage, ability, and capacity to use my adverse history to my advantage: To be able to confront my challenges, my trauma, and to provide space for healing, acknowledgment, and self-confidence. I have the ability to advocate for myself, to search out connections among my colleagues, and to open myself up to be supported and to be supportive of others. My past has accumulated into the present being that I reveal everyday into my classroom. My narrative here adds to my daily revelations of how I have been impacted.
by adverse situations and how I have found the capacity through resiliency factors to move through those events a stronger, healthier person.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The Future Projected

In order to understand the vast change that has progressed over the years, and the last few months regarding what my possible future could look like, we have to go back (yet again). When I was a teenager I did not expect that any successful future was in the cards for me. I seemed to have defined success at that time as having a house with a white picket fence, two cars, being married and having kids. I never thought of a job at that time, or a career. I presume, I assumed I would be a minimum wage worker forever. I wanted more, but, I never thought that more was possible for me. In my early twenties I wanted to be everything from a lawyer to a working artist making sculptures for corporations. I wanted to be a construction worker, a scientist, a stock broker, a professional dancer. In my twenties was when the world seemed to open up and because I had finally found some grounding, stability and some genuine loving support, I began to think that I was worthy of a different type future. When I was 28 I got married to a man (yes mentioning this is important because I had never before my twenties pictured a future where I was in a hetero relationship). Getting married changed me in many ways. I learned a lot about myself: My weaknesses, my vulnerabilities, how I can change without noticing into someone I am not, that I need structure and some stability, that I needed a future where I could retire comfortably, that the idea of being “taken care of” despises me, that I am not as patient, compassionate, or “chill” as I would like to be. My marriage also taught me that “planning” a future is futile. A set, predicted future for me is something that is unattainable. I am changing, healing, growing, exploring so quickly and often that planning a far fetched future based on the present is useless. What I mean by this is that I do not know what my future looks like. I do not know what the future of the world looks like and where I fit into it. I certainly do not know where the future of education is going or how I will be part of it.

I do know that there are some things I would like to accomplish: Being more patient, kind, understanding, and less serious. I would like to become; a better climber, a kayaker, a pianist, a published novelist, a builder of my own sustainable off grid tiny home, a sewer of my
own clothes, a provider of my own food, an identifier of wild plants, a mushroom picker, a nutritionist, a swimmer, a surfer, a yoga practicer; the list is endless it seems for me. I would like to let go of some patterns of thinking and behaviour: The desire for instant gratification, acting on impulse, obsession out of the fear of being alone, being hasty, the notion of not being good enough, restlessness, prideful self confidence, the feeling of justified anger. I am certain this list could go on as well but, is probably not as healthy. All of these things above I am fully certain will happen for me over time and with vigilance and by fostering the resilience I have gleaned from this study. What I want to talk about are the things I am less certain of that pertain to education, and my place within it.

Every year I think to myself and sometimes, say out loud to others that I will never teach again. That, teaching is not for me, there is no place in public education for me, I do not believe in our education system…how can I do something I do not believe in? Every year I reapply to a teaching job of some sort. The truth is, I do not know if teaching is for me or if there is a place within education for me. The truth is I think this way when I am tired, when I am wading out deeper into the tide, staring the wave of burnout in the face. Again, burnout is washing towards me. When I am surfing that wave of defeat, exhaustion, and hopelessness, I declare that teaching is not worth it. Teaching in those moments are vast, cold, powerful, torrents that have no end except to be drowned and washed to shore. The settings of high stress, high demands in the work environments and the classrooms are factors in the high cost to resiliency. The main setting of high stress that adds to my burnout is not recognizing a place in the future of education where I can maintain my vibrancy in the current system, where more and more students “fall through the cracks”, the content is archaic and not relevant, and we are stuck waiting for ministry, buildings, and teachers to catch up with the velocity of our ever changing and unknown present. When this rise of low self efficacy, low self confidence in my own ability to exert control over my own motivation is the main reason for low resilience. Ineffectiveness is a huge contributor to those waves of disbelief in my capacity. Schichte, Yssel and Merbler (2010) say that emotional support is perceived as very important to special educators in order
to maintain self efficacy and to avoid burnout. Can I provide myself with enough emotional support to foster my resiliency? Is hope intrinsic? This study has shown that external support in the form of modelling and mentoring, collegial support are the main factors in building resilience and preventing burnout. If I am to have a place in education I must reach out and genuinely make connections with my peers. I need to discuss my feelings, listen to others share their feelings and identify with them that we are not alone, that we are making a difference together.

I want to be Doctor. That is, I want to get my doctorate so that people will have to call me Dr. Heiman. One, because that is funny as all hell, and two, it brings with it accomplishment, it is like a big fuck you to all those people who never thought I would amount to anything but dumpster trash. It is an “I told you so” when I am feeling particularly resentful and hurt by those who did not believe in me for whatever reason; they could not, they did not know how, they did not have time, they did not know any better themselves. I want to get my doctorate because I love learning. Learning is something that I am good at. I am good at it I think because I am curious, I am not afraid to fail, I like getting better, I feel satisfied when I can explain things for myself instead of taking for granted or at face value what others have to say. I like learning because it gives me a feeling that I do not often get from elsewhere: Pride. I am proud that I am a good student. I am proud when I understand concepts that I did not know before and I can apply them to new situations. I like learning because it gives me a freedom. A freedom to change, to know that I am not stuck in who I am or the position I am in. I am free to choose, because without learning about new choices, or changes, I can not choose them. I want to make changes within myself. I want to make changes within education; within in policy, approach to curriculum, within the high school amongst staff and students, and within my classroom. I want to provide the options, choices and paths for students so that they can know that there may a different way for them, and that is ok. I want students to know that there is NEVER just one way to do anything, that one way is no more right or wrong than the other way.
I want students to know that nothing is permanent and anything is attainable— if— you have passion about it, if you are encouraged, if you work hard enough, if you want it bad enough, anything can be changed. I change when the pain of being who I am and where I am is greater than the fear of changing. I overcome obstacles when I am angry. I want my future to be one of peace. I want to be passionate without anger. I want to have drive for the pleasure of it instead of the anger that pushes me forward. I want to show students, teachers, admin, that change is possible, I want to show them what change looks like. I do not want to give them a program or approach. I want to give them hope. Hope, that they too can change because they options and that anything is possible with the right support. I want to create a way to share support— what ever that looks like. Everyone needs support. That’s it: Support. Support, encouragement, desire. Is resilience that simple?

Resilience it seems is something that can be learned, fostered, and grown. By creating communicative, open, and supportive environments where teachers can leave their silos and join each other in open discourse and sharing the true nature that is teaching, we can, together build our own resilience. Knowing that we are not alone, that we are making a difference and be told as much, helps us to build confidence in our identities as teachers. My internal tension carried with me creates dialogue within my mind:

There is a voice in my head that is screaming “Do it, please, you can do it”. It is partially pleading and partially yelling, demanding, enforcing that I move forward. Just one more step that voice says, one more step, one more step. I can do one step. If nothing else, I can do one more step. If one more step is the best I can do, it is as far as I can go, then perfect, then I found exactly where I need to be. I can be grateful for taking as many steps as I possibly could. I can feel proud that I took just one more step, that I got further than I thought was possible. My best, my last step may not get me a PHD. It may not have been enough steps to get to that outcome. It will be enough however, to know that I put forth as much effort as I could. It will be enough to know that I have learned, grown, healed and moved past my fear. Trying is enough.
We can not all be doctors they said… and, they were right. But when I say we can not all be doctors my tone does not present as degrading, pretentious, defeating, pity etc. I say that we can’t all be doctors, because frankly, we don’t need everyone to be doctors. What we do need is for everyone to keep making one more wheel rotation, we need everyone to keep trying to their best and to be happy with whatever their best looks like. We need people to keep moving forward past their fears, sharing their successes and what those successes look like. We need people to celebrate their journey instead of comparing themselves to some constructed product of false acceptance.

My narrative reconciles those internal conversations. My resilience changes my mindset. My perceived future is ever changing, but when fully aware of how my resilience is working in my life, that future is positive. When living in burnout, the future is grim and the present is unbearable. When inspired, supported, encouraged, and resiliency factors are put into praxis, the future holds all possibilities.

Significance of study

This study provides a single voice within curriculum to provide a better understanding of teacher burnout and resilience. Through the method of currere I have written a perspective that ties the current literature with first hand accounts and analysis of the process of burnout and the fostering of resilience. Through my subjective voice and my objective synthesis, I deliver a study that will resonate with a vast array of educational professionals. Factors of both burnout and resilience have been identified using story linked with theory. My research questions have been fully investigated, analyzed and synthesized to reveal that my history of trauma, the tension I hold, the themes that intermittently resurface, and the knowledge that I have created all provide one more step, avenue, and resource for those teachers entering the profession, who are in the profession, and those who feel like they want to leave profession. This study is a resource for the promotion of resilience. My study provides a precedent for research that proves the value of praxis, currere, reflection, and synthesis of experiences in order to make significant transformations in one’s professional identity and practice.
Preservice education providers, novice teachers, administration, professional development organizers, teachers, students, and parents will hopefully benefit from this study. Burnout is a very real symptom of a greater problem within the system and our culture. We need to foster resilience for ourselves and each other. My hope is that by being vulnerable, sharing my story, I have opened up another avenue for discussion within curriculum that addresses the emotional needs of teachers and helps to mitigate burnout by providing one voice sharing the journey of resilience.
References


factors, Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, 8:4, 244-256, DOI:
10.1080/1754730X.2015.1080123

jcacs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jcacs/article/view/16867/15673


Routledge.

reduce burnout and improve retention of special educators. Exceptional Children, 62(4)
336-355

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.). (2013). American Psychiatric
Association.

Teacher Education, 7(5/6), 513-535

Hamama, L., Ronen, T., Shachar, K., Rosenbaum, M. (2012). Lines between stress, positive and
negative affect, and life satisfaction among teachers in special education schools. J
Happiness Stud, 14:731-751. DOI: 10.1007/s10902-012-9352-4

Hong, J. Y. (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay?
Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. Teachers and Teaching,


