Caught In The Middle

(Re)constructing Beginning Teachers’ Identities

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A report of an investigation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This research investigates how beginning teachers (re)construct their teacher identities in the first year of teaching. The emphasis is on the various ways in which beginning teachers negotiate their new school contexts, with their norms and discursive practices, and the complex interplay between the contradictory discourses, beliefs and values arising from their own past experiences of schooling. Central to the thesis is the argument that, by illuminating the personal struggles of beginning teachers as they engage in the cultural negotiation of their teacher identities, we can be better placed to develop strategies to help teachers negotiate their first year of teaching.

Drawing on the tradition of critical ethnography, five beginning teachers in Western Australia were interviewed longitudinally over the first year of their teaching to gain a better understanding of their experience and the discursive practices that influenced the (re)construction of their teacher identities. This research shows, through narrative storytelling, the way teacher identity is shaped by a range of contextual, relational and autobiographical influences.

The research revealed that teacher identity (re)construction is a complex and contested process highly dependent on the contextual and relational dimensions of the first year of teaching. The research also revealed that beginning teachers actively negotiate norms and practices associated with classroom interactions with students in the school context. Thus, beginning teachers continually (re)construct their identities in relation to school context as well as to professional and student expectations.

Further, past formative experiences of schooling play a significant role in influencing teacher identity (re)construction. The beginning teachers in this study re-framed their
past experiences of being students in their current roles as teachers. There is a transaction between past and present experiences as beginning teachers work out the best ways to deal with their students.

Finally, the distinctive contribution of this study is that it reveals the significant role that beginning teachers’ relationships with their students play in teacher identity construction. Importantly, the research found that beginning teachers’ identities were created in part as a result of the relationships they have with students, and in discovering the kinds of teachers they want to become with their students.
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iii
Contents ................................................................................................................................. v
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................... viii
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... ix

1 CHAPTER ONE ............................................................................................................ 1
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
1.1 Context - Teacher Attrition ................................................................................ 4
1.2 Research Problem ................................................................................................. 10
1.3 Research Questions ............................................................................................... 12
1.4 Significance of the Research ............................................................................... 13
1.5 Thesis Structure and Overview ........................................................................... 14

2 CHAPTER TWO ...................................................................................................... 18
THE CHANGING NATURE OF TEACHERS’ WORK AND IDENTITY ........... 18
2.1 Public Policy Context ............................................................................................ 20
  2.1.1 Neo-liberal Agenda for Schooling ............................................................... 21
2.2 What Is Happening to Teachers’ Work? ............................................................... 32
  2.2.1 What Are the Implications of These Changes to Teachers’ Work and
       School Contexts for Beginning Teachers? ..................................................... 41
  2.2.2 Beginning Teachers’ Experiences ................................................................. 44
  2.2.2.1 Emotional response in the first year .......................................................... 45
  2.2.2.2 Reality shock .............................................................................................. 46
  2.2.2.3 Induction, support and learning ................................................................. 49
2.3 Beginning Teachers’ Identity ............................................................................... 54
  2.3.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 54
  2.3.2 Limitations of Developmental Approaches to Teacher Identity .............. 56
  2.3.3 Discursive (Re)construction of Teacher Identity .................................. 59
  2.3.4 Studies on Beginning Teachers’ Identity .................................................. 67
2.4 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 76

3 CHAPTER THREE .................................................................................................. 78
CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY ......................................................................................... 78
3.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 79
3.2 Reflexive Awareness of My Position As a Researcher .................................. 80
3.3 Critical Ethnography ......................................................................................... 86
  3.3.1 Definition of Critical Ethnography ............................................................ 88
  3.3.2 Features ....................................................................................................... 90
3.4 Undertaking Critical Ethnography ................................................................... 95
  3.4.1 Choosing and Engaging Research Participants ......................................... 96
  3.4.2 Purposeful Conversations — An Informal Kind of Interview ................. 99
  3.4.3 Data Validity and Trustworthiness .............................................................. 109
  3.4.4 Ethical Responsibilities ............................................................................... 114
  3.4.5 Making Sense of the Conversations ........................................................... 115

4 CHAPTER FOUR ...................................................................................................... 118
NARRATIVE PORTRAITS ...................................................................................... 118
4.1 Introducing Teachers and Their Schools ..................................................... 119
   4.1.1 Lok and Olivewood Senior High School .................................................. 120
   4.1.2 Lee and Forrestville Senior High School ................................................. 123
   4.1.3 Jemma and Bold Edge Community College ........................................... 127
   4.1.4 Cliff and Lifton Senior High School ........................................................ 130
   4.1.5 Bella and Ivy College ............................................................................... 133
4.1.6 Summary ................................................................................................... 135
4.2 Brief Description of Emergent Themes ....................................................... 136

5 CHAPTER FIVE ................................................................................................. 138
NEGOTIATING TEACHER IDENTITY IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT:
THE STRUGGLE FOR INSTITUTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL
ACCEPTANCE ........................................................................................................ 138
5.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 139
5.2 Influence of School Culture on Teacher Identity (Re)construction ............ 141
   5.2.1 Story 1: The Struggle for Social Justice—Lok’s Story ......................... 145
   5.2.2 Story 2: Deficit Views of Students’ Capabilities—Lee’s Story ............... 155
5.3 Influence of Professional Expectations on Beginning Teachers’ Identity
(Re)construction ................................................................................................. 163
   5.3.1 Story 3: Managing Students’ Expectations—Jemma’s Story ................. 164
   5.3.2 Story 4: Addressing Teacher Expectations—Lee’s Story .................... 168
   5.3.3 Story 5: Addressing Teacher Expectations—Jemma’s Story ................. 171
   5.3.4 Story 6: Managing Parent Expectations—Bella’s Story ....................... 175
5.4 Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 182

6 CHAPTER SIX .................................................................................................. 187
PRIOR SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES, CURRENT EXPERIENCES AND
THE COMPLEXITY OF TEACHING .................................................................... 187
6.1 Introduction .................................................................................................... 188
6.2 Influence of Prior Schooling Experience on Teacher Identity ................... 190
   6.2.1 Story 7: Lived Experience Becomes Lived Practice—Bella’s Story ....... 192
   6.2.2 Story 8: Using Lived Experience to Negotiate Opposing Discursive
       Practices—Lee’s Story ............................................................................... 196
   6.2.3 Story 9: Using Lived Experience to Stand Against Negative
       Stereotypes of Students—Cliff’s Story ...................................................... 198
   6.2.4 Story 10: Learning to Teach from Observing Parents’ Lived
       Experiences—Lok’s Story ....................................................................... 201
   6.2.5 Story 11: Living the Imagined Teacher—Jemma’s Story ..................... 203
   6.2.6 Summary ................................................................................................ 207
6.3 Influence of the Continuing Experience of Teaching on Teacher
Identity (Re)construction .................................................................................. 210
   6.3.1 Story 12: Streaming Students According to Their Abilities—Jemma’s
       Story .......................................................................................................... 210
   6.3.2 Story 13: Living with Contradictory Realities—Lok’s Story ................... 215
   6.3.3 Story 14: Checking Out the Roots of Students’ Behaviour—Cliff’s
       Story .......................................................................................................... 220
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Summary of Participants’ Teaching Contexts ............................................ 99
Table 6.1: Types of Relationships with Students That (Re)construct Teacher Identity ...................................................................................................... 288
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Few experiences in life have such a tremendous impact on the personal and professional life of a teacher as does the first year of teaching.

Gold (1996, p. 548)
In this thesis, I examine how five beginning teachers in Western Australia (WA) (re)construct their teacher identity in their first year of teaching. It is an inquiry into how beginning teachers constitute and reconstitute their identities, and develop their professional practices in relation to their school contexts, prior experiences and relationships with students. Their struggles, tensions, values and motivations for teaching are examined as they negotiate various institutionalised practices and the changing micro-political contexts of their respective schools. Although there is a high attrition rate among beginning teachers, the focus of this research is how beginning teachers (re)construct their teacher identities in their first year of teaching. In this thesis, I discuss the concept of teacher identity (re)construction as an ongoing, contested, contextual, discursive and relational process. This perspective suggests teacher identity is in a constant state of change and shift in relation to others within a context. This introductory chapter presents a contextual background to this study, the research problem and research questions, and outlines the significance and structure of this thesis.

Learning to teach in the first year is a very complex process (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). It involves adopting and enacting a new identity. It also involves negotiating relationships with students, the school context and the discursive practices embedded in the context. Several studies have shown that some of the problems beginning teachers have are related to contextual factors in their schools (Gold, 1996; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Indeed, the school context is constantly being shaped and reshaped by policy changes and political influences (Owen, Kos & McKenzie, 2008). These influences dictate what is deemed relevant and non-relevant within schools and are entrenched in the school culture because accountability and
benchmark structures attached to school contexts lead to the re-analysis of beginning teachers’ thinking and practices. These influences are crucial in shaping new teachers’ professional behaviour (Flores, 2001, p. 140). As mentioned by Bullough and Gitlin, part of the challenge for beginning teachers is to ‘examine and perhaps reconstruct institutionally preferred roles in the quest for a place within the school that is ethically defensible, morally and politically responsible, and personally satisfying’ (2001, p. 12).

Ensuring a high quality experience in the first year of teaching is very important for building a strong foundation for a teaching career. It is even more important for beginning teachers to build a positive and satisfying identity in the first year of teaching, as this is the critical point when teacher identity is formed and reformed (Gold, 1996).

Although there has been much research on student identities in relation to their teachers, research on how the school context influences beginning teachers’ identities, and how beginning teachers’ identities are constructed in relation to students, is limited (Reeves, 2009). This leaves ‘teachers’ own identity unexamined or treated only superficially’ (Reeves, 2009, p. 35). Reeves’ research on teacher identity (re)construction focused on how one teacher constructed his teacher identity in relation to English language learners in his classroom. Drawing from Reeves’ research, part of this current study is to understand the role of relationships with students in beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction, and to understand in particular how beginning teachers negotiate conflicting subject positions and professional expectations while creating a teacher identity (Alsup, 2006). Teacher
identity (re)construction involves an interaction of different discourses, such as the grand narratives of education (McLaren, 1995), as well as the social, cultural and personal discourse that shape the identities of beginning teachers.

1.1 Context - Teacher Attrition

Currently, teacher attrition has been identified internationally as one of the major challenges in education. A national study of teacher turnover in the United States (US) by Ingersoll and Perda (2012) showed that beginning teachers have high attrition rates, with 40 to 50 per cent of beginning teachers leaving in the first five years of entry into the profession. Other studies have reported that 14 per cent of beginning teachers leave by the end of their first year and 33 per cent leave within three years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004, p.2). Similar trends have been reported in England, where 40 per cent of those who start a teacher education course fail to become teachers, while a further 40 per cent of those who complete teacher education leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2004; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Smithers & Robinson, 2003).

Similarly, in Australia, studies have provided evidence that early attrition rates of beginning teachers are high (Canavan, 2004; DEST, 2003; Quartz, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Watt & Richardson, 2011). According to the 2007 ‘Top of the Class’ report on teacher education in Australia, 40 per cent of beginning teachers resign within the first five years. Watt and Richardson’s (2011) longitudinal study of 1,650 teachers from the start of their university education in 2002 showed that 27 per cent of that group planned to leave in the next five years. Another study by the Australian
Education Union (AEU, 2006, 2008) surveyed 1,700 beginning teachers and found that nearly half (47.9 per cent) did not see themselves teaching 10 years from the time of study. Specifically, the WA Department of Education and Training’s report on workforce profile showed that 35 per cent of beginning teachers leave in their first two years and 50 per cent in their first five years (Department of Education and Training, 2006, p. 12).

While there is no national consensus on the exact number and details of beginning teachers leaving the profession (Productivity Commission, 2012), statistics from these studies draw attention to the need to focus on the experiences of beginning teachers in their first years of teaching. Specifically, data from these studies show that the high attrition rates of beginning teachers are inextricably linked to the negative experiences they have in their first year (House of Representatives, 2007). There is a need, therefore, to hear what beginning teachers are saying about their experiences, in order to better understand what is happening and what can be done to help.

Before proceeding, it is important to discuss the wider effect of the high attrition rate of beginning teachers on education as a whole, as this contributes to the teacher shortage experienced in Australia (AEU, 2009a). According to the AEU (2009a), there is a strong link between high rates of beginning teachers’ attrition and general teacher shortages. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2003) acknowledged teacher shortages in Australia and predicted continued teacher shortages until beyond 2012. In WA, a report by the Department of Education on teacher supply and demand projection predicted that ‘teacher shortages will increase beyond 2011, primarily due to a projected increase in
retirements based on recent exit patterns of older teachers projected against the current age profile’ (Department of Education and Training, 2008, p. 3). The Twomey Report also revealed that the WA public education system has struggled to fill teacher vacancies in recent years (Education Workforce Initiative [EWI], 2007). According to the report, there were over 200 teacher vacancies at the commencement of the school year in 2007.

There is also concern about the ageing population of teachers in WA (DET, 2008; EWI, 2007; MCEETYA, 2003; Productivity Commission, 2012). According to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s report on educational reform in WA, ‘the number of baby boomers retiring from the teaching profession is set to continue to increase’, partly due to a boom in mining activities in WA (2009, p. 14). It was projected that about 30 per cent of the workforce would retire in the five years between 2008 and 2013, with 45 per cent of the teachers in WA over the age of 45, and 26 per cent between the ages of 55 and 59 (Department of Education and Training, 2008). These statistics suggest there is immense pressure on the education system and its capacity to deliver quality education. Several factors contribute to this, such as low remuneration, lack of sufficient preparation of teachers (especially for those teachers who come through fast track alternative routes), work intensification and overload, large class sizes, lack of recognition, and non-involvement of teachers in developing professional policies and standards related to their practice (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003; Donnelly, 2004; Education Workforce Initiative, 2007; Fetherston & Lummis, 2012; Zammit et al., 2007; WA College of Teaching [WACOT], N.D).
While these factors reinforce the difficulties of retaining currently employed teachers, their effect on attracting new teachers cannot be underestimated. The difficulty in attracting new teachers has been identified as a major issue in WA (DET 2008; Lane, 2008; Fetherston & Lummis, 2012). There has been a marked decline in the number of teacher education applications in the state (Lane, 2008). According to the Department of Education and Training, WA (2008), the number of applications for education courses as first preference significantly reduced from 4,706 in 2003/04 to 2,646 students in 2007/08. This significantly affects the number of teacher graduates available to teach.

The high levels of teacher attrition within the first few years of teaching add to the enormous challenges that novice teachers face as they commence their professional teaching career (Preston, 2000). Due to teacher shortages, there have been systemic changes, such as teachers being assigned to teach subjects in which they have not been trained. Fast track alternatives and more funding programs have been provided to encourage entry into the teaching profession (Department of Education Services, 2006; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2005; Preston, 2000). Nevertheless, teacher shortages pose a threat to the delivery of quality education and provision of education opportunities to all students.

Major educational policies that have increased accountability may have contributed to the exodus from the profession. For example, in research conducted by Blackmore (2004), teacher shortages were found to be linked to mandated policies that created market-driven accountability and a growing managerial school culture in Victoria. Here, the pressure to successfully market schools created a change in focus from
teaching to the adoption of economically driven measures that devalued how teachers felt and increased the attrition rate.

Similarly, a submission by WACOT to the Taskforce for Education Workplace Initiative (2007) identified that the shortage of teachers in WA was linked to various changes in educational policies, in conjunction with other complex factors such as ‘changing demographics, a resource-led economic boom and the changing nature of teaching and learning’ (2007, p. 54). While recruitment and retention of teachers is a major problem in WA, changing educational policies and initiatives, such as the implementation of, and then withdrawal of, Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and an increase in standardised testing have also contributed to attrition (Fetherston & Lummis, 2012).

Changing educational policies create a further need to understand and help beginning teachers have a successful entry into the profession and, as a result, continue teaching. According to the 2007 ‘Top of the Class’ report in Australia, beginning teachers reported that they were unprepared for teaching and had inadequate support structures for their entry into the teaching profession. An analysis of this report suggested that the causative factors of beginning teachers’ attrition were ‘inadequacies in either the quality of initial teacher preparation or in the level of support provided to beginning teachers’ (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007, p. xxi). Research has also suggested that the experience of beginning teachers’ conflicts with their teacher preparation courses and professional practice in the new school context (Toll, Niersteimer, Lenski & Kolloff, 2004).
Beginning teachers often struggle with their own expectations and the stark realities of the expectations of schools, co-teachers and students (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Beginning teachers’ expectations are mostly developed from preconceived notions of their professional practice, which may be realistic or unrealistic. Hammerness (2003) explained that beginning teachers have visions of their professional practice that are often implicit and not articulated by teachers. When beginning teachers move into their workplaces, they discover a big gap between their vision, which is mostly idealistic, and their real practice. The struggle between aligning their current practice with their vision often leads to frustration that, when unattended to, may lead to new teachers leaving the profession and an increased burnout rate (Black, 2004; Goddard & O’ Brien, 2004; Hammerness, 2003). Thus, the recurring problems of recruitment and attrition of beginning teachers have been identified as major challenges in education. Moving from the role of a student to the role of a teacher is a struggle for beginning teachers who have been students for decades (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Grossman, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Kagan, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Reynolds, 1992). The transition from learning to teach, to the actual practice of teaching, is a huge step for most beginning teachers (Herrington, Herrington, Kervin & Ferry, 2006; Paris, 2010). Whether there is a link between teacher attrition and teacher identity has not been established. The literature about teacher attrition and identity is very sparse (Hong, 2010). In trying to understand the relationship between teacher attrition and teacher identity, Hong (2010) argued that most studies have discussed the problems of attrition on the basis of demographic characteristics and the school context; however, this does not seem to fully explain why beginning teachers leave the system. Teachers could be exiting the system because they are unable to create teacher identities that fit
Chapter One

into the school context in which they find themselves. Indeed, Alsup (2006) argued that pre-service teachers leave teacher education courses because they cannot develop a satisfying teacher identity. Some of the teachers in her study who were not able to engage in ‘borderland discourse’—an integration of personal pedagogy and professional identities—left teaching. Alsup (2006) established the idea that if teachers are unable to build a teacher identity that is satisfying—that is, an identity that integrates their personal and professional identities—they are likely to leave the system. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how beginning teachers (re)construct teacher identities that are congruent with their personal beliefs about teaching and learning.

1.2 Research Problem

Until fairly recently, studies of beginning teachers, mostly originating in the US, have focused on discussing and describing beginning teachers’ survival rate, the generic problems beginning teachers face, and the provision of mentoring and induction programs, without a critical understanding of how beginning teachers’ identity is formed through the challenges and struggles they face (Cherubini, 2009; Black, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Gold, 1996; Hammerness 2003; Huberman, 1992). Some researchers (e.g., Huberman, 1992) have discussed the emotions attached to teachers’ early careers through metaphors such as the ‘shattered images’ of teaching (Cole & Knowles, 1993), the experience of ‘reality shock’ (Reynolds, 1992) and having to ‘sink or swim’ (Ingersoll & Perda, 2012). The focus has been on documenting the problems of beginning teachers, with little attention given to possibilities for restructuring or reculturing schools to address these problems. What has received much recent attention is how beginning teachers survive
Chapter One

the challenges and ordeals of starting to teach and learning to engage successfully in a new environment. According to Cherubini, ‘new teachers experience many of the same initial concerns that have been documented about beginning teachers for over 35 years’ (2009, p. 83). Cherubini questioned why beginning teachers are surrounded with these constant issues, and suggested that the problem may not be the beginning teachers, but the structures in which the beginning teachers work.

While these research studies have provided useful information regarding the conditions that beginning teachers engage with, there is still the need for more understanding of how these relate to the identities that beginning teachers construct in the first year. Little is known about the contextual influences surrounding the way teachers negotiate their new school context and their teacher identities in WA. In this study, I present another way of interpreting these problems and challenges by examining the deeper underlying issues that affect beginning teachers’ work. My approach in this research presumes the need to re-focus on how teacher identity is (re)constructed for new teachers instead of focusing on reasons for attrition. This research examines how beginning teachers engage with the different discourses they are exposed to as they negotiate the process of becoming teachers, and aims to secure an understanding of their experiences. This study offers a discursive view of beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction, and supports the notion that identities are formed in relation to these discourse.

The unique point of this research is the exploration of the selves that beginning teachers develop in their first year of teaching, and how these selves change in relation to contextual influences. It focuses in particular on the processes of building a
professional teacher identity that is recognised and accepted by teacher colleagues, students and parents.

1.3 Research Questions

In writing about the process of learning to teach for newly qualified teachers, Alsup focused on ‘what a teacher is and does, what a teacher looks like, and whether the teacher’s body is a normal teacher’s body’ (2006, p. xi). In this thesis, I also aim to understand the beginning teacher’s world by using and examining these concepts in beginning teachers’ narratives. In particular, I aim to show how beginning teachers are caught in the middle of different discourses. In this research, I provide the opportunity for beginning teachers to voice their own stories of becoming teachers in their first year. These stories provide insights into their challenges, struggles and frustrations in identifying with their roles as teachers, building professional identities in their different contexts, and forming the different selves needed to perform their roles as teachers. The questions that are explored in this research are:

1. How do beginning teachers understand, experience and respond to their school contexts as they develop their teacher identities?

1.1 How do discursive structures, practices and professional expectations in schools influence beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction?

1.2 How do prior and continuing experiences of teaching contribute to the identity (re)construction of beginning teachers?

1.3 How do beginning teachers’ relationships with students contribute to their identity (re)construction?
1.4 Significance of the Research

In this research, I explored five beginning teachers’ narratives by focusing in depth on their experiences of teaching in their first year. The findings of this research are not intended to be generalisable, but are meant to have resonance for other teachers and to be useful in influencing school leaders and policy makers in the educational sector. The significance of this research is threefold. First, the original contribution of this field of work comes from relating the findings to the specific context of WA. There is little research on the first-year contextual experiences of teachers working in WA and their identity construction; therefore, this research aims to contribute to this discussion and provide insights into beginning teachers’ experiences as they negotiate their identities.

Second, in many of the research studies discussed earlier, the focus has been on the problems beginning teachers face. This focus conceptualises beginning teachers as problematic. Such studies frame beginning teachers as deficient and unable to confront the normalised practices within the school. The problems of beginning teachers have been well documented. Cherubini (2009) highlighted that beginning teachers are still experiencing these problems. However, this focus only highlighted a single storyline of beginning teachers’ issues. The danger of the single story (Adiche, 2009) is that it creates stereotypes of the stories beginning teachers tell about their first year of teaching. It creates a single narrative of what we expect of them and reiterates a deficit notion of beginning teachers. With this thesis, I intend to disrupt this deficit story from its position as the definitive story of beginning teachers and provide more diverse stories of beginning teachers actively (re)constructing their identities and influencing their contexts. This research offers different perspectives and multiple
narratives of how beginning teachers are \((re)\)constructing their teacher identities, and emphasises that identity construction is ongoing.

Third, this research study contributes to the sparse literature on how relationships with students contribute to beginning teachers’ identity \((re)\)construction. While there is much research on students’ identity in relation to teachers, there is little research on how beginning teachers’ identities are constructed in relation to students (Reeves, 2009, p. 35). Educational research on identity has largely centred on how student identities are constructed and assigned by their teachers (Harklau, 2000; Valdes, 2001). Teachers have been investigated because of their influence on students’ identity \((re)\)construction. For example, there has been much research on how students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been assigned identities such as ‘students-at-risk’, or worse (Miller Marsh, 2002). However, ‘teachers’ own identity has remained unexamined or treated only superficially’ (Reeves, 2009, p. 35). Reeves, whose own research focused on the way a teacher negotiated his own teacher identity by helping his English language learners construct their own identities in his classroom, pointed the way for more research studies in this area. Therefore, part of this study is to understand the role of relationships with students in beginning teachers’ identity \((re)\)construction.

1.5 Thesis Structure and Overview

In this chapter, I have outlined the purpose and rationale for the study. Chapter Two discusses the policy context for the changing nature of teachers’ work and some key problems beginning teachers encounter. It explores the discursive nature of teacher identity by examining the literature in this area.
Chapter One

In Chapter Three, I focus on the methodology employed in this research. I elaborate on the choice of critical ethnography as a preferred methodology to explore the experiences and silences of beginning teachers. I discuss how purposeful conversations (Burgess, 1988) provide a method of gathering information from participants and collecting rich data to create narrative portraits as the basis of analysis.

In Chapter Four, I introduce the beginning teachers that participated in this research and reveal the different school contexts in which they worked, using narrative portraits. The stories and portraits shared in this chapter provide an insight into the lives of the beginning teachers involved in this research before examining and analysing their stories in subsequent chapters. Through the collected stories of participants, a rich picture of how beginning teachers (re)construct their teacher identities is foregrounded for subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five contains the beginning of data analysis and the linking of it to the contextual influences shaping the (re)construction of teacher identity. I examine the discursive practices that beginning teachers negotiate, in particular the influence of school culture, and the implicit and explicit professional expectations of beginning teachers. In the chapter, I explore how beginning teachers challenge some of these discursive practices and expectations, and creatively construct a teacher identity more attuned to their own beliefs and values. I contend that beginning teachers in this research have to confront and negotiate culturally accepted teacher identities and reframe themselves as teachers within that context. This involves understanding contextual demands and deciding whether or not they want to comply with or
challenge these as defining factors of their identities. Thus, the beginning teachers negotiate their identities based on their beliefs about ‘who a teacher is’, ‘what a teacher does’, ‘and how they want to represent themselves as teachers’.

Chapter Six contains the personal-professional narratives of the participants drawn from their prior schooling experiences, their current experiences of teaching and the complexity of teaching. This is used to explore how these factors influence the (re)construction of teacher identity. In this chapter, I illustrate how formative experiences of beginning teachers shape their perspectives of teaching and their beliefs. I also show how the choice of particular pedagogical approaches are influenced by the past and how teachers appropriate, renegotiate and reposition themselves in relation to their present context. In this chapter, I reveal how teacher identities are influenced by previous experiences of schooling, and that these experiences, coupled with continuing enculturation in schools, influence the kinds of teacher identities that are available to, and taken up by, these teachers. Embedded in this chapter is the notion that the (re)construction of teacher identity is a process that starts when beginning teachers are students and continues into their first year of teaching when they have to fit into their new roles as teachers. Within these experiences are stories of hope, expectation and desire.

Chapter Seven examines the role of relationships in shaping teacher identity. The emphasis is on better understanding the processes of identity (re)construction as something that is created and re-created in teachers’ relationships with students. This chapter focuses on how teacher identity is shaped by relationships with individuals in the school environment, but particularly through interactions with students. Again
drawing on teacher narratives I examine the ways in which the beginning teachers negotiate relationships in the process of forming their own teacher identities.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes with my overview of the main implications and recommendations of the study and some questions for future research. I argue that much knowledge about teacher learning can be gathered from examining how teacher identities are constructed, and by exploring the conditions that encourage the (re)construction of certain identities.
2 CHAPTER TWO

THE CHANGING NATURE OF TEACHERS’ WORK AND IDENTITY
This chapter is devoted to reviews of relevant research literature in three major areas that contribute to discussions on the (re)construction of beginning teachers’ identity. In the past few years, the introduction of various policies to schools has seen beginning teachers entering a notably changed profession and schooling environment (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000). In attempting to make sense of how beginning teachers construct their teacher identity, it is important to understand the political context surrounding schools and its influence on teachers’ work. The interactions between teachers and the school context promote certain kinds of identities that in turn reproduce policy discourse represented in the larger public context. It is neither possible nor beneficial to separate school organisations from the broader society (Cummins, 2003; Musgrave 1973; Smyth, Angus, Down & McInerney, 2009). This is because schools have histories and cultures that are influenced by the wider society (Cummins, 2003). Teacher identity (re)construction cannot, therefore, be meaningfully discussed and analysed in isolation from the larger influences of school and public policy contexts.

In this chapter, I first review the broader public policy context and consider what is happening to schools in terms of the neo-liberal agenda for schooling; second, I discuss what is happening to teachers’ work with particular regard to beginning teachers; and third, I examine how teacher identity is constructed and how it contributes to a better understanding of the nature of teachers’ work. These reviews provide a context for rethinking the structural discourse that influences the process of becoming a teacher. Paramount to understanding the process of becoming a teacher is the importance of understanding the context in which teachers’ work is located politically, culturally, socially and historically. For the purpose of this chapter, there is
a particular emphasis on the political influences that affect teachers’ work and on the
challenges teachers face in this context.

2.1 Public Policy Context

In this section, I delve into the broader context in which teachers’ work is located. I
focus on the politics and politicisation of teachers’ work and consider the impact of
the various policy changes in schools. According to Smyth (2001), what is happening
to schools at present reflects Australia’s need to strategically position itself for
economic growth in response to macro-economic demands and globalisation.

In the last two decades, teachers in many countries, including Australia, have been
faced with profound changes in new societal demands on schools. Schools are fast
becoming a playground for policy-making and political and economic decisions,
which is causing a re-examination of the purpose of schooling and its role in society.
This process of allowing globalisation and international forces to reshape the economy
and the educational system suggests a sense of dependence rather than independence,
such that ‘what passes as teaching in schools also exerts a reciprocal shaping influence
on the kind of society in which we live and work’ (Smyth, 2001, p. 34).

The effect of marketisation on the lives and work of teachers and the privatisation of
education have arguably resulted in the erosion and corrosion of true education and
the moral aspects of it (Greene, 1988; Noddings, 2003, 2005; Spring, 1998). Some
teachers have unconsciously adopted business-like activities as part of their roles as
teachers. Principals now have increasing responsibilities for the management of the
educational system and performance (Kenway, 1995; Reid, 1999). Policy makers and
administrators have transformed these demands into regulations and procedures that
have become popular dominant educational policies (Ballet, Kelchtermans & Loughran, 2006). According to Ballet et al. (2006), these educational policies are grounded in a fundamental view of education as a consumable commodity for students and parents, thereby reflecting a market-driven ideology in education.

Empirical research findings in the US, Australia and England have revealed that it has become extremely difficult to segregate economic rationalisation and international marketization from the world of education (Apple, 2001; Ball, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994; Troman & Woods, 2001). Strong evidence has affirmed the influence of economic rationalisation on managing the performance of teachers, so that teachers deliver the standard outputs required to constantly improve a nation’s economy and its international competitiveness (Robertson, 2000). It is, therefore, not surprising governments in most countries, including Australia, ‘have intervened in the governance and curriculum of schools in order to raise standards of teaching, learning and achievement’ (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005, p. 563; Ramsey, 2000).

2.1.1 Neo-liberal Agenda for Schooling

[T]he most powerful economic and political groups in the United States and similar nations have made it abundantly clear that for them a good education is only one that is directly tied to economic needs (but, of course, only as these needs are defined by the powerful). (Apple, 1996, p. 5)

There is little doubt that neo-liberal policies have influenced educational changes in Australia. Australian education, being strongly influenced by economic rationality and market-driven ideology, has responded to globalisation by issuing policies that favour economic growth and productivity rather than genuine education values such as students’ welfare and building learning relationships (Smyth, 2001; Taylor, Rizvi,
Lingard & Henry, 1997; Vidovich, 2002). Overt forces of globalisation, international markets and competitiveness have directly and indirectly influenced the policies and processes in Australian education (Taylor et al., 1997; Welch, 1996). Inherent in these policies are the technically driven business and managerial models that have spawned and directed what goes on in education (Down, 2006). Although these policies are enacted to solve or resolve educational problems within society, they have in turn created new problems (Robertson, 2000). Underlying these educational policies are hidden agendas to serve vested interests, including those of the OECD, federal and state governments, financial and business groups, politicians and public bureaucrats, to the exclusion of the least powerful groups in society (Smyth, 2001).

The interests of educational policy makers have been highly engineered towards economic rationalism, conservation and sustenance of the economic image of the country in the face of degrading educational values (Down, 2009; Down & Hogan, 2000). The Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2009) report on educational reform in WA declared a ‘strong interest in raising the status of the education and training system’ (2009, p. 11) and establishing a fundamental link between the Australian economy and education. In fact, according to this report, ‘the primary purpose of schooling is for students to learn and develop knowledge, skills and values that will equip them to survive and prosper in the global economy of the 21st century’ (CCI, 2009, p. 11). This is consistent with what Robertson called ‘educationally driven economic success’ (2000, p. 187). Smyth (2001) also emphasised that education is being used as a means for improving the nation’s economy. Hence, policies driven by economic values have displaced educational and moral values in schools and the
emphasis has been placed on accountability, efficiency, productivity and performance (Dudley & Vidovich, 1995; Gale & Densmore, 2003; Robertson, 2000).

The OECD, an international organisation governing the education and economic affairs of member states, of which Australia is one, reported in 2004 that performance monitoring is an effective way through which governments can regulate the educational outcomes of schools. It was advocated that to improve the quality of learning, educational policies that effectively monitor the adherence of teachers to educational benchmarks and standards should be enacted. According to the OECD report, ‘formulating educational goals and standards, and monitoring adherence to them, are widely considered to be prerequisites for raising performance levels’ in schools (2004, p. 5).

The previously mentioned 2007 ‘Top of the class’ report on teacher education published by the Australian House of Representatives also emphasised the link between improving teaching standards and quality, and the general welfare of Australian society and its economy. According to the report, ‘teacher education is undeniably important to the social and economic well-being of Australia’ (House of Representatives, 2007, p. vii). Again, education is being explicitly linked to the economic interests of the country. This view is, however, premised on the assumption that improved quality of teacher education is directly related to improved student performance, which eventually leads to a better workforce. The perceived belief that the quality of education provided is directly related to teacher quality is accepted as common sense. However, while teacher quality is an important influence, the educational system is equally as important in influencing students’ performance. In a
similar vein, Appleton, Ginns and Watters argued that the Mayer report on key competencies ‘was based on the premise that the role of general education was for the main purpose of employment’ (2000, p. 22). According to them, this report showed a strong political agenda of transferring government values for defining a sustainable future for a multicultural Australia through educational institutions (p. 22).

The ‘Quality matters: Revitalizing teaching: Critical times, critical choices’ report of the review of teacher education and training in New South Wales by Ramsey also emphasised that ‘the work of teachers was inextricably a core part of the preparation of young people for employment’ and there ‘needed to be an even closer relationship between the workplace and the educational institution’ (2000, p. 23). Secondary and tertiary education is used as an instrument for recruiting the general labour force in Australia. Thus, there is an underlying social agenda of using education to serve economic interests and as a key weapon for improving economic competitiveness in the international world (CCI, 2009; DEST, 2003). The CCI’s report on the current status of educational reform in WA advised that ‘to remain competitive, WA must ensure that its education system continues to produce students that are of the highest calibre in the international arena’ (2009, p. 10).

Down’s (1994) review of WA secondary education revealed the influence of the non-educational values of human capital theory on students’ and teachers’ work, with schools and teachers are put under pressure to prepare and provide transferable skills relevant for the workplace. The Australian secondary school curriculum is being expanded and revamped to include non-traditional subject areas that prepare students for both vocational and tertiary institutions. Hence, there is a growing pressure on
increasing students’ performance, and on training students to be more prepared for the workplace by improving their literacy, numeracy and scientific capabilities.

As a result of neo-liberal ideologies and Australian economic interests, major changes in policy direction have occurred in the last few decades (Appleton et al., 2000; Louden, 2008; Smyth, 2001). Both the federal and state governments in Australia, as in many other Western countries, have enacted policies that have emphasised neo-liberal philosophies and, as a result, have arguably diminished the autonomy and professionalism of teachers. The recentralisation of educational governance, demands for public accountability of teachers and schools, marginalisation of teachers in making educational decisions, and tightened monitoring and assessment of students’ performance through high stakes testing all reflect neo-liberal philosophies with their dominant values of free market principles, economic rationalism and globalisation.

More of these changes in policy directions are enumerated by Smyth et al. (2009):

[T]he goals of education are being set within a narrow frame that subverts the social and aesthetic domains of learning to technical and utilitarian purposes. In an effort to lift national economic goals and global competitiveness, governments have sought to make curricula more responsive to the workplace through an emphasis on basic skills and competencies, entrepreneurialism and vocational education. A business ethos manifest itself in education through the promotion and adoption of corporate managerialist practices such as target setting, audits, mission statements, performance appraisals, and the marketization of schools. Perhaps these new ways of operating are best encapsulated in the idea of a school as a high performance organization incorporating a measure of local autonomy within strict accountability guidelines laid down by central governments. (2009, p. 19)

This critical perspective of the Australian education system is reflected in Ball’s (2008) review of United Kingdom (UK) education and educational policies. Ball’s analysis revealed the global trend of international economic competition, globalisation and free markets as a powerful discourse shaping public education in most western
countries. His analysis of the UK government’s ‘Approach to Public Service Reform’ policy revealed that underlining the new labour movements are principles of top-down performance management, increased efficiency and quality of service through market incentives, with users shaping the service from below (p. 103). Ball argued that education is increasingly being reshaped ‘as a producer of labour and skills and of values, that support entrepreneurship and commercial “knowledge”’ (p. 103).

In advocating for a change in educational policies in the US, Ohanian and Kovacs (2007) suggested there is a crisis within the US educational system. The implementation of the ‘No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB, 2002) educational policy in the US has gathered critical reviews about the main purpose of education and the underlying values presented there and in other associated policy directives and intents. Ohanian and Kovacs (2007) discussed the ineffectiveness of the NCLB policy in providing a morally fair education for all students in the US, pointing out the impracticability of the mission to achieve proficiency in numeracy and literacy for all students by 2014. They argued that ‘what is at stake is not only the status of teaching as a profession but the very future of a generation of children who are being regimented into Stepford automatons’ (Ohanian & Kovacs, 2007, p. 270). What is implicitly present in this policy and its various standards is the inherent economic interests and rewards that education provides for the state, rather than the child’s interests. Similarly, Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder’s (2006) review of the NCLB policy showed that the NCLB’s theoretical basis is flawed and biased. They concluded, ‘there is no date by which all (or even nearly all) students in any subgroup, even middle-class white students, can achieve proficiency. Proficiency for all is an oxymoron’ (2006, p. 1).
All of these arguments suggest the global changing nature and purpose of education, from its social and moral purposes to serving economic interests, which result in a change in values, roles and relationships within the educational environment (Down, 2006; Miller & Norris, 2007). The discursive nature of educational policies is to produce more skilled citizens. The outcomes of adopting a neo-liberal philosophy in Australia may include increased privatisation of public education, recentralisation of curriculum, introduction of new courses, reduced funding to schools, introduction of high stakes testing and school league tables, unhealthy competition among schools and post-compulsory schooling. Further, it may include an unhealthy view of education as a business organisation, with the importation of corporate business practices and language like target setting, significant outcomes and benchmarks. Implicated in these policies and reforms is the instrumentalist view of education and the technicist way of practising education.

Smyth, Down and Mclnerney’s discussion of the public policy context’s influence on schooling in Australia highlighted five major policy directives and changes in the public school system by the Australian government: ‘(i) recentralisation of curriculum; (ii) back to basics - literacy and numeracy; (iii) parental choice; (iv) a discourse of marketization; and (v) citizenship education’ (2008, p. 114). In their discussion, the authors claimed there was an underlying theme connecting these five major policy directives to the focus of the government and policy makers in actively controlling schools and their performances. Distribution of resources has become equally tied to students’ performance, especially now that standardised literacy and numeracy tests - the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests - have been enforced for years’ three, five and seven students in WA.
Chapter Two

Schools in Australia are increasingly being mandated to conform to set targets and goals. Students are expected to demonstrate certain outcomes. Teachers are expected to demonstrate that students demonstrate such outcomes. Achieving these outcomes demonstrates successful delivery on the teachers’ side and also symbolises good management of the syllabus. This can often leave teachers and administrators struggling between the intended meaning of educational outcomes and teachers’ views of what outcomes they want their students to achieve (Smyth, 2001). According to Smyth (2001), achieving educational outcomes - the new public management scheme in education that has produced confusion and uncertainty for teachers as well as students - has streamlined funding to public education, which is overwhelmingly disadvantageous to schools. There is greater demand for performance indicators, performance management and accountability, even with fewer funds available to schools. It could be argued that education is currently being managed remotely with the rubrics of management imported from the corporate world.

As a direct result of the demand and focus on improving the skilled workforce in WA and Australia, there is a need to have more students stay on to years 11 and 12, which has been enforced through the raising of the school leaving age. Dudley and Vidovich (1995) argued that post-compulsory schooling was established by the government to increase the labour force, and to strengthen the link between education and the nation’s economy. Post-compulsory schooling is a way the government has expressed its belief that students should be trained and used to improve the economy (an exchange rationality). The authors opined that politics in education is undeniably real, featuring the domination of primary stakeholders (parents, teachers, students,
administrators) by the voices of outside stakeholders in educational policies. They further argued that there should be balanced involvement of all stakeholders:

> How can young people operate as active citizens if their education is limited to job training? We are strongly of the view that education should be offering young people the ‘life world’ knowledge and skills which are being marginalized by the discourse of utilitarian vocationalism. (Dudley & Vidocich, 1995, pp.173–174)

Improving educational outcomes is considered an important issue and the WA government has implemented a series of changes in improving educational outcomes, such as improving curriculum, restructuring testing, accountability of schools and performance management of teachers. Nevertheless, there is still the question of whether these approaches improve students’ educational outcomes.

In a bid to improve educational outcomes in WA, OBE was embarked upon in 1999. OBE was initially provided up to year 10, along with the New Courses of Study, but an extension of OBE was introduced to years 11 and 12 in WA in 2005 to 2006. Research on this reform showed that the design and implementation of this curriculum change were technically flawed (CCI 2009; Tavner, 2005). The underlying intention and framework of OBE was considerably questioned and challenged by both teachers and students because it was difficult to practice (Eltis, 2003; Hiatt, 2007; Power & Berlach, 2006), and researchers have argued the changes were politically and ideologically motivated (Berlach & McNaught 2007; Blyth, 2002; Donnelly, 2007a).

The key issues surrounding OBE debates, as identified by Berlach and McNaught (2007), were the inadequate transference of the OBE theoretical model into successful practical results, and the dissemination and implementation process for teachers and schools. Teachers were generally dissatisfied with the planning and implementation
process because they were not involved in its formulation and implementation. Inherent problems within the model were: teachers had difficulty understanding the assessment protocols; they did not know what to teach students; and there was a lot of documentation that accompanied the reform (Donnelly, 2007b). As a result, there has been an increase in resignations and retirement of teachers in recent years, and the issue of whether OBE has considerably improved students’ performance is still much debated (Berlach, 2004; Griffin, 1998; Kerr, 2000).

The assumption that the continuous roll-out of government imperatives for education - such as OBE, New Courses of Study, performance benchmarks, effective management of schools and teachers’ performance - would lead to improvement in students’ educational outcomes and invariably yield greater rewards and income was also flawed. Research suggests that there are more consequences evident in the widening achievement gap between students in high and low socio-economic schools (Au, 2009; Ohaninan & Kovacs, 2007). Glesson and Gunter argued that due to changes and demands, schools have been positioned to be concerned with performance and impression management, which ‘obscures a discourse of power, masking deeper issues of regulation and control of teachers and learners’ (2001, p. 154). Schools are expected to perform to standards set in the national curriculum. The preoccupation of schools and teachers with performance has shifted the emphasis of education to teaching students to pass examinations to satisfy the requirements of educational bureaucrats.

Arguably, this enterprise culture creates more hazards than the benefits it is assumed to offer. The enterprise culture asserts the belief that young people will secure jobs if
they have personal, generic work-related skills, knowledge and values like self-management, time-management, self-motivation, discipline, teamwork skills and capacity for innovation. Enterprise education advocates a shift from social to individual responsibility. Enterprise culture emphasises the values of the entrepreneurial class, with the business sector allowed to decide what education should be, and how teachers should train students. According to Smyth (2001), the incorporation of the enterprise culture is a way of asserting the social inequalities in society within the school walls. This in a way contributes to the deep crisis experienced in the public education sector in the UK, as argued by Fielding (2006). Fielding argued that the focus on performativity, accountability and managerialism has resulted in a ‘philosophical crisis’ about the purpose and meaning of education (2006, p. 350).

The ‘illusion of choice’ (Smyth et al., 2009) is what some have argued is presented to parents in this marketisation era. Claiming that increased accountability and efficiency will help parents choose schools is inaccurate. In fact, schools do the choosing of students. The rich schools choose students from affluent and middle-class backgrounds, meaning the rest of the students end up in ‘ghetto’ schools, which leads to a ‘separation of the haves and have nots’ (Smyth, 2001). But in the true sense, the choice of schools by parents and students depends on available financial resources and preferences of the relative benefits provided. In the last few decades in WA and other Australian states, there has been an increase in the proportion of students attending private schools as a result of an increased level of subsidies provided to the private sector by the government (Donnelly, 2004; Watson & Ryan, 2010).
Although there have been arguments that this has been solely based on societal demands and parental choices, this shift has perhaps been largely influenced by changes in government funding policy and the public distrust of the education provided to children in government schools. As Watson and Ryan (2010) mentioned, the government has increased their resources and support to help the middle and upper class schools in Australia. The effect of this on government schools means increased enrolments in private schools and fewer students in government schools. Government schools in WA are now left with increased pressure to justify their funding base. For children who are in the low socio-economic category, their educational fate might now be determined by chance, not choice. This thesis has paid more attention to this area because beginning teachers who participated in this study were from government schools, mostly in low socio-economic communities.

These policy changes in the public policy context considerably influence what is happening in schools and teachers’ work. There is no doubt that the policy changes discussed in this section have increased the amount of work that teachers do and heightened the amount of work they need to pay attention to. Each policy brings different administrative tasks to ensure that teachers are working according to established policies and demonstrating increased accountability for the work they do. This is described in the literature as intensification of teachers’ work, an issue that I focus on in the next section.

2.2 What Is Happening to Teachers’ Work?

The incessant demand for changes in teaching, curriculum planning and assessment can coerce teachers into the performativity discourse. Teachers are required to be
accountable for students’ performance (Glesson & Gunter, 2001; Smyth, 2001). Thus, much is forced on teachers to change their ways of doing things that teachers can become bewildered and overwhelmed with the numerous calls for change or reforms (Hargreaves, 1997; Smyth, 2001). In this section, I examine the effect of the policy context in schools on teachers’ practice and work lives, the changing nature of teachers’ work and implications for beginning teachers.

Reid argued that current policy reforms affect teachers’ work in two ways: ‘they intensify work and they limit the capacity of educators to determine the goals and ends of their work’ (1999, p. 197). The tensions and problems faced by WA teachers in incorporating OBE into their practice, and the post-compulsory education for years 11 and 12, created a heightened uncertainty, unease and confusion among teachers and schools (Berlach & McNaught 2007; Berlach & O’Neil, 2008; Donnelly, 2004; Kessel, 2006). In fact, teachers who were opposed to the mandated changes expressed their concerns about the damaging effect of the implementation of these changes on students, schools and teachers’ work in the WA Report of the Ministerial taskforce (2005). In the report, teachers and school leaders emphasised the need for the WA Curriculum Council to ‘reconsider both the content and the mode of delivery of the professional development program’ (p. 11). The accountability measures imposed by state and federal governments on schools and teachers’ work could leave teachers worn out as they try to comply to set standards.

As policy changes have increased, teachers’ work has intensified, so much that their roles have been likened to performers or, as Kincheloe (2003) described it, ‘functionaries’ of mandated policies. In a policy culture that demands efficiency,
effectiveness and increased student performance, there is little recognition of teachers’ practical knowledge and experience of students’ learning and how teachers could provide their wealth of resources to increase students’ performances (Kincheloe, 2003). Instead, policies and changes are imposed and teachers are required to act as technicians with limited resources for the implementation of centrally mandated policies (Apple, 1996; Kincheloe, 2003; Robertson, 2000). Nonetheless, teachers continue to work with prescribed policies even though they recognise the inherent damage to school culture and students’ learning. This puts a lot of pressure on teachers and their work. Although Smyth et al. argued that these changes have ‘not necessarily deskill[ed] teachers in Australia, [these changes have] left teachers nevertheless with the feeling of lack of control over their work’ (2009, p. 17).

According to Smyth et al., the changes in economic, social and knowledge contexts have ‘narrowed the options and changed educational goals’ and the roles of schools are gradually shifting from ‘a commitment to social justice, equity and the common good’ to auditing performances and ensuring effectiveness of teachers and students (2009, p. 18). One of such changes in this decade is the publishing of individual Australian schools and students’ performances in league tables, which is vehemently opposed by the State Schools Teachers Union of WA (SSTUWA) (2009). Australian teachers increasingly feel pressure to teach to the testing regimes so as to improve their scores on the league tables (AEU, 2009b). Standardised numeracy and literacy tests are employed to measure outcomes, which find their way to league tables displaying the success of schools. Faced with the demands of testing, teachers are increasingly ignoring more transformative and democratic pedagogies and focusing on technical ways of ensuring that students pass the tests. Hence, principals select staff
and encourage activities that enhance the school’s market position. This has significant effects on teachers’ work and its nature (Reid, 1999). Reid argued that this focus on league tables is a way of reconfiguring teachers’ work:

> When so much of a school’s success depends on its position on league tables, there will be an inordinate amount of pressure upon teachers to improve the performance of their students in literacy and numeracy tests. In this way, the government is able to use the rhetoric of the market and consumer ‘choice’ whilst manipulating market conditions in order to engineer pre-determined outcomes. In so doing, the approach radically restructures the labour process of educators. (1999, p. 194)

As a result of the policy changes, there have been many conflicting expectations of teachers and students regarding their performance and effectiveness. These conflicting expectations have affected how teachers view their work and roles. In the US, Valli and Buese (2007) examined the effect of federal, state and local government policies on the roles of elementary school teachers. They concluded that in response to federal, state and local policies aimed at improving student achievement, the expectations of the teacher’s role increased around instructional, institutional, collaborative and personal learning. Valli and Buese (2007) went further to reveal that these changing educational trends and policies have unexpected and often negative influences on teachers’ relationships with students, pedagogy and sense of professional well being. Smyth et al. (2008) dispelled the myth that the quality of teachers’ work and students’ performance has been improved by the increased accountability measures and policy changes. They argued, ‘on the contrary, there are signs that teachers are losing their creative energies and capacity for curriculum innovation as they seek to cover the objectives and requirements of externally prescribed curricula’ (Smyth et al. 2009, p. 22).
Another emerging theme is the commodification of teachers’ performance. Research in education policy has suggested that performance management is a process designed to measure value for the capital invested in education and teachers (Apple 2001; Glesson & Gunter, 2001). Boxley (2003) argued that performance management signifies expectation of returns from the capital directed into schools. Since research on education funding shows that teachers receive between 60 and 80 per cent of school funding (OECD, 2004), the government tries to justify school funding through an increased focus on measuring the performance of teachers through inspection and managerial activities—the carrot and stick model for the reward and punishment of performance.

Although the broad aim of a performance management model is to ‘raise the quality of teachers and schools to such an extent that there will be a notable improvement of students’ performance, it seems that this is different from what is happening in schools. Instead much attention is paid to doing so many things which might be superficial’ (Smyth, 2001, p. 41). The resulting outcome is that teachers put much effort into the achievement of performance indicators (Down, 2006; Down, Chadbourne & Hogan, 2000), which would invariably limit the possibilities of teachers utilising their discretion and professional expertise because the prescription of good practice has been imposed on teachers (Glesson & Gunter 2001; Smyth, 2001).

Down et al. (2000) argued that performance management in WA has positioned teachers as people to be controlled. Although the performance management model was presented as part of professional development, its implementation shows that it is
a way of making teachers accountable for their performance and addressing target outcomes. Teachers do not regard performance management as a professional development activity; instead, they see it as a monitoring activity. Down et al. reported that WA teachers devised ways of negotiating the rules and boundaries to accommodate their needs and desires—the teachers described performance management as ‘performing for the management’ (2000, p. 219). In other words, teachers regarded it as meaningless to their work. The energy dissipated on the performance management process may have been more profitably channelled into understanding teachers’ work and the influence of policy changes on their work.

Regardless of meeting government expectations, the intensified labour process associated with achieving performance indicators is enormous (Reid, 1999). This is evident in the amount of paperwork that is required of teachers, along with regulatory demands of curricular standards and the time invested in familiarising teachers with the new curricular changes. The labour process for teachers has been restructured and controlled in such a way that there is a ‘concomitant shift in who and what is valued in schools’ (Gerwirtz, 2002, p. 89). This has left teachers questioning their values, judgements and practice and struggling with dominant standard outcomes required by the Department of Education (Gerwirtz, 2002; Smyth, 2001).

Teachers are least involved in the policy formulating and developing process and are usually at the receiving end. The policies do not acknowledge personal practical knowledge of teachers both during the development and implementation stages (Gale & Denmore, 2003). Stories of teachers in the study conducted by Down et al. (1999) affirm the marginalisation of teachers’ voices from the policy development process.
Chapter Two

According to them, this widens the gap between the policy makers and the policy implementers, in such a way that there is a wide disparity between prescribed knowledge of good practice and experimental knowledge of good practice.

Further, there have been concerns about the presentation of these policy directives and changes to teachers under the guise of professional learning and development workshops (Day & Sachs, 2004). These workshops have frequently dismissed the original purpose and intent of professional learning and development for genuine teacher learning and have been used as part of the implementation process of officially prescribed policies. Although there have been arguments about the purpose and effectiveness of professional development as a viable resource for teacher learning, considering the short-term duration and the outside school context nature, the use of these workshops as a place to explain and disseminate policy implementation to teachers clearly defeats the aim of professional learning (Appleton et al. 2000; Nikkerud & D’Unienville, 1995).

Rather than focusing on the genuine learning needs of teachers, professional learning and development workshops organised as an orientation and awareness program to help teachers understand and implement the intent of policies promotes ‘compliant’ professionalism, as discussed by Day and Sachs (2004). They also argued that ‘both content and form will imply particular conceptions of “professionalism” … Indeed, it may be argued that the new agenda is concerned with being compliant or an “activist”’ (p. 4). What this means is that, although teachers need programs to ensure they understand how to implement policies within their schools, the use of professional learning workshops to carry out the intent of policy makers emphasises
that teachers no longer have the right to make decisions about their work. In turn, professional development workshops lose their meaning for teachers because they know that the workshops are no longer about their genuine learning needs but about proliferating the demands and authority of powerful others over their work.

Another concern is that professional development workshops have been ideologically overtaken and driven by managerial values that train teachers more about how to be managers rather than teachers (Miller & Norris, 2007). Workshops could instead be an avenue for teachers to understand better the values and the ideologies driving their work and could promote agency to re-invent and practice the true purpose of teaching.

Day and Sachs (2004) discussed how professionalism, professional identity and professional development have changed due to the government’s agenda of controlling and monitoring educational outcomes of schools. The discussion about the new fad of professionalism and professional identity highlights two prevalent discourses pervading teachers’ work and educational institutions: managerial and democratic professionalism. These two discourses have different orientations and interests, and as a result offer particular subject positions and identities to teachers (Day & Sachs, 2004). According to Day and Sachs, ‘these discourses set the limits of what can be said, thought and done with respect to debates and initiatives which are designed to enhance the political project of teacher professionalism nationally across various educational sectors’ (2004, p. 5).

The managerial discourse discussed earlier in this chapter has been more influential on teachers’ work because it is inherent in neo-liberal reforms, a point made by Reid, who argued that because neo-liberal policies and managerial discourse:
recontextualize the educational environment, education policy constructs new identities for public education workers. These new ‘identities’ not only reshape the parameters within which educators work; they also alter established social relations, and have material effects on the ways in which educators experience their work. (1999, p. 194)

Likewise, Day and Sachs (2004) argued that managerial professionalism ‘gains its legitimacy through the promulgation of policies and the allocation of funds associated with these policies. These policies ‘attempt to re-define what is meant by teacher professionalism and how teachers practise it individually and collectively’ (p. 6). This managerial discourse, as mentioned earlier, serves to monitor, manage, assess, intensify and increase teachers’ workload. As Sachs (2001) explained, this managerial discourse of professionalism produces a particular type of teacher identity—an entrepreneurial identity that is becoming accepted as normal within the educational community.

This reshaping of teachers’ roles and identities also brings increased levels of teacher stress, burnout, resignation and cynicism. Policy reform often requires new action to be taken by educators and an addition of new tasks to the current full workload. This results in a lack of time to keep up with professional reading or engage in professional learning activities. The fact that the conceptualisation and implementation of the goals of schooling are carried out by those most removed from schools and classrooms reinforces the view that teachers are becoming skilled technicians rather than theorists of their own practice or intellectuals (Giroux, 1988a). In the words of Reid (1999), teachers are ‘ideologically deskilled’.
2.2.1 What Are the Implications of These Changes to Teachers’ Work and School Contexts for Beginning Teachers?

The discourse in the literature discussed so far portrays the public policy context, politics of teachers’ work and changing school contexts in Australia, the UK and the US in fairly bleak terms. This literature highlights how schools in Australia are increasingly serving political ends, in which managerialist and economic rationalist discourse is being applied to schools, and in which teachers are increasingly feeling monitored and disempowered. Many teachers in Australia are struggling with the changes they face, leading to a large exodus (Twomey 2007). According to the Twomey (2007) report, ‘data supplied by the DET’s Workforce Planning Unit indicates that in the five years between 2002 and 2007, classroom teacher vacancies at the start of the school year increased from 55 to 206’. Teachers’ decreasing autonomy and increasing demands for improved performance appear to jeopardise their work, their students’ learning development and, more importantly in the case of this research, the complexity and changing nature of teaching for beginning teachers.

In the ‘new’ school context of managerialism, ideas about teaching are based on managerial principles and performance management in such a way as to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, and improved performance by individual students and schools. This approach pushes back the moral purpose of education, such as paying attention to students’ learning needs, the process of learning for students and their learning engagement in schools. In addition, there are important issues that students bring from their backgrounds that influence their learning engagement in the classroom. Within this context, and due to the increased workload of teachers, there is
less time to pay attention to these unique background issues and there is even less time to spend with individual students.

Referring back to the labour process of teaching, teachers are constantly faced with the task of aligning their work to political decisions about their practices and outcomes. Their labour is influenced by political struggles, which in turn affect the way they experience their teaching. For instance, Reid (1999) discusses the various effects of the marketisation discourse and its corporate managerialism on the social relations in schools and on the labour process of teachers. Reid argues that the most significant effects in relation to teachers are the proliferation of competition and individualism. Apart from the ways in which teachers’ work has been structured to promote individualism, the policy changes put teachers in competition with each other and can make them overly concerned with how they can individually promote their own work achievements and contributions, which invariably influences career progression and promotion.

Whether or not teachers feel ideologically compromised by the market-driven changes imposed on their professional practice and choices, this is not the only effect of these changes. Ball (2008) argued that there is considerable evidence that teachers need to understand the broader institutional policy context that is affecting their day-to-day decisions about their practice; they also need to understand the power relations instigating the change in education practice and how they think about themselves as teachers. Until they are able to understand and take an agency position, these changes could obscure the moral values of teaching and present market ideological values in the name of policy changes.
Beginning teachers’ work is shaped around new issues that are not traditionally educational (Miller & Norris, 2007). The contextual issues within the school and the broader policy context in which schools operate are market-driven and based on neo-liberal reforms that encourage competition and managerial discourse, which is not what education or teachers’ work should be. Thus, new teachers are increasingly exposed to these issues that influence the way they think about themselves as teachers; this invariably leads to a ‘new’ form of teacher identity. The identity that is constituted by the new environment of marketisation, a consequence of neo-liberal reforms, is what teachers are struggling against or conforming to. Research has showed that a new form of teacher identity is being produced by managerial and marketing discourse in the neo-liberal regime (Reid, 1999; Sachs, 2001).

In this section, I have discussed some of the major themes in the research literature to highlight the discursive political environment in which teachers’ work is being reshaped. These themes are significant to teachers’ professional practice and I argue that they are pertinent to the process of becoming a teacher and the understandings of teacher identity (re)construction. Beginning teachers are caught between the indirect influence and effect of policies and discursive practices of teacher identity (Britzman, 2003). From their interactions with school contexts, students, fellow teachers and parents, beginning teachers decipher certain understandings of discursive practices within the school and what it means to be a teacher. These understandings are not simply oriented around socialisation but involve a complex negotiation of beliefs, values and assumptions of what good teaching is.
In summary, there is a strong influence of the changing policy contexts, school contexts and teachers’ complex roles on new teachers’ \((re)\)construction of identity. This is separate to the normal influence of school culture and practices on new teachers’ identity \((re)\)construction. Becoming a teacher involves building a teacher identity within new school contexts. The next section continues the discussion about beginning teachers’ work. It highlights the main problems beginning teachers experience in their first year.

### 2.2.2 Beginning Teachers’ Experiences

Research shows that about 30 to 50 per cent of beginning teachers leave in their first five years of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Hammerness, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Quartz, 2003). As discussed in Chapter One, this is in part a result of their negative experiences of teaching (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; House of Representatives, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2011). According to these studies, these negative experiences are due to and not limited to heightened emotional stress, excessive paperwork compliance and workload administration, lack of support for school-based induction and mentoring programs and lack of effective preparation in teacher education programs for the stressful demands of teaching (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; House of Representatives, 2007; Paris, 2010; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). This section reviews the literature on some of these negative experiences, which are: beginning teachers’ emotional responses in their first year of teaching, the reality shock they encounter, and issues with induction and support in their first year. Each of these issues has become a part of the normal survival pattern of beginning teachers in their first year.
2.2.2.1 Emotional response in the first year

Studies on beginning teachers have shown that moving from being a student to the role of becoming a classroom teacher is a daunting experience for beginning teachers in their first year of teaching (Gold, 1996; Huberman, 1991; Lacey, 1977; Lortie, 1975; Vonk, 1993). Some of these studies have highlighted the dramatic emotional experience of beginning teachers, such as feeling like they are on a ‘roller coaster’, isolated and disappointed (Flores & Day, 2006; McNally, Blake, Corbin & Gray, 2008). Unfortunately, the process of learning and beginning to teach involves facing several emotional events that question deep-seated beliefs about the work of teaching, student learning approaches and teachers’ perceptions of their teaching capabilities.

According to McNally et al., beginning teachers are ‘emotionally charged, with so much compressed into a short period’ in their first few weeks (2008, p. 288). Thus, the first year is often filled with dramatic, graphic and unforgettable episodes. Britzman argued that the beginning experience of learning to become a teacher is ‘chaotic’ and involves ‘disorganizing selves in the search of a meaning’ (2006, p. ix). According to Britzman, beginning teachers enter a phase of exploring, learning and locating themselves as the kind of teacher they want to become, the kind of teacher they want to be to their students, and the kind of teacher they want to be remembered as. The search for a meaning in their lives is the ultimate search for an identity they are most comfortable with. According to Alsup, ‘moving from their university education into student teaching and/or field experiences made it inevitable that they would compare the two learning environments and what was valued and enacted in each’ (2006, p. 72).
2.2.2.2 Reality shock

Other studies on beginning teachers have focused on the experiences and problems of beginning teachers in their work context (Black, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Specifically, these studies have emphasised that beginning teachers experience a reality shock about the magnitude of their roles in their first year of teaching (Huberman, 1991; Lacey, 1977; Lortie, 1975). Beginning teachers enter the profession with enthusiasm, and high hopes of achieving and fulfilling visions of their professional practice (Long, 2004; McCormack & Thomas, 2003). These visions are often developed during their teacher education programs or inspired while undergoing pre-tertiary schooling (Hammerness, 2003). Hammerness’ (2003) study of beginning teachers’ visions and images of their classroom practice revealed the gap between their visions and current realities. Their level of expectation did not correspond to the reality of the professional context. Gold (1996) affirmed that new teachers often meet with disappointment because of their teaching workloads, the bureaucratic nature of schools and discouragement from older colleagues. They struggle with aligning their expectations of schools, co-teachers and students with the stark realities of bureaucratic school structures (Flores & Day, 2006; Romano, 2004).

One of the causes of this reality shock, as expressed by beginning teachers, is the conflict and lack of congruence between their teacher education programs and their work contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006; Ewing & Smith, 2003; Gustafson, Guilbert & MacDonald, 2002; Lang, 1999; Watt & Richardson, 2011). Ramsey (2000) explained that beginning teachers felt ill-prepared for their new roles as teachers. The conflict arises from the idealistic promises of teacher education, which are different from the professional realities in school. Fullan (1995) argued that the pre-service
teacher education program is narrowly conceptualised with no linkage to practical realities in schools such as classroom management, adapting teaching strategies to meet individual students’ learning needs, assessment and handling parents.

A significant part of the literature on beginning teachers is focused on teacher education programs. There has been a huge international debate on the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Goddard & Foster, 2001; Herbert & Worthy, 2001). Some of these studies have been initiated by changes in government policies and national reports on the evaluation of beginning teachers’ preparation, students’ performance and achievement levels in public schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Commonwealth Department of Education Science & Training, 2002; Ramsey, 2000). Other research studies advocated for better funding to help improve teacher education programs for pre-service teachers (House of Representatives, 2007). Others highlighted the importance of improving professional standards for beginning teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000) and organising state-level induction programs for beginning teachers, as in WA. One of the major recommendations of the ‘Top of the Class’ report was the ‘development of national professional standards for teaching at graduate or entry level and also standards for teacher education programs’ (2007, p. 34). In WA, for instance, a professional standards framework and benchmarks were developed and implemented by the WACOT for new teachers, in accordance with the national professional standards for teachers. Beginning teachers have to achieve these to proceed from their initial provisional registration to full registration as teachers.
In essence, the major focus of all these national studies and reports has centred on improving teacher education programs, in order that pre-service teachers can successfully transfer professional knowledge and be fully functional once they start teaching (House of Representatives, 2007). From these studies, one of the major concerns regarding the effectiveness of teacher education programs is the wide gap between educational theory and practice. Transferring learning into action in classrooms when teachers eventually start teaching unsupervised has attracted much attention in the past (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Zeichner, 1996). Studies have also suggested that beginning teachers revert to traditional ways of teaching once they practice, instead of implementing creative and progressive educational theories and strategies learnt during teacher education programs (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

To this effect, action research programs and more practical-based programs have been organised for pre-service teachers to challenge their beliefs about the social and moral significance of practice in schools, and engage them in reflective conversations about their teaching, with other students and teacher educators acting as a ‘critical friend’ (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Russell, 2000). While there is substantial research in this field, there are still ongoing debates on the most effective way of narrowing the practical and theoretical divide in beginning teachers’ experience (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Russell, 2000).

In the Australian Educators Union’s (2009) survey of beginning teachers in their first year, only 41 per cent felt they were well prepared for the reality of teaching. These teachers indicated the problems they had with starting to teach, in particular the weak link between pre-service training and the reality of teaching, ineffective mentors,
isolation, their lack of practical skills in classroom management, handling parent-teacher interviews, and curriculum and lesson planning. These surveys depicted heights of frustration, anxieties and confusion, and demanded a fast rescue. It is, therefore, not surprising that there is a relatively high attrition rate among new teachers early in their career (Ewing & Smith, 2003; Gold, 1996).

2.2.2.3 Induction, support and learning

Several studies report problems beginning teachers encounter, including a lack of effective induction and mentoring processes, lack of or poor support structures within the school, minimal collegial support, full teaching loads, teaching outside subject areas, students’ behaviour management, managing or handling difficult or violent children, and working in rural areas with minimal resources (Gold, 1996; Ramsey 2000; Paris, 2009). The lack of effective support programs or structures situated in their workplace context has been identified as one of the factors that influence new teachers’ decisions to leave teaching (Manuel, 2003). The teaching profession is different from other professions such as medicine, accounting and law in that it does not provide internships, which is evident in other professions (Gold, 1996). Beginning teachers are often abandoned and left to survive on their own immediately they assume their job posting (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Hammerness (2003) argued that new teachers receive minimal support in their first year of teaching. She believed that the lack of support structures to help beginning teachers makes a meaningful transition between teacher education programs and the workplace difficult. In regards to the treatment of beginning teachers in their first year of practice, Smith and Ingersoll suggested that the profession of teaching often ‘eats
its young’ and is akin to a ‘sink or swim’, ‘trial by fire’ or ‘boot camp’ experience (2004, p. 682).

Manuel’s (2003) study on New South Wales beginning teachers’ experiences transiting from the self-construct of being students to being professionals revealed similar challenges. The major findings of Manuel’s study of the early career experiences of teachers indicated the impact of demanding working conditions, lack of personal and professional support structures, and ‘the need for more than mere on-the-job professional development in the areas of classroom and behavioural management and pedagogical knowledge’ (2003, p. 148). Ewing and Smith’s findings complemented Manuel’s findings by categorising beginning teachers’ problems into ‘adjusting to the demands of teaching full time, negotiating colleague relationships, understanding classroom, school and community cultures, coping with self: finding a niche, idealism of pre-service preparation’ (2003, p. 17). These findings were also found in Lang’s (1999) study of the struggles beginning teachers face in becoming professionals.

As the lack of professional learning support is one of the major problems of beginning teachers, attempts have been made to alleviate this problem through mentoring and orientation programs in schools. Some schools conduct mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, usually designed in partnership with universities and colleges, as a means of providing professional learning and support. Irrespective of the fact that these programs have alleviated the challenges, beginning teachers still talk about the lack of professional development programs to aid their practice (Long, 2004).
Williams, Gore and Cooper’s (2004) study of the experiences of early career teachers showed that teachers did not have effective pedagogical support from their mentoring and induction programs. The teachers were displeased with the ineffectiveness, lack of organisation and focus and poor quality of induction. They complained that the mentor teachers did not perform their roles. Lazarus (2000) also affirmed this by shedding light on the interpersonal problems between mentor and mentee teachers. There is always the possibility of disagreement about what constitutes good teaching between expert teachers and beginning teachers as a result of out-dated methods of teaching practised in schools in contrast with beginning teachers’ new ideas and concepts of teaching. Problems can arise for beginning teachers when their mentors or supervisors lack confidence in their knowledge and abilities as professionals, which in turn affects the beginning teachers’ professional confidence and efficacy.

Induction is often about socialisation into the school world and learning survival strategies. Manuel (2003) questioned the induction process of beginning teachers and challenged the underlying motive behind it. Manuel’s study of New South Wales government schools showed that the induction process of beginning teachers is not well organised or effective. For it to be effective, there needs to be a recognition of the resources that beginning teachers bring into the profession, instead of these being ignored.

Martinez (2004) discussed the deficit function of mentoring programs, which have been reduced to helping beginning teachers learn the skills of surviving rather than learning and developing their teacher identities. According to Martinez (2004), mentoring causes more harm when its sole aim is to transmit knowledge of the
approaches and strategies that work in teaching. Most mentors act as local guides to
the practices and established rules of schools. When the mentoring programs available
are ineffective to support beginning teachers’ learning, what is implicitly assumed in
teaching is that beginning teachers can be experts on their first day on the job. This
assumption is challenged by critically examining the context in which teachers work.
The lack of adequate support and provision of quality induction programs shows that
teachers are being expected to employ their expertise and find ways around the new
system and be professional in their practice immediately. This can set new teachers up
for numerous tensions, struggles and problems in their first year.

There is a growing amount of evidence to suggest that beginning teachers’
problematic experiences are not only a factor of individual teachers’ newness but a
problem with the context. Johnson et al. (2010) argued that beginning teachers still
experience issues such as professional isolation, heavy workload, school politics and
culture, generalised personal stress and anxiety and loss of self-efficacy. These issues
when critically examined are context related, and are the same concerns reported over
35 years ago (Cherubini, 2009 p. 83). Cherubini (2009) questioned why beginning
teachers are surrounded with these constant context-related issues despite the stark
evidence that these exist. Cherubini (2009) suggested that the problem may not be
beginning teachers but rather the structures in which beginning teachers work, which
are a result of events and debates happening in the wider context. Cherubini (2009)
argued that the schools in which teachers work operate on an industrial regime and
tensions occur between the industrial and post-industrial paradigms of schooling.
Teachers’ lives are not separated from their school contexts, which are influenced by policy dictates and directives, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Thus, what is really going on in this system influences how new teachers think about their work and themselves as teachers (Tomlinson, 2003). There is a need to know what is going on in this environment and situate a discussion around its influence on changing teachers’ work and school context. Beginning teachers are measured against their social context, their primary site for physical negotiation of identity.

With the numerous changes in schools, beginning teachers experience new forms of teaching that are performance and market-driven. Teachers are exposed to a new culture that favours the policies being enacted on how they do their work and how their students learn. The accountability measures, managerial standards and target setting objectives are what these teachers get involved in sometime during their first year, if not at the very beginning. As a result of the mounting pressures on schools and teachers to conform to these initiatives, beginning teachers are also exposed and observe other teachers’ responses to them.

School cultures geared towards achieving these policies tend to focus on achieving standardised test scores rather than creating a student-centred learning curriculum and school communities that would be more likely to engage students. Schools are pressured to look for ways of attracting more students. There is bound to be a change in the perception of what teaching ought to be, although beginning teachers are typically too optimistic when they are starting out; both the school culture and veterans’ perceptions of their roles as teachers are changing, and these will be communicated to new teachers starting out. New teachers can experience confusion
about what they think their roles should be and what they really have to do. Since there is a significant influence of the school context on the (re)construction of teachers’ identity, it needs to be acknowledged that identity (re)construction is context-specific and situated.

2.3 Beginning Teachers’ Identity

2.3.1 Introduction

In writing a foreword for Jane Alsup’s (2006) book, Britzman suggested that one key problem newly qualified teachers face in their first year of practice is identity (re)construction, and describes it as ‘what a teacher is and does, what a teacher looks like, and whether the teacher’s body is a normal teacher’s body’ (Britzman 2006, p. xi). Most beginning teachers ask similar questions. Questions such as ‘What do I do?’ and ‘Where do I start?’ are paramount in their minds and they are asked in different forms. The beginning of a new profession is usually very chaotic and dramatic; it involves ‘disorganizing selves in the search of a meaning’ (Britzman, 2006, p. ix). For this, the teaching profession has received a fair bit of attention due to the very problematic nature of learning to teach.

My understanding of beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction is grounded in Sachs explanation of teacher identity construction as a:

‘framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (2009, p.15).

This view of identity points to the experiential, discursive nature of identity and ongoing interaction between the personal and professional aspects of identity. I
therefore use this perspective as way to explain my discussion around the way I understand identity. In this section, I focus on the \((re)\)construction of teacher identity, particularly that of beginning teachers, and outline the discursive nature of teacher identity as a theoretical framework for understanding beginning teachers’ struggles to become teachers. By conceptualising identity as discursive, I convey that many challenges and problems beginning teachers face are not a function of their individual deficiencies; rather, they are quests for building identities in relation to their institutional contexts. This section begins by reviewing several studies on identity \((re)\)construction.

Many have argued that teacher identity is a combination of both personal and professional lives and demands (Britzman, 1991; Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992; Danielewicz, 2001), which involves an alignment between internal desires and external demands. Developing teacher identity is a synchronisation of both aspects. Many beginning teachers are faced with the daunting task of understanding professional expectations before they can think of the synchronisation. The context in which this occurs does not support this synchronisation because other factors are challenging them, such as a clear understanding of themselves and their values and values-in-use (Findlay, 2006; Flores, 2001). In studying how beginning teachers learn to shape a professional identity, researchers have generally employed either psychological or post-structural approaches. In the next section, I describe these two approaches as they relate to beginning teachers’ identity.
2.3.2 Limitations of Developmental Approaches to Teacher Identity

Developmental approaches, for example, Dreyfus’ novice-to-expert model (1986), explain teacher learning and development as staged and rigidly structured. These approaches present beginning teachers’ learning to teach as an accumulation of years of teaching experience. Three main limitations to developmental approaches are discussed in this section.

First, psychologised studies have associated teacher identity with their career development or years of experience. These studies have suggested that teachers undergo developmental stages in which they progress from novice to expert teachers (Benner, 1984; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) and are based on cognitive and psychological perspectives. The Dreyfus novice-to-expert model has been adopted by various educational researchers to emphasise the stages of development of teachers (Daley, 1999; Tomlinson, 1995). The Dreyfus and Dreyfus model (1986) separates professional development of teachers into five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. In this model, the novice teacher depends on rules to govern her/his behaviour to practice, while ‘experts’ rely on tacit knowledge built from a large body of experience (Tomlinson, 1995). According to this model, novices have no personal practical knowledge or experience to work with; thus, they rely on rules to guide and build their experience (Daley, 1999). This model has been used in organising professional development programs for beginning teachers as a way of preparing them for the challenges ahead.

The second example of the psychologised view of teacher learning is the developmental phases of first year teaching put together by the California New
Chapter Two

Teacher Project. This model suggests that beginning teachers move through several phases such as ‘anticipation’, ‘survival’, ‘disillusionment’, ‘rejuvenation’ and ‘reflection’, with timelines attached to them (Moir, 1990, 2011). This grouping of beginning teachers’ development in their first year into five categories influences or distorts beginning teachers’ perception of their first year, as it presents expectations of what to expect as they commence teaching. Nonetheless, this model has been used in some of the professional development workshops for beginning teachers here in WA. Although advocates of this theory admit that not all teachers pass through the sequence, they believe that learning to teach is structured into stages. While this psychologised way of thinking places emphasis on stages of development, it suggests a rigid and structured way of becoming a teacher.

Third, the risk of presenting a structural organisation of teacher development is that it presumes beginning teachers have knowledge deficits and are in need of structured programs and standards to move to the next stage of development. Thus, it emphasises deficiencies in beginning teachers and undermines other complexities involved in teaching. This is contrary to the expectations that beginning teachers can perform as experienced teachers from their first day of teaching (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003). When beginning teachers are portrayed as undergoing developmental stages through to maturity, professional development is prescribed for classroom management and discipline, subject mastery and pedagogical skills. Such an imposition provides a limiting view of beginning teachers’ capabilities. It suggests there are conflicting expectations and imaginations of what new teachers can and cannot do. At one end of this continuum, they are expected to be naïve and, at the other, they are expected to know what they are doing. Another concern of this structured way of viewing
teachers’ development is that it overemphasises acquiring years of experience as the way to become a good teacher. What this suggests, however, is the notion that beginning teachers are not or cannot be good teachers because they do not have years of experience under their belts.

These developmental stages suggest stereotypes of what beginning teachers could and could not do and also seem to suggest that beginning teachers do not have the agency to act and engage within this powerful discourse because they are in their first year. However, Beauchamp and Thomas’ (2009) review of literature on beginning teachers explains how teacher identity has been used as an analytic framework to understand teachers’ work and it can also be used as an organising framework through which teachers can understand and describe themselves in relation to their school context and their roles. The analytical approaches to examining teacher identity employ professional, cultural, personal and political discourse that influences beginning teachers’ thinking about their work and themselves and draws on the importance of agency. There is a strong link between teacher identity and agency (Day et al., 2006). According to Beauchamp and Thomas, ‘what may result from a teacher’s realisation of his or her identity, in performance within teaching contexts, is a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward … even to transform the context. It is apparent that a heightened awareness of one’s identity may lead to a strong sense of agency’ (2009, p. 183).

Therefore, I seek another approach to teacher identity research—one that sees the relationship between these discourses and sees that new teachers (re)construct their identities in relation to the conflicting and contested discourse influencing their work.
in their local context. It also acknowledges the indirect influences of public policies. I propose another approach to examining teacher identity, which draws on critical theory and post-structural discourse. I believe that in the context of current educational reforms described earlier, and the ongoing public discourse of performance managerialism and accountability, it is particularly urgent to reconceptualise ways to help beginning teachers to actively engage and negotiate the discourse as they move through their first year of teaching.

2.3.3 Discursive (Re)construction of Teacher Identity
Post-structural research and critical theory offer different ways of conceptualising how beginning teachers construct their teacher identities. The post-structural approach focuses on the discursive nature of identity (re)construction, and critical theory highlights the hidden power behind these discourses. Both theories reject the perception or view of beginning teachers as powerless and without agency and the linear developmental process of learning to teach (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003). Alternatively, teacher identity construction is conceptualised as complex, ongoing, discursive, unstable and involving interaction with multiple discourses (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The discursive nature of teacher identity highlights teacher identity as ‘a construction, a process, never completed—always in process’ (Hall, 1996, p. 16). This alternative view understands teacher identity as a process that occurs in relation to the discourse of expectations from students, teachers, school administration, parents and communities.

The term ‘agency’ has been used in my discussion of teacher identity (re)construction to show the dynamic and dialogical nature of the interaction between teachers and the
discursive practices within the social context. It also shows the capacity of beginning teachers to actively challenge, disrupt and accept in varying degrees the discursive practices and ideologies within their school contexts as they reconstruct their teacher identities. Giddens argues that human agents ‘never passively accept external conditions of action, but more or less continuously reflect upon them and reconstitute them in the light of their particular circumstances’ (1991, p. 75). This research, therefore, seeks to examine the struggles in which beginning teachers interact with ‘contradictory realities … conflicts and crises that structure the work and narratives of learning to teach’ (Britzman, 2003, p. 11).

Teacher identity is a discourse within the larger frame of the discourse of education and schooling, and is composed of several different discourses. Hall argues that identity is ‘constructed within, not outside, discourse’ and is ‘produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies’ (1996, p. 4). This suggests that identity (re)construction is not isolated; it is inscribed in layers of multiple histories and contexts. Therefore, creating a teacher identity for beginning teachers involves ‘weaving strands of multiple discourse’ within schools’ (Gee, 1999, p. 21). Flores and Day define identity as ‘the making sense and (re)interpretation of one’s own values and experiences’ (2006, p. 220). This process of reinterpretation of values and experiences occurs within a context and is relative to other people within the context. Depending on that context, multiple and conflicting identities could be in play; each individual has different identities and multiple identities based on their different contexts. These contexts, however, have discourse and discursive practices in operation that are embedded and locked in the historical, political and social
configuration of the context. Viewing identity as discursive suggests that identity by itself is actively and ongoingly constituted within discourse and discursive practices.

Gee explains that each individual is a ‘member of many Discourses, and each Discourse represents one of our multiple identities. These discourses need not, and often do not, represent consistent and compatible values. There are conflicts among them, and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various Discourses’ (2008, p. 4). Teacher identity is constituted by different discourses and discursive practices that relate to all the different aspects of teachers’ work. In a broad sense, it could encompass beliefs, philosophical statements, instructions/teaching, emotions and pedagogical practices. Discourse can also be specific and related to a particular aspect of teaching or teachers’ work. Examples include the nuances that contribute negatively or positively to parents’ attitudes, students’ responses, students’ gestures, institutional practices and norms, colleagues’ attitudes, the structure of the classroom, teachers’ emotions and teachers’ personal lives. Thus, seeing identity as discursive or constituted through discourse means that a combination of several streams of messages or influences affect teachers’ identity \((re)\)-construction.

Beginning teachers bring into their new profession other discourse from their past experiences, such as their biography, social status, the schools and universities they attended, and these enter into the diverse discourse at work (Beauchamp & Thoams, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006). Such discourse includes ideas about what it means to be a professional, what is acceptable or not acceptable for a teacher within a particular school, pedagogical beliefs and practices, learning styles and other teaching styles, behaviour management methods, dressing styles, enactment of school policies in the
classroom, and the position and behaviour of teachers during teaching. All these influence the (re)construction of teacher identity for beginning teachers. The process of constructing teacher identity for a beginning teacher involves accepting ‘some of the discourse of the “other,”’ or of the educational community they were entering as young professionals, repudiating and non-repudiating their own personal discourse’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 9). In becoming a full member of the profession, beginning teachers ‘run the risk of becoming complicit with values that denigrate and damage their home-based discourse and identity’ (Gee, 2008, p. 4). These values could be biographically informed and developed from their experience in the formal process of learning to become a teacher in a teacher education program. This, however, creates conflicts between comfortable zones and what they are being coerced to adopt. Consequently, this becomes the site where identity negotiation and struggle occurs, what Alsup (2006) calls ‘borderland discourse’.

Sociologists, postmodernists and post-structuralist theorists (Foucault, 1981; Gee, 2008; Hall, 1996; Mills, 2004) have used the term discourse to describe social practices, conversations and underlying meanings understood by a group of people who live by similar assumptions and values. Such is the description by Gee (2008), who believes discourse is a way of creating and communicating meaningful connections between the implicit and explicit within a certain type of discourse community. Discourse is interaction shared by similar people bounded with similar concepts and thought patterns. Gee defines discourse as peculiar ‘ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, and often writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities … by specific groups’ (2008, p. 3). He further defined discourse as ‘ways of being people like us’ - they are ‘ways of being in the
Chapter Two

world’; they are ‘forms of life’; they are socially situated identities’ (Gee, 2008, p. 3). The definition of discourse discussed here subsumes the ordinary acts of writing, talking and what transpires in between (Garman, 1994). It goes beyond what is communicated in words and delves into the ‘the roles and identities we occupy and develop’ within a context (Shacklock et al., 1996, p. 4).

According to Davies and Harre (1990), discourse exposes us to meta-narratives of political and historical ideologies that shape our lives. Participating in this discourse means using the technologies of communication and resources needed for meaningful engagement. For instance, ‘the larger realm of the “discourse of education” determines the kind of speech an educator can engage in on a daily basis and still be a part of that community’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 4). Therefore, when a beginning teacher embarks on the journey to become part of the teaching community, they embark on speaking the language that is endorsed by the larger realm of the discourse of education, which is entrenched in political, social and cultural meta-narratives. The beginning teacher signals they are ‘filling a social niche in a distinctively recognizable fashion’ (Gee, 2008, p. 61) and, therefore, socially earmarks and locates their identity. Within the discourse of the teaching community are theories and assumptions of ‘behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing’ (Gee, 2008).

Gee argues that these theories and assumptions are ‘usually taken for granted’ and they determine ‘what counts as a “normal” person and the “right” ways to think, feel, and behave’ (2008, p. 4). Mill (2004) refers to these theories and assumptions as highly regulated and actively regulating practice within discourse. According to Mill:

discourse as a whole consists of regulated discourse. Discursive rules and structures do not originate from socio-economic or cultural factors as such,
although they may be shaped by these factors; rather they are a feature of discourse itself and are shaped by the internal mechanisms of discourse and the relations between discourses. (2004, p. 44)

Discourse is filled with power relations and emphasises and showcases power stakeholders. According to Gee, ‘these theories crucially involve viewpoints on the distribution of “social goods” like status, worth, and material goods in society (who should and who shouldn’t have them)’ (2008, p. 4). These rules and structures shape our ways of being in the world and hence create our realities.

Foucault points out that our perception of realities is limited by discursive constraints (Foucault, 1977; Mills, 2004). A key argument of Foucault’s is how discourse influences our perception of reality within political and historical spheres. Power is present in discourse; it is enforced in the influence of discourse in that it creates particular discourse (Hiferty, 2008; Gee, 2008; Hall, 1996). Power is revealed through practice. These discourses ‘have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way that individuals act and think’ (Mills, 2004, p. 55). Foucault’s interest was in understanding this institutionalised force and discovering its supporting structures, which are discursive structures or ‘archives’, explained as a ‘set of rules at a given period and for a definite society defined by the limits and forms of expressibility; the limits and forms of conversation; and the limits and forms of reactivation’ (Foucault, 1978, pp. 14–15). These rules that are embedded in discourse regulate and limit people’s behaviours and actions.

One of the features of discourse is its exclusivity. Mills refers to this as the ‘difficulties of inserting oneself within a discourse’ (Mills, 2004, p. 57). Discourse has a way of making new entrants alienated. According to Foucault (1981), it has a way of identifying and signifying the new beginners. Foucault argues that an institution
Chapter Two

‘solmnizes beginnings, surrounds them with a circle of attention and silence and imposes ritualized forms on them, as if to make them more easily recognisable from a distance’ (1981, p. 51).

Building on this notion of discourse exclusivity, beginning teachers who are entering the profession are in the challenging position of constructing a social space for themselves within the school discourse. The entry into the discursive space of teaching suggests that beginning teachers embark on the process of (re)constructing a socially situated identity within other discourses. To participate and be fully recognised within this discourse, they engage in language and non-language activities that might align with teachers’ values or not. Some of the nuances and practices within this discourse are hidden and based on long-held assumptions that have been successfully passed down through history without critical questioning or interruption. Beginning teachers are then faced with the challenge of synchronising, navigating, negotiating or finding a middle ground between the socially situated identity as a teacher and their own personal identity. This then involves negotiating conflicting subject positions and responding to different cultural expectations of the preferred teacher and how teachers should be to create their own satisfying identity (Alsup, 2006).

Beginning teachers are thus faced with the challenge of being the ‘right kind of person’ in school contexts (Gee, 2008, p. 155). This right kind of person has been defined by the culture of ‘who a teacher is and should be’. This challenge is made complicated because for beginning teachers the process of identity (re)construction is not very obvious nor are they attuned to the process. The process of identity
(re)construction occurs subtly without them realising it (Hall, 1996). It starts with the basic process of identification. Becoming a teacher and developing a teacher identity is not an ‘all-at-once, once-and-for-all’ process (Gee, 2008, 161). The discourse notion sees identity as the process of ‘construction, a process never completed - always in process’ (Hall, 1996, p. 2).

Although entering into the discourse of teaching gives newly qualified teachers the social identity of teachers at a surface level because of the qualification they have acquired, they are still faced with being signified as new, as explained by Foucault (1981) earlier. There is the cultural discourse of the local school they need to fit into and where they need to demonstrate their capabilities. The need to understand the practices within the school distinguishes experienced teachers within the school. Engaging with the socially situated identity of being called teachers involves finding out for themselves how they will negotiate and create another identity based on that. It is the creation of this identity that I am mostly concerned with. The whole notion of identification involves recognising and sharing common ground with another, and then noticing the difference between oneself and the others. It is in noticing the differences that the desire to identify is birthed. As Hall argues, ‘identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside the ‘positive’ meaning of any term— and thus its ‘identity’ can be constructed’ (1996, p. 17).

Therefore, beginning teachers are faced with the politics of difference that separates them from others within the school. This negotiation of difference is what supports
their (re)construction of teacher identity. The discursive view of identity gives us the opportunity to conceive identity as a fluid and not a stable construct. It helps us to understand that identity (re)construction is a constellation of forces from the institutional environment and the core self of the individual within the environment. This raises the portrayal of interaction as a medium in which identity is being formed. If we say that the (re)construction of identity is mainly scripted by society, then we are relegating the power of self-determination by the individual; we are indirectly saying that the agent is powerless. Centralizing relationships in the discursive (re)construction of identity helps us to see that identity (re)construction is a two-way process and is contingent and constantly changing based on the context and level of self-reflexivity of the teachers.

2.3.4 Studies on Beginning Teachers’ Identity

Recent research studies have paid more attention to the significance of teacher identity development in teacher education programs (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Hoban, 2007; Sachs, 2005). These discussions have centred around the change in subject positions, or, as some have called it, the identity or subjectivity that teachers undergo when they transition from universities to schools. Although identity change continues as teachers interact within school cultures, few studies have paid attention to identity (re)construction in the first year of teaching.

The nature of teacher identity that is multifaceted and dynamic raises the problematic notion of developing a full understanding in the changing school contexts. Various researchers have discussed the challenges involved in attaining a fixed understanding of identity (Gee, 2001; Britzman, 2003; Sachs, 2005). In an attempt to understand its
dynamic nature, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) grouped research studies on teacher identity into six categories: notions of personal self-awareness and understanding; teachers’ narratives of themselves and their work; involvement in various discourses of teaching and learning; influence of contextual factors; teacher agency; and the place of emotion and reflection in shaping teacher identity. Although they pinpointed the overlap of these literatures in explaining teacher identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) suggested the need to incorporate these conceptual understandings in the development of teacher education programs to alleviate the challenges beginning teachers face in their first year.

Gee (2001) also described the multiple forms in which identity occurs and might be interpreted depending on contextual influences, among them: nature-identity, which is the personal self; institution-identity, derived from the influence of role and position within the institution and the recognised institutional norms; discourse-identity; and affinity-identity based. Again, this description emphasises the multiple and complex nature of identity (re)construction.

Instead of placing teacher identities into categories based on sociological, contextual, subject or occupational points of view, MacLure’s (1993, p. 316) report on teacher identity (re)construction grouped his participants’ views according to the beliefs that his research participants used to describe themselves. Their descriptions of identity claims seemed to be abstract and unstable in relation to the technical and non-technical aspects of their practice. MacLure then argued that identity is a ‘kind of argument’ and a ‘continuing site of struggle’ through which teachers ‘justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to other people, and to the contexts in which
they operate’ (p. 312). This suggests the ongoing nature and emphasises the relational feature of (re)constructing teacher identities. In exploring the concept of professional identity, Sachs (2005) deconstructed the notion of teacher identity as a fixed concept and explained how identities are constantly changing and undergoing active negotiations based on experience (past and present) and its interpretation. Britzman (2003) also argued that student teachers struggle to make sense of themselves in ‘contexts that are already overpopulated with the identities and discursive practices of others … Indeed, much of their time is taken up with negotiating, constructing, and consenting to their identity as a teacher’ (Britzman, 2003, p. 221).

In her discussion about pre-service teachers on learning to teach, Britzman (2003) argued that pre-service teachers are confronted with the pressure for identity and identification in rigid institutional structures that do not recognise them for who they want to be. Pre-service teachers are then faced with the struggle for a voice that is contained in the ‘biography of structure called schooling and a biography of learner’ (Britzman, 2003, p. 20). Britzman argued that learning to teach is a struggle for a voice that ‘contains and expresses institutional structures, biography, and emotions’ (p. 22).

In her discussion about student teachers, Britzman explained how past experience struggles for expression as the student teacher negotiates through present experiences. Britzman explored how teacher identities are constituted as student teachers in their school contexts and questioned how student teachers inherit their teacher identities (p. 26). Britzman’s ethnographic study showed how student teachers’ identity is strongly influenced by their lived contradictory realities of teaching. In focusing on the ways
beginning teachers’ identities are constructed by their past histories as students and school context and the relationships they form within the school context, there is the realisation that teacher identities are discursively understood. Although beginning teachers draw a lot from their experiences because of their many years of schooling, which is very important in teacher identity (re)construction, Britzman argued that there is danger in assuming that experience makes the teacher. She mentioned that treating experience as the sole determinant of teacher identity construction suggests that, ‘it is taken to order perception and guarantee essential truths’ (p. 30).

Britzman further explained that identity (re)construction, which is a struggle for voice, occurs as an internal argument within an individual as well as in relation to others. It ‘contains and expresses institutional structures, biography, and emotions … [identity (re)construction] is a struggle for narrative, not authenticity or adaptation into a pre-existing identity’ (p. 22). Employing MacLure’s (1993) notion of identity construction as a ‘kind of argument’ and ‘continuing site of struggle’ provides a better view of the narratives that teachers create out of their work to understand their practices. It suggests that teachers are continuously involved in a struggle with different aspects of their job—constraints and concerns within the context in which they operate, and they have to negotiate through these boundaries.

A further key discussion on teacher identity in the post-structural literature revolves around its narrative and discursive nature. New teachers’ narratives of selves, practice and school context show that teachers engage in different layers of discourse and this discourse shapes their lives and practice. Substantial evidence in the literature has shown that narratives and stories are important ways in which teachers explain
themselves in relation to their contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). In describing their narratives, teachers are involved in identity (re)construction. Both the narrative and expression of the narratives indicate identity creation. These stories usually provide multiple presentations and representations of their selves depending on their context.

The centrality of emotional experience in the development of teacher identity has also been argued by authors like Zembylas (2003) and Eraut (2004). Eraut (2004) argued the significance of the emotional dimension to beginning teachers’ work. It is what influences their actions and decisions regarding their teaching experience because emotions experienced during these times are recorded and locked into their (his)story of becoming a teacher. Identity (re)construction and emotions are interwoven, and informing and reforming each other (Zembylas, 2003; Lewis, 1999). According to Zembylas:

Identity formation opens up many possibilities for self-transformation and acknowledges the identity politics involved in the sense that a dynamic notion of identity can focus on aspects of change. This notion of identity formation that appears in post-structuralist accounts of emotion and identity lends insights into challenging the approaches suggesting that identities are ‘located’ in a specific ‘site’ alone. The underlying idea of these accounts lies in the notion that the singularity (i.e. unity), predictability, and stability of identity are illusions. (2003, p. 222)

Melucci (1996) also argued that identity is not stagnant nor an isolated concept, but is situated within the historical and political context. This understanding of identity suggests that its development depends on a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of selves, actions and past events within roles and trans-situational contexts. Through interpretation and re-evaluation, one’s identity is informed, reformed and formed as individuals change roles and move from one context to another. Kondo (1990), as
cited in Sachs (2001, p. 154), also supports the view of the instability of identity—he explained that identity is ‘negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended power laden enactment of those meanings in everyday situations’. This recognises the importance of the social context and individual beliefs on the (re)construction of identities. It also suggests that individuals could have multiple identities as they mediate different situations.

Sachs (1999) refers to professional identity in the teaching profession as comprising attributes that are imposed on teachers by society. This influences their beliefs, values and attitudes. Sachs (1999) explained that there are common practices and behaviours that are deeply ingrained in the teaching culture and have become identifying characteristics of teachers. These practices and beliefs are not usually developed by teachers themselves but by the societal expectation of what teaching and teachers should be. Teachers’ perceptions of their personal and professional identities are crucial. Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000) argued that teachers’ perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional development as well as their ability and willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their teaching practice. These perceptions of identities determine how teachers define and see themselves.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, Sachs (1999) argued that there are two types of identities that teachers embraced within the teaching culture: the entrepreneurial identity and the activist identity. This categorisation seems to come from an ideological perspective. This perspective is limited to the specific school culture, context and routines, whereas the bigger perspective looks at how the historical,
political and social contexts have shaped the identity construction of teachers. Beijaard (1995) also categorised the identity of teachers from a local perspective of the teachers’ subject matter, relationship with students and teachers’ conception of role.

The self (who you are) is very important because it is what the students engage with in their decision to learn or not learn. Students can easily decipher their teachers’ beliefs and assumptions about themselves (Romano, 2004; Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Beginning teachers make sense of their teaching and create their teaching styles through their personal prior experiences and socialisation into schooling. According to Bullough and Gitlin, ‘it is through these biographically embedded assumptions and beliefs, which are generally taken for granted and assumed to be natural and shared, that sense is made of … the world of teaching’ (2001, p. 12). By understanding self through exploring personal experiences and social interaction with others, we begin to understand the identity that is formed and how ‘social norms both delimit and embrace who we are and what we may become through our action’ (Cooper & Olson, 1996, p. 88).

Starting to teach presents continuing possibilities and impossibilities at the same time. As Britzman (2006, p. ix) suggested, it is a ‘borderland of limits and hopes’ that beginning teachers must pass through to determine what they make possible within their classrooms and local school contexts. Beginning teachers enter a different discourse when they start teaching; however, there are discourses that facilitate and support the development of teacher identities as well as hinder their development. The discourse that hinders development strongly enforces certain ways of doing things
without much room for new teachers’ personal initiatives and concerns. Alsup described borderland discourse as a ‘discourse in which there is evidence of integration or negotiation of personal and professional selves’ (2006, p. xiii).

Although there have been researchers who have argued that beginning teachers denigrate their personal selves in preference for professional lives when transitioning from being a student to a teacher, there have been many challenges for beginning teachers to combine both selves because they do not see the link between the two subjectivities. Alsup (2006) argued that beginning teachers do not necessarily need to abandon their personal selves. She developed a theoretical framework for understanding teacher identity construction of pre-service teachers and argued that constructing a satisfying teacher identity involved a connection of both personal and professional selves. Alsup argued:

> It is at the discourse borderlands, and by association at the borders of various subjectivities or sense of self, that pre-service teachers can discover how to move from being students to being teachers, and can learn how to embody a workplace professional teacher identity without satisfying personal priorities and passions. (2006, pp. xii–xiv)

Alsup (2006) raised a series of questions on the challenges student teachers face when they see the difference between who they are and what is accepted within the school environment (that celebrates conformity over non-conformity). The transition process from student to teacher involves repositioning new teachers in their new work environment and in relation to their students, school culture and other colleagues within the school (Day, Kington, Stobart & Simmons, 2006).

Nias’ (1989) research within primary school contexts showed the conflicting tensions teachers face between institutional practices that control student learning to meet
public policies, professional standards and the moral values ingrained in authentic teaching of children. Her work provided a basis for understanding how the personal often interacts with the professional and how institutional structures often influence identity construction. Although she argued for stable selves, she showed that the fluctuating institutional environment in which teachers work is highly influential in the creation of teachers’ ‘work identities’ (p. 605).

Beijaard’s (1995) research study across 28 secondary schools in the Netherlands revealed that the subjects taught by teachers had a strong influence on their professional identity development. Beijaard’s study has contributed immensely to the understanding of teacher identity in the literature. This research showed how teacher identity is influenced through teachers’ relationship and interaction with students, subject status and the influence of the school context. Beijaard also found that subject type and status strongly affected the development of the teacher’s professional identity. He particularly emphasised that teaching less popular subjects or having a changed subject status negatively affected teacher identities.

Day et al. (2006) classified the structure of the context in which teachers work into macro-, meso- and micro-structures. Instead of engaging in the fragmented discussion of professional and personal identities, these researchers explored the link between these three levels and how they operate within school contexts. There are different factors influencing teacher identity, which cannot be compartmentalised into professional and personal, but overlap and interconnect in their influence on the teacher and teacher’s work. One factor is the context in which teachers work.
Cooper and Olson (1996) explored the multi-levelled layers of teacher identity and their multiple representations depending on their context. They emphasised that identity construction is a process and explored the different aspects that contributed to teacher identity development. Their study showed that teachers have ‘multiple selves’ that are constituted and (re)constructed through historical, cultural, sociological and psychological influences, which eventually generate tensions for pre-service teachers. Cooper and Olson (1996) also argued that pre-service teachers are engaged in competing tensions between their past and present experiences and they are engaged in a continuous process of interpreting and re-interpreting their experiences. In the process of resolving these competing tensions, teachers are shaped by these tensions, their actions also shape the tensions and there are multiple identities that emerge. The importance of Cooper and Olson’s work is the significance they placed on the influence of the past on the present and how a ‘prescribed role’ within the school dominates teachers’ personal voices, values and multiple identities.

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, I have defined identity (re)construction as the process of ‘becoming’ in the discursive space of teaching. It is the difference in relation to the other with the motive of becoming like the other in a social space. The forming of an identity is always relative to something or someone else. Understanding identity (re)construction involves understanding how beginning teachers think they fit in their relationship with meaningful others in their social spaces - their colleagues, students, parents and local community. Identity is relational; thus, the identity formed in these social spaces is relational. This aspect will be discussed in Chapter Six.
Discursive (re)construction of teacher identity is the way of behaving and acting within the role of teaching that helps in the (re)construction and co-creation of teacher identity for beginning teachers. Discourses are hidden practices and texts. These discourses co-interact to produce other forms and frames that construct the identity of a teacher. Within these new discourses are preferred roles that have been scripted and the challenge for beginning teachers is to conform to these scripted roles. There are discursive practices of what is accepted and normal in the socio-political environment in which they are being produced or replicated. The teacher’s identity resides in how they, as the subject of their activity system, make sense of their role within that system and how they act within it. Employing a discursive (re)construction of teacher identity allows us to better understand how power relations and emotions are at the centre of their construction and negotiation of these discourses and identity.

Some of the discourses within the discursive space of teaching that will be discussed in the analysis chapters (Four, Five and Six) are school culture, professional expectations, recognition and acceptance of beginning teachers, past experiences of schooling, and the complex role of teaching and relationships. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology and particular methods employed in carrying out this research, including its theoretical framework and design.
3 CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY
3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my thesis. In the first part of this chapter, I acknowledge the importance of being reflexively aware of my position as a researcher and of locating myself in a specific theoretical practice. In doing so, my beliefs, values and struggles are deeply implicated in this section. In the second part, I examine the methodological premise of critical ethnography by looking at various ways theorists have defined it and its features. The definition of critical ethnography as it relates to this research and its features are explored. In the third part, which is the undertaking of critical ethnography, I present my experience of using critical ethnography, research design, methods, participants’ selection, making connections with my participants, purposeful conversations as way of collecting data, data analysis and ethical considerations.

I have located this work within a broader framework of competing discourse in relation to the influence of the cultural and political landscape on my research. In regards to political issues, critical ethnography has given me the tools for exploring and understanding the voices of beginning teachers, which I contend are mostly silenced and unheard within the bigger frame of school politics and societal expectations (Smyth, 2005; Smyth, 2006). Critical research in education is particularly concerned with ‘mapping and understanding cultural spaces and practices around teachers and students’ in synergy with their lived realities within their social milieu (Smyth, 2005, p. 152). The major epistemological advantage in adopting a critical approach to ethnography is that I am able to capture participants’ views of their experiences and acknowledge that research participants have agency and can change or be liberated from institutional discursive practices/structures.
The flexibility of this research design, which a critical approach to qualitative research allows, has helped me to take account of the ‘multiple nature of reality, the close relationship of researcher to the researched, and the personal approach to writing the narrative’ in the process of conducting this research (Creswell, 2009, p. 73). Therefore, I am able to combine the methodological practice of critical ethnography and purposeful conversations as a way of understanding how beginning teachers might negotiate and (re)construct their teacher identities.

### 3.2 Reflexive Awareness of My Position As a Researcher

Researchers have epistemological beliefs they bring into the research (Schram, 2003) which significantly determine positionalities within the broader theoretical and philosophical discourse (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). These epistemological beliefs are influenced by values, beliefs, assumptions and prior experiences (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003) which in turn influence worldviews and significantly affect the way research studies are conducted (Barab, Thomas, Dodge, Squire & Newell, 2004). The degree of importance placed on the researcher’s values and beliefs or assumptions drives the choice of the theoretical framework and methodological process a researcher adopts in inquiry (Caelli et al., 2003; Schram, 2003). These subjectivities in a way influence the research process, the research questions asked, themes particularly noticed during data collection and analysis, and the researcher’s interpretation of the information collected (Pierce, 1995).

Creswell (2003) describes the importance for a qualitative researcher, like myself, to carefully reflect and be aware of the influence of biography, values and assumptions as they shape the research design and process. In understanding the influence of
personal beliefs on research design, Schram (2003) advocates for clear articulation and presentation of such beliefs. Therefore, in this discussion, I describe my beliefs, philosophies, assumptions and positionality that have influenced the process of this research.

My experiences of primary and secondary schooling, university education and learning to teach as a beginning teacher have equipped me with the insights of what teaching and learning involve. These experiences have led me to have a particular interest in developing a better understanding of beginning teachers’ lives, how they learn and develop in schools, how they define and engage in what is possible in their teaching lives, and their critical awareness of socio-cultural impacts on their lives and teaching. In addition, my own socialisation as a teacher provided me with the following set of epistemological relationships between practice, research and theory: the need to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers within a larger, social, political and economic context; the importance of valuing the researched in the research process, that is, the stories and experiences; and the importance and power of the researcher, and because of this, the need to examine, articulate and critique my role in the research process.

This has led me to think about what is actually possible for these teachers, considering my theoretical awareness of discursive practices and institutional histories that affect teachers’ lives. As a result, I have reorganised my thoughts of who I am as a researcher as being influenced by what I do and what I have done. Kincheloe stated that ‘what we see as researchers is shaped by particular worldviews, values, political perspectives, conceptions of race, class and gender relations’ (1995, p. 210). In the
process of organising my thoughts as a researcher and recognising familiar past experiences, I have faced different struggles and tensions. These include: the struggles of challenging dominant socially constructed images, stories and practices; the journey of rescripting the stories of what is normal; the struggles of taking ownership, critically reflecting on how I have come to be who I am; and what is considered appropriate for this research. It is a mix of personal battles, forging research identity and creating boundaries of mindscapes that others have politically and historically invaded. Being aware of these struggles, I have come into this research with a reflexive mindset that is prepared to see and accept themes and concepts emerging from the data that might have no direct structural relationship with my own past experiences due both to individual differences and to changes in beginning teachers’ socio-cultural environments.

An important tool used in critical ethnography is critical reflexivity (Anderson, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Smyth & Shacklock, 1998). This is the ability of the researcher to engage in reflection on their position as a researcher and on the dialectical relationship between data and theory. Critical reflexivity is defined as a ‘conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of the research itself’ (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p. 278). This ‘conscious experiencing’ of myself has forced me to come to terms with examining the way I come to know what I know and has helped me to examine the multiple selves, including the researcher self, I brought into the research field. I realise that being critically reflexive helps me to become aware, and it helps me to get into the place where I ask the ‘why’ question frequently. For in being reflexive, I turn the lens back on myself and put myself in the centre of
representation. My hope is that, by being critically reflexive of my position as a researcher and writer within this (critical ethnographic) study, my awareness of the worldviews, changes in my ideologies and changes in the way I see the world will help me to be more alert in recognising silences and be open to seeing patterns in my participants’ stories of their experiences as teachers.

Critical reflexivity is not only something I engage with in theory; it has been employed at every stage of the research process from proposal to writing the final draft. As a researcher and writer, I have undergone several changes; for example, my theoretical orientation and my methodological choice have changed. My experience of becoming a beginning teacher was what inspired me to research beginning teachers’ work. With the high number of beginning teachers exiting the system, and my highly palpable experience of the struggles of becoming a teacher, it felt like more needed to be done in this area. Of the research studies conducted on beginning teachers, many have reported on the problems beginning teachers experience and encounter. However, it felt like there was a lot unsaid about beginning teachers’ positive experiences in their first year. Further, there were no stories about beginning teachers who had challenged the status quo and created gentle disruption. It was a rude silence.

I began asking myself questions about beginning teachers who, like myself, were experiencing the struggles of becoming teachers. I was surprised with the literature based on individualised notions of beginning teachers, which portrayed them as problematic. I was also surprised that the social discourse that influenced how teachers view themselves as teachers was usually abandoned. I felt these research studies were not giving a complete picture of what was truly affecting teachers, such
as competing influences that shape beginning teachers’ work. Thus, when I initiated this research, my aim was to uncover the experiences of these beginning teachers and identify the social structures that impinge on their work and how they are able to struggle against some of these social structures and formative experiences. I wanted to uncover what these teachers were really saying and to examine the social factors embedded in their experiences.

Given the study’s research questions and aims, recognising and being reflexive about my position was integral for a deeper understanding of the research process. By being open and transparent about my position as a critical researcher, I was able to see the various influences, including my worldviews, on the research process. In finer detail, understanding my position helped me to take ownership of my own identity and be confident in who I am, which gave me the courage to critically engage in exploring wider connections and patterns in teachers’ stories.

At the heart of this research is the belief that teachers actively construct individual meanings from the various discourses available to them. These discourses are located in their social and cultural contexts. We as social actors define social reality by our experiences and social structures embedded in both our past and present stories. My definition of social reality is not devoid of political nuances. There is enough evidence that suggests knowledge is not produced in a vacuum. This, therefore, means that meaning is not discovered, but is actively constructed through the interaction of people and their context. I thus take the position that experience and theory have implicitly and explicitly informed the research questions I have asked in this research study.
Chapter Three

Theories and past research studies have influenced my assumptions, methods of data collection and the approaches employed to carry out this research. In turn, my personal experience with the research participants and the questions asked from data collected have influenced my interpretation, analysis and conclusions of the research study. Underpinning my choice of research methodology is my valuing of indepth information and my focus on hearing voices and authentic stories of beginning teachers’ experiences. It is important to emphasise that since teachers’ experiences are socially constructed, their views of teacher identity would be embedded in such (re)construction. Their experiences are based on how they see the world, which is influenced by beliefs, values, assumptions, prior experiences and expectations.

The methodological choice of the researcher is important. It explains the theories that have foregrounded the conduct of the research study and suggests the research methods that have been used in conducting this research. Patton (2002), Creswell (1998) and Crotty (1998) argue the need for a good methodological framework for answering the questions the researcher seeks to answer, which is consistent with the researcher’s worldviews and assumptions. In this research study, employing critical ethnography as a methodological approach reaches into my understanding of human knowledge as imbued with both individual and social experiences. I understand human knowledge as constantly being shaped and guided by surrounding structures and human forces. It particularly helps me in capturing the richness and complexity of each beginning teacher’s experiences, which helps me explore the values embedded in their lived stories of being in schools. Of particular interest was the participants’ description of their experiences in relation to events and societal structures within school and society.
According to Smyth (2006), ethnographic studies in education help to reveal the underlying meanings and assumptions behind people’s accounts of their experiences. Ethnography also engages me in a relationship with research participants and gives me a sense of awareness and understanding of the influences on and meaning inherent in this relationship. In general, I believe critical ethnography provides me with interpretive and flexible tools that help me in exploring beginning teachers’ cultural experiences in depth. These descriptions of their experiences show the influence and interrelatedness of factors in the context being studied. By unravelling the complex interrelationships surrounding beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction, and the influence of their personal histories as they negotiate and mediate meanings in their current school context (Anderson, 1989), I am able to interrogate discourse and social structures affecting the process of becoming a teacher. In the next section, I first explore conventional ethnography and then focus on critical ethnography as a methodological choice for this study.

### 3.3 Critical Ethnography

Emanating from anthropology, ethnography has become an established methodology in social research (Forsey, 2007; Patton, 2002; Willis & Trondman, 2000), albeit in a proliferation of contemporary forms of research methodologies. These contemporary forms find their roots in post-positivism, postmodernism and post-structuralism (Denzin & Linclon, 2000; Lather, 2001; Patton, 2002), of which critical ethnography is an example. Ethnography considers participants’ description of their experiences in depth and quality. In the original tradition of ethnography, which stems from anthropology, it is normal that the context and culture of participants be consistently and conscientiously studied (Forsey, 2007). It involves the researcher actively
engaging in the daily activities of the participants in order to study them (Walters, 2007). Conventional ethnography within the interpretivist research tradition offers the opportunity for studying people’s lives in their own time and space (Tedlock, 2000). Connecting the personal to the cultural accurately points to the important mission of ethnography. Ethnography provides general accounts of participants’ experiences that are descriptive and narrative in nature.

Creswell defines ethnography as ‘a description and interpretation of a social group or system’ (1998, p. 58). These accounts are descriptions of social structures and constructions that shape and consistently maintain people’s worldviews of their social experiences. Burawoy (1991) defines ethnography as the intensive studying of people in their natural habitats. The underlying assumption of ethnography is that regular interaction between groups of people develops into culture, and studying the culture is salient to understanding the people (Patton, 2002). In a response to the question ‘What is ethnography for us?’, Willis and Trondman emphasise the importance and the significance of experience by referring to the ‘irreducibility of human experience’ (2000, p. 3). They further suggested that ‘understanding and representation of experience … both empirically and theoretically’ is important to ethnographic studies (p. 3).

It seems apparent from the above definitions that one central feature of ethnography is the study of the experience of individuals within a culture of an organisation, a community, a country, a family or a school, to mention a few. Experience is the building base for the coordination of any form of ethnographic research. These experiences have ‘symbolic forms, patterns, discourse and practices which help to
form it and give it shape, so that the ethnographic enterprise is about presenting, explaining and analysing the culture’ that is located in past historical ‘structures and trends’ of humanly created forces (Willis & Trondman, 2000, p. 6). These experiences are realities created by participants based on their self-perception of themselves, of the world around them, and of their influence in the world they act in.

Although the traditions of ethnography allow exploration of the experiences of individuals within cultures and the different elements in their culture, Robertson argue that the ‘crux of conventional ethnography simply describes problematic societal breakdowns, instead of providing theory which might create paradigmatic shift’ (2005, p. 6). Critical ethnography, however, provides the tools to analyse power relations inherent in peoples’ experiences and gives the promise that human beings can change their world, and make the ‘paradigmatic’ shift to resist intimidation, domination of any form of disempowering discourse and discursive practices (Giroux, 1988b; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Wexler, 1983). Critical ethnography enables me to consider the context, social practices, structures and norms that were interwoven into beginning teachers’ stories. I will now discuss critical ethnography and the features that attracted me to it.

3.3.1 Definition of Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography emerged primarily out of a desire to change oppressive cultural situations and as a response to the need to understand the symbolic structural and historical forces that shape human experiences. It developed in a bid to understand and address forms of social injustice and hegemonies in society (Giroux, 1988b; Korth, 2002; McLaren, 1994). According to Madison, critical ethnography evolved from
critical social theory, which developed from ‘a tradition of “intellectual rebellion” that includes radical ideas challenging regimes of power that changed the world’ (2005, p. 13). The point of difference between critical ethnography and conventional ethnography is the word ‘critical’, which found its roots in critical theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000) and informs the practice of critical ethnography. It is a definite and intended move away from empirical science (objectivism enquiry) to politics (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994), a shift ‘away from the interests of the ethnographic self and toward a concern for altering the material conditions that determine the lived realities of the other’ (Brown & Dobrin, 2004, p. 3). It is a move to the political, historical and structural conditions that define the lived realities of individuals, especially the suppressed voices.

As a research methodology, critical ethnography has only recently become accepted as part of mainstream research (Korth, 2002), and many scholars have not agreed on many of the fundamental issues related to the field (Carspecken, 1996). Whereas many social science researchers have not agreed with the critical perspective of critical ethnography (Erickson, 1986; Hammerness, 2001), numerous authors have endorsed a critical ethnography approach, including researchers in the business management and nursing fields (Cook, 2005; Herdman, 2000). It attempts to investigate the ‘lived realities of human beings and the conditions informing both the construction and possible transformation of these realities’ (Dilorio, 1982, pp. 22–23, cited by Anderson, 1989, p. 254). Jordan and Yeoman argue that the difference between conventional ethnography and critical ethnography is the ‘critical analysis’ of the ‘actuality of everyday world’ (1995, p. 398). This definition of critical ethnography overhauls the conventional notion of ethnography as describing social
experiences by ‘supplying it with additional perspectives, principally historical and structural that alter the ethnographic project toward one which supports an emancipatory as well as hermeneutic concern’ (Simon & Dippo, 1986, p. 201).

Thus critical ethnography aims to do more than maintain and validate the status quo or social order. It is not only the description of the social status or of the problems beginning teachers encounter that is important in this research, but also the cultural, political and historical influences that have shaped their experiences of teaching. Critical researchers, such as Koro-Ljungberg and Greckhamer (2005), have argued that narrative descriptions of cultures are not enough in a world that is constantly bombarded with political mandates and prescription of dominant interests. For researchers who want more than a mere description of the reinforcement of social orders and status, critical ethnography moves beyond the descriptive borders to change actions and challenge prevalent ideologies. In my research, this entails interrogating seemingly rational issues surrounding beginning teachers’ identity and work and critiquing the myriads of influences that shape, promote and maintain such experiences (Smyth, Angus, Down & McInerney, 2006). This critical approach allows me as a researcher to move beyond describing general issues that continue the prevailing social organisation of the teaching profession and offer a reworking of the conceptualisation of beginning teachers’ learning and process of becoming teachers.

3.3.2 Features

Theorists of critical ethnography have identified certain necessary conditions for and features of critical ethnographic studies. Simon and Dippo claim that critical ethnographic work ‘must employ an organizing problematic that defines one’s data
and analytical procedures in a way consistent with the project’ (1986, p. 197). This
organising problematic is similar to Willis and Trondman’s ‘recognition of the role of
theory, as a precursor, medium and outcome of ethnographic study and writing’
(2000, p. 7) in their description of the features of ethnography.

The second feature of critical ethnographic work is locating the research work within
a larger and broader social domain that ‘allows it to become the starting point for the
critique and transformation of the conditions of oppressive and inequitable moral and
social regulation’ (Simon & Dippo, 1986, p. 197). This provides opportunity for a
critique of social structures that advocate injustice and silencing of the less privileged.
This fits with Willis and Trondman’s emphasis on the ‘centrality of culture’ (2000, p.
8) and ‘cultural policy and politics’ (p. 10) in critical ethnography. Critical
ethnographic studies of societies and individuals reveal dominant social structures and
their interests, and unveil the hegemonies within the different classes of the society
(Anderson, 1989).

The third condition for critical ethnographic work is that it must acknowledge its own
limitations, including that it has been framed and compounded by past and prevalent
political ideologies (Simon & Dippo, 1986). History influences and shapes the way we
think and act. Critical ethnography enables reflexive researchers to distance
themselves by recognising the influence of historical and socially constructed realities
on people’s experiences and constructions of reality. During the course of my data
collection phase (purposeful conversations), the place of critical ethnography in the
study became very clear from beginning teachers’ responses. The thematic issues
emerging from beginning teachers needed more critical tools to interpret the complex,
Chapter Three

interrelated issues articulated. Therefore, a critical approach to ethnography was employed to explore the different shades of complexity in this research study. Critical ethnography provides the tools for examining the conditions that birthed the beliefs, norms and actions within cultures, and how historical, political relationships have shaped the culture of beginning teachers.

In addition to the three conditions emphasised by Simon and Dippo (1986), Barab et al. (2004), in their critical ethnography design, enumerated some basic elements, which in my own view integrate the pieces of a critical ethnographic study. Barab et al. (2004) mentioned the role of ‘people’, ‘power’ and ‘praxis’ as distinguishing features of critical research studies that are participatory and emancipatory.

Critical ethnographic research involves people and experiences of people within situated contexts, which provide the basis for critical enquiry. Critical ethnography looks into the description of participants’ experiences and deconstructs them in order to (re)construct their underlying hidden forces. Critical ethnography provides the tools for critiquing multiple realities as defined by cultural groups, which, according to Foley, are “‘inherited” and continually constructed and (re)constructed as they are lived or practised’ (2002, p. 472). The issue of power as a key feature in critical ethnography study cannot be overemphasised; in critical ethnography, power is evident in the experiences of the participants, in the relationship of the participants with their experiences, and the relationship between the participants and the researcher.

Apple defines critical ethnography as an orientation, which ‘seeks to show how a critical stance on the nature of power in this society has been wedded to a process of
Critical ethnography questions the flow of power and challenges the assumptions that reinforce the domination of people as taken for granted realities. Critical ethnography seeks to answer the questions of why, why not and how, and through analysis provides a framework of possible alternatives. The aim is to critique the status quo and create changes in the ideological thinking of individuals within the cultural environment. Critical ethnography delves beyond the ordinary description of cultural relations to an analysis of factors that shape cultural relations. As culture is an essential aspect for critical ethnography to happen, it is important to explain my understanding of culture as employed in this context.

The term culture usually refers to a certain group of people with a similar style of living, which is influenced by norms and social dispositions (Patton, 2002). For the purpose of this research, the meaning of culture needs to be expanded beyond its normal, accepted territorial understanding. I think of culture less in terms of school culture or teachers’ norms and practices within the school environment. Rather, I understand culture more in terms of individuals in similar contexts sharing similar norms pertaining to a social group, with similar attitudes, ways of thinking or something common that binds them together in their different contexts. Eisenhart defines cultures as ‘public symbols’ that shape individuals’ ‘representations of themselves and others’ (2001, p. 21).

This definition of culture allows us to stretch our imaginations as researchers to include research participants who are connected through public symbols or ‘symbolic tokens’, as defined by Burawoy (2000, p. 3). It allows us to search for relationships
that ‘stretch out in time and space’ (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 22) but are bound and connected by similar social activities such as professions and cultural forms of language. Nespor argues that:

Instead of looking at educational settings … as having clear boundaries and identifiable contents, I look at them as extensive in space and time, fluid in form and content; as intersections of multiple networks shaping cities, communities, schools, pedagogies, and teacher and student practices … I want to give school its due, but not on its own terms—to treat it not as the focus of study but as a point of entry … to the study of economic, cultural, and political relations shaping curriculum, teaching and kids’ experiences. (1997, p. xiii)

Thus, instead of using a school as a focus of study and researching a single site, I have employed it as a point of entry to understand how beginning teachers’ identities are constructed. Nespor’s quotation points to the relationality and fluidity of culture. This, however, shifts ethnography from a focus on culture in a single site to a focus on each teacher in multiple sites, wherein I am able to examine and consider how discursive practices in the school influenced beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction. In this case, the explanation of culture above justifies my choice of not using a single site, allowing me to use multiple sites for the study because there was only one beginning teacher in each school. The sites used were five different public schools, with one beginning teacher in each school. The connections among these sites are the public symbols- the professional teaching practice of beginning teachers and the experience of the first year of teaching working in a similar school context—public schooling. The critical perspective of critical ethnography has given me tools for exploring the unique experience of each beginning teacher as they engage in similar social practices and discourse.
3.4 Undertaking Critical Ethnography

The discussion on critical ethnography in the first part of this chapter established the theoretical component of the methodology for this study. I employed a critical ethnographic methodology to study beginning teachers’ lived experiences of (re)constructing teacher identity in their first year of teaching. Adopting critical ethnographic methodology in this research has helped to generate narratives present in the actual realities of everyday lives of beginning teachers (Anderson, 1989; Simon & Dippo, 1986). At the heart of this research design is the voluntary participation of beginning teachers and their willingness to share their genuine stories of teaching in their first year.

Within social science research and specifically in the field of education, a number of different research methods could have been employed to address this study’s research questions (Patton, 2002). One possible approach might have been direct observation of beginning teachers in their classrooms, schools and professional development workshops. However, practical constraints limited the use of this method because the teachers who participated in this research were in different schools and the schools were located in different suburbs. Also, sensitivity towards beginning teachers’ early career phase, wherein they are trying to understand their workplace and build their professional lives, was one of the reasons for not using this method. Wunner (1997) and Manuel (2002) describe the early period of beginning to teach as daunting and overwhelming because of the need to understand new tasks and new school cultures. Thus, understanding their conditions, and considering that observing these teachers might interrupt and interfere in the process of acculturation and socialisation of these teachers, I decided against doing observation.
Another possible approach I considered was asking beginning teachers to write journals on their process of becoming. Indeed, some of the teachers provided a few pages of reflection during the year, which was used as a resource during our purposeful conversation. However, the work overload and administrative complexities precluded them from conscientiously engaging in journal writing. Having considered these possible research methods, and based on my research aims and methodology, I chose to pursue purposeful conversations (an informal kind of interview) and narrative portraits as the most appropriate research methods for this study. Document analysis of the researcher’s reflective notes coupled with general observations during conversations was also used to gather data for this study.

3.4.1 Choosing and Engaging Research Participants

With no privileged access to schools, my recruitment of study participants began with conversations with education students in their last year of university education, university-based coordinators of professional learning courses for beginning teachers, and coordinators of the Professional Learning Institute (PLI), an arm of the WA Department of Education. Emails were sent to graduating students in their last semester inviting them to participate in this research. Posters were placed at strategic places within the School of Education at an Australian university, requesting the voluntary participation of graduating teachers in a one-year research project. Some of the graduating students signified positive interests in participating in the research, so contact details were collected and a prospective list was compiled. However, it was difficult to depend on these interested participants because there were no guarantees they would receive job placements for the next year.
Then, I explored the opportunity of an organisation centred on delivering professional development programs for beginning teachers. I had a meeting with the coordinator of the professional learning and development program for beginning teachers in 2005. At that time, she was researching successful approaches to retaining beginning teachers within the educational sector and the kind of professional programs needed by teachers; meeting her was timely. She invited me to observe the pilot stages of the Professional Learning and Development (PL &D) project, which included workshops attended by beginning teachers who were already halfway through their first year of teaching. Discussions with these teachers made me aware of the current issues of beginning teachers, such as a lack of orientation programs, huge teaching workloads, and problems with the implementation of curriculum framework and designing OBE for students, from which I developed a list of themes for my participants.

I piloted my questions by discussing these themes with those beginning teachers who had started teaching. I used a framework for purposeful conversations, in which I asked questions about their teaching, experience of teaching and especially about whether the professional development workshops they had attended helped them in their work. I realised that teachers’ responses were focused mostly on the beginning aspects of becoming a teacher. They talked about professional development workshops that were useful. They had attended only a few workshops because of their school workload. The pilot phase gave insight into the paramount issues that these teachers grappled with. I learnt about the kind of questions that generated more discussion from them. I familiarised myself with the practical realities of interviewing as well as learning that open-ended questions were very important. Thus, I employed
open-ended questions in purposeful conversations with research participants, being present in the conversations and listening attentively to the participants.

In January 2006, I attended a two-day conference organised by the PLI for beginning teachers who had received job placements and were commencing their first year of teaching. It was an opportunity for me to promote my research to the teachers. I introduced my research project to the teachers at the conference by visiting all the groups at the conference and interacting with them on a one-to-one basis. At the end of the two-day conference, 30 teachers had registered their interest in participating in the research and their contact details were collected. These teachers were officially sent emails, letters and follow-up phone calls. From this list, five beginning teachers who had secured teaching positions in Perth, WA, were recruited for the study.

The five beginning teachers were purposively selected because they expressed enthusiasm and willingness to participate and commit their time to the research project. These teachers were also chosen based on their job locations in low socio-economic public schools where they commenced teaching in the first term of 2006. Brief descriptions of the teachers are presented in Table 3.1 following, and a detailed portrait of each beginning teacher and each school is presented in the last section of this chapter. Both the teachers and the schools have been given fictional names for confidentiality purposes.

As a means of building rapport with the teachers, I contacted them to reacquaint them with my research and motivation for examining how they (re)construct their teacher identities. I explained the research method (purposeful conversation), the duration of the study, and discussed suitable times and venues. At this meeting, permission to
record conversations was obtained from the participants. The introductory discussion was not one-way; beginning teachers were encouraged to identify with the project and to discuss issues pertaining to them. To familiarise myself with each school, I then visited teachers in their school setting. This increased my understanding of the content and context of teachers’ views, as recommended by Creswell (2003). My own familiarity with issues relating to beginning teachers, both as a young teacher undergoing similar experiences and as a researcher, was an advantage. This at-home-ness was a critical factor in preparing and conducting this study but it was not enough to sustain the research relationships and outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning teachers</th>
<th>Name of school</th>
<th>Estimated age</th>
<th>Position title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lok</td>
<td>Olivewood Senior High School</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>English teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Forestville Senior High School</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Drama and physical education teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jemma</td>
<td>Bold Edge Community College</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Middle school teacher (maths and science)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliff</td>
<td>Lifton Senior High School</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Ivy College</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Middle school teacher (maths and science)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.2 Purposeful Conversations —An Informal Kind of Interview

Interviewing is a well-established method in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998) and regarded as highly effective in eliciting detailed empirical information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Heyl 2001; Patton, 2002; Scheurich, 1997). Qualitative interviews ‘owe a major debt to cultural anthropology where interviews have been traditionally conducted on site’ (Heyl, 2001, p. 369). Conventional interviews are usually one-on-one and face-to-face and are designed to be used along with observations in lengthy
field studies. Although there are contemporary forms of interviewing in qualitative research - such as purposeful conversations, focus-group interviews, survey interviews, phone interviews and internet interviews - the common purpose of these interviews, both conventional and contemporary, is to find out interviewees’ experiences or descriptions of their experiences (Heyl 2001; Scheurich, 1997).

According to Heyl, qualitative interviews have been increasingly employed because of the ‘desire to hear from people directly how they interpret their experiences’ (2001, p. 370). Patton defines an interview as a process of finding out ‘what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories’ (2002, p. 341). Heyl also expands on the definition of interviews within ethnographic studies to include ‘genuine exchange of views, enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their world’ (2001, p. 369). These definitions provide a basis for understanding interviews as a conceptual process of ‘getting to know’ the perspectives of others and entering their worlds. Patton explains that the purpose of qualitative interviews is to ‘capture how those being interviewed view their world … learn their terminology and judgments, and … the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences’ (2002, p. 348). This, however, suggests the underlying assumption of interviews, which is that interviewees can express themselves and that their stories are important.

To build on this conception of interviews as gathering perspectives of others, I chose purposeful conversations as a method in my research. Lincoln and Guba describes another form of interviewing as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (1985, p. 268). It is a ‘form of conversation in which issues can be discussed and explored’ (Savenye &
Robinson, 1996, p. 1182) in a purposeful way. It means interchange and production of views (Kvale, 1996) in which issues of interest can be shared and the researcher is ‘free to go where the data and the respondents lead’ (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The researcher is aware of his or her ‘role in the co-construction of meaning during the interview process’ (Heyl 2001, p. 370), and the researcher ‘realistically acknowledges that power is shared in meaning construction’ (Smyth et al., 2006, p. 136).

Instead of using interviews, Burgess (1988) advocates ‘conversations with a purpose’ as a better way of understanding the worldviews and stories of participants being researched. Burgess argue that purposeful conversations go beyond the ‘static’ and ‘detached’ nature of conventional interviews (1988, p. 138) to ‘establish relationships with teachers by developing the art of conversation’ (p. 139). These conversations allow teachers ‘space to talk’ (p. 144) and get them to ‘talk in a personal way’ (p. 150), thereby providing more robust and insightful information about the research questions. Purposeful conversations are ‘designed to provide an opportunity for teachers to talk about their work in their own words, using their own concepts rather than in an abstract way or in response to a set of staccato questions’ (p. 144). As there is freedom for the conversation to be guided by the participants, both the participants and the researcher connect at a deeper level and in return meanings behind the silences and hesitations can be explored. Smyth et al., arguing in support of purposeful conversations, ‘acknowledge that the reality is that researchers and informants co-construct meaning in and through conversations that have a loosely defined but nevertheless negotiated intent’ (2006, p. 136).
A major feature of purposeful conversation is the power dynamics that occur between the researcher and the participants. Purposeful conversations do away with the researcher exerting power over the participants because they come up with the questions that the participants answer. Smyth and Hattam (2001) argued that instead of focusing on extracting information from participants, purposeful conversation is more participatory and reverses power dimensions, unlike interviews where the interviewer has the power to determine appropriate answers to the pre-formulated interview questions. In purposeful conversations, there is an open display and confirmation that participants have the power to influence the direction of their conversations. If confidence is given to the participants in a way that they can decide where they want the discussion to head towards, a situation of trust and rapport is developed where participants can reveal what is real for them.

Conventional interviews have particular protocols and limitations that prevent participants from totally expressing themselves. Some of what occurs in an interview is verbal and some is non-verbal. Some only occurs within the mind of each participant (interviewer or interviewee), but it may ‘affect the entire interview’ (Scheurich, 1997, p. 67). Due to the emphasis, intonation and non-verbal gestures of interviews, interaction is complexly intertwined in such a way that ‘what a question or answer means to the researcher can easily mean something different to the interviewee. What a question or answer means to the researcher may change over time. What a question or answer means to the interviewee may similarly change’ (Scheurich, 1997, p. 62) or meanings may not be shared. There is the possibility of this occurring in purposeful conversation but because of the opportunity to reflect in and after the conversations, purposeful conversations help both the researcher and
beginning teachers to be engaged in the present and be critically reflexive of the stories being shared.

Understanding the social context and developing a basis for a relationship is important. Sometimes the interviewee may not find the right words to express themselves and therefore will compromise their meaning for the sake of expediency. There may be incidences of dominance and resistance over large or small issues. There may be monologues. There may be times when one participant is talking about one thing but thinking about something else. A participant may be saying what they think they ought to say to please the interviewer; in fact, much of the interaction may be infused with a ‘shift between performed or censured statements and unperformed and uncensored statements’ (Scheurich, 1997, p. 67).

I have argued above that in view of the complexities inherent in interviews, there are benefits in using purposeful conversation as a research method. Having rapport with participants reduces some of the complexities pointed out by Scheurich (1997) and influences the co-construction of meaning. Heyl further argued that the stories shared by interviewees are reflections of the quality of rapport and the ‘conditions in their relationship and the interview situation’ (2001, p. 370).

In my research, attention was placed on developing rapport with the beginning teachers. Purposeful conversations that allowed people to be secure in themselves, free and safe to talk about pertinent issues, were my goals for this research. However, purposeful conversations did not guarantee that participants freely discussed their experiences. It opened up the possibility of collecting more information that provided background information as well as supplementary information reflected upon after the
conversations, thereby leading to a better understanding of participants’ responses. Purposeful conversations provided opportunities for flexibility and open-ended conversation, which particularly helped in achieving the purpose of this research. Questions were personalised and contextualised for each participant to deepen communication with the participants and ‘to make use of immediate surroundings and situation to increase the correctness and immediacy of the interview questions’. (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

As with any research method, employing purposeful conversations in this study had its own limitations. Burgess (1988) pointed out that it might take longer to develop good conversations and address the purpose of the inquiry. In addition, several conversations with different people were needed before similar questions could be posed to all participants, which could be time consuming. Based on the interactive nature of purposeful conversations, there was a large amount of data to work with, which eventually posed some difficulties when analysing because of the different responses (Burgess, 1988; Creswell, 2003). These potential weaknesses were carefully considered in the design and the conversation process. Thus, despite its limitations, this method was considered the most appropriate method for addressing the research questions in this study.

Many times in the initial stage of data collection, I asked questions that the respondents turned into a different question that they wanted to answer. Whereas sometimes this may have been as a result of misunderstanding, at other times it was the participants asserting their own control over the interview. In other words, ‘participants are not passive subjects, they are active participants in the interaction’
(Scheurich, 1997, p. 71). In listening to their descriptions and reflections on past experiences, participants engaged with constructing and articulating these experiences. It was a moral, ethical and professional choice for me to actively listen to these teachers’ stories and lived realities, thereby making room for the genuine voices of teachers to be heard. This choice was reiterated and practised several times so as to become a habit of the mind, a deeply internalised way of being and acting.

As this research is about understanding beginning teachers, recognising their lived experiences, and giving these teachers voices, it was vital to create an environment in which teachers felt safe and comfortable to share their experiences. This was possible with the underpinning philosophy of doing the research with beginning teachers in contrast with conducting research on them. It was not about exploiting or manipulating research participants but about understanding their experiences and what had shaped and was shaping the teachers’ becoming. In this context, as a facilitator as well as a researcher, I constructed a supportive and safe environment and helped teachers explore issues using their own vocabulary and ideas (Carspecken, 1996).

The data for this study were collected by having purposeful conversations with five beginning teachers, who fulfilled the selection criteria by having just completed their Bachelor of Education. Purposeful conversations, using open-ended questions, were conducted at the beginning, mid-year and towards the end of their first year. By having repeated purposeful conversations with participants, Carspecken argue that ‘the same subject is likely to produce richer and more self-disclosing information than that produced in a single interview’ (1996, p. 66). Having conversations with each beginning teacher three times allowed responses to be followed up. This generated a
subtle discussion of my interpretation and analysis of previous conversations. These conversations were recorded with a digital media player. Multiple data sets from the purposeful conversations and from the observation notes taken during the Beginning Teachers’ Conference were triangulated and examined for consistency, as advocated by Stake (2000) and Patton (2002).

According to Burgess (1988), physical and social contexts influence how purposeful conversations are conducted with teachers. The important rationale that influenced venues was the provision of privacy in a comfortable and relaxed environment in which teachers could freely discuss their experiences. Venues and times for purposeful conversations were organised at the beginning teachers’ convenience. Teachers were allowed to decide their preferences for interview settings. Some of the teachers were interviewed in their offices and staffrooms after school hours, and others were interviewed at venues away from the school setting, where they could freely discuss their experiences. Four teachers’ interviews were conducted after school hours in their respective schools. Others were conducted at homes and in cafes.

The process of collecting data was a conscious process in which I had to rethink and distance myself from my assumptions. Towards the end of each conversation, I summarised themes understood from the responses and presented them back to the interviewees. This gave participants an opportunity to check whether proper understanding of the shared experiences was achieved, which often led to further clarification and exploration of their ideas. This, according to Carspecken (1996), invited challenges and more clarification from the participants.
The idea of using our similar experiences of attending the Beginning Teachers’ Conference was something I found useful. It enabled me to establish a shared connection with the beginning teachers who were then able to share their feelings and express themselves readily. After starting the conversations in this way, I then moved straight to questions such as, ‘How do you find teaching in your first week?’ and ‘What does it mean to be a beginning teacher in this school?’. I encouraged the beginning teachers to start from their most recent experience and probed further back to their very first day of teaching. The reason for this technique is that recent experiences are more easily remembered and could be linked to past experiences more readily (Patton, 2002).

I encouraged beginning teachers to share their emotions and feelings and to provide vivid and detailed stories of their first day and the critical incidents they encountered. I was interested in knowing how they coped and adjusted to their new roles and workplaces, how they went about building interactions with their students and other teachers, how they experienced the support from the school, and about their participation in formal professional development courses. The broad view of my focus encouraged a discussion of all their experiences. I invited them to talk about their motives for embarking on a teaching career, their past experiences of schooling, and how these experiences motivated them to start teaching. I asked participants to describe and discuss the philosophies that guide their teaching and their relationship with their students. In other words, I wanted to learn how they evolved and changed in their understanding of their roles and new environment. As mentioned, the conversations continued throughout their first year of teaching. I asked participants to reflect on their practices each term and discussed how they had changed at the end of
Chapter Three

each school term, and the things they planned to work on for the next term. I allowed the conversations to evolve and supported teachers in responding.

This approach brought out rich and detailed responses, and participants readily recalled early experiences with teachers in their schooling years. Using the purposeful conversations, I was able to allow participants’ thinking to flow without much interruption from me. Apart from maintaining focus on conversations that were supportive of my research purpose, I allowed participants enough space to select experiences that they considered important to them. Sometimes the discussion trailed away from professional issues to personal issues. Later, when I listened to the recorded voices, I was surprised to find there were silences and pauses where participants were thinking about what they wanted to say and sometimes waiting for me to rephrase my questions as cues to prompt their answers.

In analysing and discussing beginning teachers’ experiences, I have made an assumption that participants’ initial responses and stories that were mentioned more than once have particularly significant meanings for the teachers themselves. In paying attention to beginning teachers’ voices, my intention is to make their familiar stories strange and delve into the hidden assumptions and beliefs behind their voices. Thus, when I engaged in purposeful conversations with beginning teachers, I asked them to tell me about their experience of teaching. I was interested in their narratives as well as listening to their silences, the (social) structures that shape their experiences and working the hyphen between what beginning teachers were saying about their experiences and what was really happening in their school contexts.
3.4.3 Data Validity and Trustworthiness

The issue of validity of data collected in research studies is complex and affects qualitative research. The claim for validity is not only restricted to methods and methodology; it extends to the researcher and the nature of knowledge constructed (Patton, 2002). In as much as researchers and readers want to ensure that the appropriate research methods and methodology have been used in executing the study, it is imperative also to know that knowledge produced is valid and credible. Validity claims are strongly related to and associated with the people involved and the process used in gathering information and data analysis.

Kincheloe’s (2003) explanation of validity transcends the conventional view in that validity is no longer restricted to truth claims but to practical effects and influences on people’s lives. Kincheloe recognises that people’s lives have been shaped by political, historical, cultural and social forces in such a way that multiple views of reality have been formed and nurtured. These realities are discursive constructions that are expressed as experiences shared during the process of research. According to Kincheloe, these constructions are ‘sometimes constructed not so much by ourselves but by dominant ideological and discursive forces within the society’ (2003, p. 175). This, however, complicates a researcher’s quest for conducting research that is valid and so there is a need for a redefinition of validity.

The redefinition of validity of research to mean research that affects practice involves critically looking at practice to identify the hidden meanings underlying it. It involves a continuous cycle of researching, interpreting, reflecting and critiquing before research can be said to be valid (Apple, 1993; Kvale, 1996). From this point of view,
researchers have a profound influence over how knowledge is produced because they are the main research instruments in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). They unconsciously filter information from research participants through their experiences, beliefs and philosophies. They see the world of their participants through their own worldviews. Hence, this redefinition of validity starts from the researcher revealing information about themselves that may affect or influence the research, such as their prior knowledge and strategies, values and beliefs, and how they gain access to research sites, all of which I have explained in this chapter.

This places emphasis on the credibility and trustworthiness of the researcher in gathering information (Merriam, 1998) and portraying the constructed realities of the researched in a credible way through data analysis and interpretation. It also recognises the researcher’s interactions with participants in a way that takes account of the complex construction of their experiences. Since participants come into the research with different perspectives, a central principle for ensuring and reconceptualising validity in critical qualitative studies is a ‘free, participatory process of making meaning and creating values’ (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 178), such as the purposeful conversations employed in this research. This provides access to the frontline experience of these participants, which is local knowledge, and helps in the meaning making process of data analysis (Grumet, 1990; Smyth, 1999).

The invisible, tacit understandings discovered during the process of qualitative research are part of the validity of this research. From a critical ethnography point of view, validity is internal to the meaning inherent in the description (Carspecken, 2001). Critical ethnography places much emphasis on the validity of the nature of
knowledge that is produced and the nature of the way that knowledge is produced. The validity of knowledge is not based on the presence of an object or in the experience of beginning teachers, but in the stories and descriptions of beginning teachers about their experiences (Carspecken, 2001).

Since validity in critical qualitative studies is not based on objective truths and evidence but is complexly interwoven with the relationship between the researcher, researched and data collected, validity in critical studies is therefore established by the researcher, the connections and interconnections between the researcher and researched and their data. Critical qualitative studies are centred on disrupting discourse and confronting the status quo through making visible the politics, social, historical and cultural factors that shape the experiences of people being researched. Therefore, validity is explored in terms of ‘what could be’, thereby making ‘possible new forms of consciousness’ (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 187). As critical qualitative research involves a ‘more complex interaction with consciousness construction and interaction with other human beings’ (p. 178), validity of these studies is even more complex. It is complex and complicated due to the historical, political, social, cultural and economic forces that critical qualitative researchers attach to their quest for knowledge.

In establishing the validity and trustworthiness of the data gathered for this research, the researcher herself and the process were very crucial in this aspect. Building relationships with the participants was very important, in the sense that the stories about beginning teachers were narrated by themselves. The process of recruiting participants gave me the opportunity to interact with over 50 beginning teachers; I
found this interaction established a form of rapport through which I was able to decide on the teachers who would be willing to talk about the process.

Questioning in a way that improves our understanding of the world around us was also an important element in ensuring validity in this research. As suggested by Carspecken (1996), questions on the experiences of beginning teachers relating to their first few days in schools, and on their experiences of ‘what it means to be a teacher in their school’ were asked of each participant. All questions were framed in such a way that they were understandable by the teachers and were devoid of theoretical language that might be difficult to understand. Carspecken (1996) suggested that questions heavily layered with theoretical constructs and technical jargon often distort communication structures and contexts and make people who are being researched feel incompetent and not secure enough to share their life experiences. It makes them feel uncomfortable and intimidated because they do not know whether their experiences fit into the expected categories or answer the research questions.

Being reflective during and after purposeful conversations was one of the ways of establishing validity in this research. I went through thinking about the stories I had just heard and tried to replay the beginning teacher’s gestures and moods during the conversation period. This helped me in writing my narratives and reflective field notes and helped me to make a list of things to clarify in the next meeting. Usually after briefly discussing what was going on in the teacher’s life, I revisited issues that needed clarification and linked these to the teacher’s current story. I also made sure that I asked about three important issues that the teacher had discussed in the previous
conversation to find out if the teacher still maintained their views and, if not, to know what the view was at that time and why things had changed. Due to the qualitative and constructive nature of the research, it was expected that teachers would have multiple views.

The quality of the rapport built with these teachers gave me a level of confidence in their description of realities. In establishing trust in this research, I made sure that information was transcribed in its raw form; it was not edited nor adapted and presented back to the teachers. The data presented throughout this research were the participants’ words. I also made a conscious effort to re-listen to the recorded conversations and cross-check several times with the transcribed version to make sure their authentic stories were reported. I present an honest and trustworthy set of responses exactly as the research participants presented them to me. I created narrative portraits based on my interpretation of the data.

To increase trustworthiness and credibility, I took an initial period for getting to know each of the participants before the commencement of the interviews. This gave them a chance to talk about their anxieties and gave me the opportunity to discuss the objectives of the research. According to Patton, this ‘supports credibility both within and outside the study setting’ (2002, p. 567). Also, time spent with the participants during purposeful conversations and talking about personal and private issues helped to support the building of trustworthiness and rapport with the teachers. It should be noted that Patton (2002) has discussed the disadvantages of staying too long in a research site to build trust with participants, stating it could have a negative influence.
In a research project that celebrates the hearing of teachers’ authentic, genuine stories of their different experiences and attempts to research the forces that have shaped these experiences, it is almost impossible to have objective data (Kincheloe, 2003). It becomes even more complex and complicated when each person has multiple realities. My objective was to capture and understand multiple lived realities and truths about beginning teachers’ lives in the first year of their teaching.

### 3.4.4 Ethical Responsibilities

The ethics of this project were examined and considered before the commencement and execution of the project. I understood the ethical sensitivities involved in conducting a year-long research with beginning teachers in their first year of teaching who were trying to retain their first job. Thus, one of the ethical choices was not to employ direct participant observation as a research method in this study. Approval was sought from beginning teachers, since one of the research objectives was to look at a cross-section of beginning teachers in different schools.

This project received approval from Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Consent to attend the Beginning Teachers’ Conference organised by the Department of Education was sought from the coordinator of the program, and was approved after I explained the research project.

Written informed consent was obtained from each beginning teacher (see Appendix A). The consent forms outlined the project objectives and process and emphasised the confidentiality and anonymity of participants’ responses. The form explained that participation was voluntary and teachers were free to withdraw at any time. In addition, careful attention was paid to sensitive issues, since in depth interviewing
might be too personal and intrusive (Patton, 2002). Teachers were not coerced into revealing information that they would rather keep secret; teachers’ views and rights were recognised and acknowledged in this research. The completed digital interview recordings and transcripts were stored in a secure location, to be kept for a period of five years from the date of collection.

In fulfilling the promise I made to beginning teachers that their names would not be revealed in the thesis, I took precautions by using pseudonyms and codes for beginning teachers’ names and schools when writing and made sure that the report of the findings was accurate and based on the verbatim transcription of recorded interviews.

3.4.5 Making Sense of the Conversations
As a research instrument myself (Patton, 2002), I developed an approach to analyse purposeful conversations by continuously listening, reading and rereading the conservation transcripts so as to understand the patterns, silences, key experiences and emotional responses of these teachers. I then developed narrative portraits of each of the teacher’s stories. Narrative portraits are stories of the lived experience of beginning teachers. Narrative portraits are derived from portraiture, a research methodology designed by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) that combines ‘the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4). It is a ‘dialogue between science and art’, in ‘pursuit of truths, insight, and knowledge projected by the imagination’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 14). Portraiture unveils voices and ‘listen[s] for a story[ies]’ that lie[s] in the specifics and complexity of everyday life to understand
and express a ‘moment in time and of timelessness’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 11, 6).

By capturing the specifics and the complexity, portraiture as a research method allowed me to understand at a detailed level both the cultural context and beginning teachers’ perspectives while they were constituting and negotiating their teacher identities. I used narrative portraits to understand how beginning teachers see who they are as teachers; the narratives helped to express the implicit nature of teacher identity in explicit ways (Upadhyah, 2009).

Creating and using narrative portraits in understanding beginning teachers identities was not an easy project. As Lawrence-Lightfoot stated, ‘The process of creating narrative portraits requires a difficult (sometimes paradoxical) vigilance to empirical description and aesthetic expression and a careful scrutiny and modulation of voice’ (2005, p. 10). It was difficult for me because there was the constant need to stay engaged and be present to listen for the story in the conversations with beginning teachers. Lawrence-Lightfoot described the process of creating portraits as a ‘discerning, deliberative process and a highly creative one’ that involved ‘documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving and shaping, reflecting and imposing, mirroring and improvising’ (2005, p. 10). Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney (2008) advocated for the honesty and transparency that narrative portraits bring to the research because it allows the voices of people who would rather have remained silenced be heard in authentic forms.

By using narrative portraits as a method of analysing beginning teachers’ stories, I was able to understand the issues that were most important in teacher identity
(re)construction and to understand how teachers struggled to construct the kind of teachers they wanted to be. It was interesting to see how teachers’ narratives showed their struggles against school contextual demands and professional expectations and how their past experiences as students interacted with their current experiences as teachers. My analytical role was to understand teachers’ stories of their experiences and decipher how their teacher identity has been constructed in relation to their experiences. I explored prominent and recurring issues expressed in teachers’ stories of their experiences of teaching in their first year. I scrutinised carefully the story lines that emerged from our conversations about who they are as teachers, how they were becoming teachers, how they negotiate their identities in classrooms, how they searched for a balance in negotiating their identities with past schooling experiences and their continuing teaching experiences.

My intention was to be ‘present’, critically engaged and strategic as I listened and searched for the main themes that beginning teachers told me in their stories. Uncovering the complexity and details in the unique experience of beginning teachers as they learnt to become teachers in their school contexts was a key research goal. In the process of creating these narrative portraits, descriptions of beginning teachers’ experiences were examined several times as I entered beginning teachers’ lives cautiously and politely, engaged in their stories and pursued the silences in their stories. What ensued as a result of this was a deeper knowledge of these teachers and their experiences in a way that unravels the discursive practices, such as professional expectations in schools that shape experiences of becoming teachers and how teachers created their identities considering these influences. In the next chapter, I share the narrative portraits of these five beginning teachers.
4.1 Introducing Teachers and Their Schools

‘In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is’ (Goodson, 1981, p. 69). I believe we need also to know the school context in which beginning teachers work because their narratives are based on what it means to be a beginning teacher in these schools. Their experiences and school context appear to speak to one another in significant ways. According to Flores (2001), contextual factors have a huge influence on the process of becoming and being a teacher. Thus, their experiences are and were understood in terms of their particular school contexts. Each school was different; therefore, the experience of each teacher aligned with the particular context they were in. The uniqueness of each beginning teacher’s experience is shaped by distinct characteristics of each school, which cannot be generalised. Beginning teachers were, therefore, in constant negotiation with the particular nature of their school context. Elbaz-Luwisch argues that teacher identity studies need to highlight ‘a sense of the teacher teaching in a place - a given location that is not only specific, describable and distinct from other locations, but that holds meaning, and that matters to the persons who inhabit it’ (2004, p. 388).

I start by introducing the teachers and describing the public school contexts (i.e., government-funded or state schools) in which these teachers worked. I chose these beginning teachers’ stories because of the rich, diverse, interesting and detailed stories of their experiences in the first year. I begin with Lok, followed by Lee, Jemma, Cliff and Bella, because their experiences have a combination of themes threading through their stories. I share these stories because they provide a good understanding of who
the beginning teachers are and the significance of the school contexts in which they work.

4.1.1 Lok and Olivewood Senior High School

Lok’s Portrait—’If we all stop whenever we have doubts or we think we have reached a limitation, then nothing will ever occur’

‘Articulate’, ‘visionary’, ‘confident’ and ‘mature’ are the words that sprang to mind when I first met Lok, a female teacher. I met Lok at the Beginning Teachers’ Conference and we started talking casually in one of the district group workshop activities. Our task in that particular activity was to locate ourselves on the mood line on a positive to negative continuum, depending on our feelings about our new teaching placements. I found myself standing beside Lok, who was one metre away from the negative end of the mood line. I decided to stay there because of my feelings regarding the progress of recruiting beginning teachers for my research. Lok and I discussed why we chose where we were and what issues were going on.

Lok explained that she was not sure of the school context she had been appointed to and she appeared to be anxious about her job. Despite Lok’s apparent anxiety, she had a positive energy and was passionate in her description of her interest in teaching and her experience at the conference and how it was a good way of networking with other teachers. I thought to myself that she was perfect for my research. I had an opportunity to discuss with her what my research was about and asked her if she would like to participate, so that her voice could be heard. She was willing to participate and was enthusiastic about the opportunity of knowing what other beginning teachers like herself had to say and how it would eventually contribute to the educational system. We agreed that I would contact her in the next two weeks. I
called her twice in the following week to set up a time and place for our conversations, and to find out if she had received a letter from my supervisors.

The first long conversation we had was in the first week of the first term in a café, which became home to all our conversations. She came into the café bubbling with energy and was really interested in how the discussion would play out. Positive things she had going for her were a bubbly personality, an enthusiastic attitude, the openness to share anything, a positive outlook and the ability to reflect. She could easily pause and think about what she had just said and rephrase it into what she really wanted to say. This happened several times during our conversations. Her passion for her students and desire to make a difference for them were really outstanding. From the dialogues we shared, I found out a few things about her personal life that contributed to her experiences of becoming a teacher and her narration of such experiences. She completed her Bachelor in Education as a mature-aged student. At the time of the interview, Lok was in her mid-thirties, a single parent with one child. She has Noongar\(^1\) heritage and both her parents were teachers. Her teaching job was located in a low socio-economic school comprising Aboriginal, refugee and mainstream white students, and she taught English.

\subsection{Olivewood Senior High School}

Lok discussed how she started teaching without any specific teaching resources for her class. Being new, with little practical experience of teaching was a big challenge. To add to the seeming disadvantage of being a beginning teacher, the school was not

\(^1\) Noongar—the name given to a person from the south-west of Western Australian who is of Aboriginal descent.
prepared for her. Discussing the constraints arising from her school, Lok said the school was ‘a bit disorganised. There was no timetable for a good week and a half, and so there was no DOTT [Duties Other Than Teaching] time. Because I teach ESL [English as a Second Language], it meant that I just had my entire class all day, every day, without any DOTT time’. The challenged in her school, combined with her own personal issues as a single parent where she needed to drop her son at daycare at 7.45 am, made it extremely difficult for her in the first few days.

Lok worked with refugee students in the English program centre at the school. According to her, there was a strong lack of structure in the program centre she worked in. In particular, there was a lack of a well-structured behaviour management plan in classes and a structured curricular content for students so that a particular language topic could be taught three terms in a row. The students who attended her program were required to stay in the program for a two-year period before they could join the mainstream classes. Lok found it really frustrating, particularly as a graduate, because ‘there was actually no kind of macro system in place for behaviour management and curriculum structure, which needs to be in place as a guide for new teachers’.

Olivewood was a challenging school to work in, with a high percentage of students classified as students at educational risk (educationally disadvantaged). The school had an enrolment of 600 students from year 8 to 12, and 52 staff. Olivewood was located in a very low socio-economic community with a high population of Indigenous and refugee residents. The community had an unfair share of social problems, such as high unemployment rate, ongoing conflict over public housing
between Indigenous and refugee residents, and high crime rates. In the last couple of years, the school had witnessed students moving in and out of jail detentions, an increased number of teenage parents, and increased numbers of highly traumatised students moving straight from war-torn countries into the school. A large percentage of students received government assisted payments.

Due to the school’s unique challenges, it was organised around special programs, which were sub-schools that specifically catered for the different personal needs and learning needs of the students. There was a provision of strong pastoral care programs addressing the social and emotional needs of students. Apart from the mainstream program, which was run similarly to other schools, other programs were geared towards reconnecting students back to school and increasing their learning engagement. Therefore, in an attempt to help students’ literacy and numeracy skills, the school received Commonwealth Literacy and Numeracy funding and ran an established English as a second language support program. Olivewood was also involved in Aboriginal School-based Traineeships. There were lots of conflicts and politics within the school to the extent that Indigenous and refugee students did not share common areas together.

4.1.2 Lee and Forrestville Senior High School

*Lee’s Portrait*—‘In dance, you either teach to create dancers or you educate them about life. I want to train my students so they can use the techniques I teach them in life’

I met Lee, a very dynamic young woman in her early twenties, also at the Beginning Teachers’ Conference. Walking down the hallway towards the lunch room, I introduced myself to her and we started talking about the conference and some of the things we had learnt. She explained to me how she was happy to see some of the other
teachers with whom she had studied during her Graduate Diploma in Education, but also wished she could really meet other dance teachers in the whole group. Prior to her Graduate Diploma in Education, Lee was an accomplished performer, and had taught dance classes to a few private students in her home studio. Her Bachelor Degree in Arts where she specialised in drama and dance had equipped her to be an Arts director. She had organised a few shows and had directed some shows as well. In our discussion, Lee indicated she was ready to get involved in Forrestville School and was looking forward to starting after the many conversations she had had with the principal and administrative staff over the phone. She gave me the impression they were looking forward to having her because, as she said, they ‘basically fought for me to get into the school’.

In our first conversation, which started in the school car park and continued in the make-shift staffroom that she shared with three other teachers, she described her experience of teaching in the first few weeks. She narrated how she started her first day at Forrestville with a dramatic opening. Her first day was riddled with questions and dramatic scenes of being mistaken for a student by teacher colleagues and students asking her if she was year 12 student. She was pulled aside for not wearing a uniform to school by two teachers, and then she went to her classroom only for students to ask her if she was still in year 12. Although she managed to get through her first day, it left an indelible mark, which she mentioned with humour at different times during the year.

When Lee started, the school itself was not prepared for her in terms of an office space, cabinets and classrooms for her students. She was inundated with timetable
clashes, coupled with being asked to teach physical education (PE), which she was not qualified to teach. In fact, according to Lee, she did not participate in PE at all during her secondary and post-secondary schooling but here she was faced with the task of teaching PE 14 times and dance only nine times in a week. Moreover, she did not have a classroom in which to teach her students, so she had to teach them outside of the classroom. Lee felt very disappointed about the whole situation.

A string of events in the first term clearly proved to her that the school was not prepared for her as a dance teacher but was in fact expecting a PE teacher. There was a serious conflict between Lee’s expectations and those of the school. Based on Lee’s prior visit to the school, she was expecting to be able to use a classroom as the dance room and other facilities. She was not expecting to teach PE because they had mentioned specifically that they were trying to grow dance classes. There is a lot hidden in Lee’s stories, but it is important to point out her struggle to find a space both metaphorically and literally. She struggled to find and create a space for the learning of her students, while psychologically, socially and emotionally she struggled to find a space for herself in a school that was crowded with old practices that did not resonate with Lee.

4.1.2.1 Forestville Senior High School

Forestville was a comprehensive school stretched on an extensive parkland setting in a suburb that had a growing multicultural population because of its lower housing prices. There were over 1100 students enrolled from year 8 to year 12 and about 80 teachers in the school. There were numerous awards provided to encourage students to do well across all learning areas. According to Lee, ‘we are known as one of the
toughest schools with lots of students from bad upbringing. A lot of our students in year 9 do not have their mum and dad at home with them. They are alone by themselves.’

From Lee’s description, sustaining programs for academically inclined students was a challenge for the school, so the school introduced new specialist courses in sports, drama, dance and other areas. With the promotion of these New Courses of Study within the school, the school was well positioned to become one of the good schools in the district. At the time, there were more students doing arts than the school facilities could accommodate. There was also an increase in the number of students wanting to do dance and some 64 year 9 students were rejected because there were not enough classrooms and teachers.

Dance was not a well-established subject at the school because it was one of the new courses that was being promoted. Dance was grouped under the Health and Physical Education learning area instead of Arts. Therefore, the subject was taught by PE teachers instead of dance specialists before Lee joined the school. From Lee’s description of her first term at Forestville, half of her dance classes were conducted in the foyer and in the school grounds because there were no available classrooms. Lee further explained that the perception she got from other teachers in the Health and Physical Education learning area was that ‘administrative staff do not want to be involved in any more work than they do and the principal was just waiting to retire’.

When she organised a concert, the principal and other administrative staff did not attend, despite the fact that there was a special invitation addressed to the administrative staff.
4.1.3 Jemma and Bold Edge Community College

Jemma’s Portrait—‘You don’t start learning to teach until you teach. I have learnt more in the past two weeks than I have the whole of last year’

The interesting story of Jemma started when I moved to her table at the Beginning Teachers’ Conference so that I could meet with other teachers. We started talking and I asked if she would like to participate in my research. I provided all the details, and she agreed to participate. We developed rapport, which culminated into having conversations through the year. Jemma brought with her story an intense combination of rich personality strengths and emotions.

Prior to teaching, Jemma worked extensively in the recreation industry, organising camps for students of different ages. Her experience of working in this field motivated her to become a teacher because she wanted to spend more time with the students. In her words, ‘I would run sessions with them for an hour and a half and then they go. And that just kept happening and then I got sadder and because some of the students I really liked. And if I am lucky I see them the next day and do another program with them but often you don’t. Thus, I thought I wouldn’t mind spending a little bit longer than an hour and a half with students’. Her motivating desire helped her through the one-year Graduate Diploma in Education.

When Jemma completed her training, little did she realise how challenging and stressful her new job would be. For weeks before and after she started teaching, she described herself as very nervous and scared. Her stable and familiar world was turned upside down; Jemma found herself in a world that she did not know how to navigate and operate. It was entirely new and especially in the first two weeks she thought she was not well equipped to handle the pressure. She described her newly acquired
experience of teaching in four words - eye-opening, frightening, enriching and emotionally draining.

Her first day of teaching was challenging, stressful and enlightening. Just before she started teaching, Jemma attended two days of professional development organised in the school. On the first day of the professional development, about half a day of orientation and induction was provided to her and other new teachers and the next day she started gathering her teaching resources together. She cried and was very nervous the night before she actually started teaching. She did not know where to start from, or what to do, and had no idea of what the students looked like, or what the students expected of her. Like she said, ‘Now I was crying on Tuesday night [night before her first class] because I didn’t know what I was doing. I was asking everyone what I can do and they were giving me ideas. They were giving me all the help they could give me but I still felt like I didn’t have any idea about what to do at all’.

Jemma opened up her hidden emotions about how she started teaching and what her initial thoughts and reactions were. When she started teaching, she thought that she would never last a year. She said, ‘I thought every single day was going to be like the first day, that I would not know what I am doing. I just thought that I was crap’. She thought she was incapable and unprepared to teach. The thought of not knowing what she was doing controlled her emotions to the extent that she thought she did not deserve to be teaching.

Her experience of starting a new job and feeling inadequate was further illustrated when she discovered her students’ expectations of her, which will be discussed later in the chapter. I now present her school context.
4.1.3.1 Bold Edge Community College

With a population of over 1500 students, Bold Edge was one of the largest schools in the state. It offered comprehensive educational programs from years 7 to 12 for students from over 40 national backgrounds. It offered a diverse range of educational programs to cater for the diverse students’ learning needs. Bold Edge was located in one of the fastest growing suburbs in WA. The college was divided into middle and senior schools. The middle school ran integrated curriculum learning areas for years 7 to 9 and the senior school offered a wide range of courses for students from years 10 to 12. Jemma mentioned that most students in her class had very unstable homes and the school provided a safe haven for them. Academic extension programs were organised for students who were at educational risk, especially in year 9.

The college was well positioned and known for innovation and excellence in education. It received and continues to enjoy huge grants from governments and industries. Its involvement in the community stood out and it had strong parental support for its programs. The college enjoyed strong partnerships with different community groups, industrial associations, surrounding universities and TAFE (Technical and Further Education) institutions. Teachers were organised into year teams and the teams were very supportive. According to Jemma, the year 7 team was very supportive of her from the very first day when she was overwhelmed and did not know what to do. Most of the learning resources she used on her first day were collected from other year 7 teachers.
4.1.4 Cliff and Lifton Senior High School

Cliff’s Portrait—‘If there’s one thing I do as a teacher, it is to open my students’ minds to thinking that the mainstream way is not necessarily the best way and the only knowledge available’

Cliff, in his mid-twenties, had studied English Language for his Bachelor’s before completing his Graduate Diploma in Education. When talking with Cliff at the Beginning Teachers’ Conference, I discovered he was posted to a ‘hard-to-staff’\(^2\) school and was faced with the challenge of teaching a new subject—music—in his first year. He agreed to participate in the study and all the interviews were conducted in his school.

On the first day of our conversations, I arrived just after the school had finished for the day. There were lots of students on the road and in the school compound and I could tell just from looking at the students that they were from different cultures. I thought to myself, ‘Yes, I am in a culturally diverse school’. I asked a few students and they directed me to the reception area. On arriving, I asked for Cliff and all three people mentioned his name with familiarity, perhaps because he was one of the beginning teachers in the school. The first question that popped in my head was, ‘How do they know him so well?’ It was evident in their faces that they liked him and had a good rapport with him. When one of the teaching staff came to the reception, they asked him if he had seen Cliff and he mentioned he had left him in the staffroom. Cliff came to the reception and we walked into one of the staff lunch rooms. On our way to the lunch room, we met two students and the way he greeted them showed a genuine relationship outside the normal walls of classrooms.

\(^2\) Hard to staff schools—schools that have difficulty finding and retaining suitably qualified teachers.
During our first conversation, I realised he was the kind of person who had a huge social agenda. He was very bold and confident in declaring his views and stance regarding social issues. His belief in social justice and helping the less privileged was what led him to work in the school in his first year of teaching, and from his own story it seemed it was this belief that helped him to get the job. From what he said about himself:

I think they wanted me to teach music because I’d fit with the students here, more than being, like I didn’t go to the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts or anything. I have just played in bands since I was a kid. Thus, I think they just saw that and gave me a job as a teacher and it is all fairly similar in terms of cognitive abilities.

So Cliff was hired not because he specialised in music but because the principal thought he could get through to the students. Cliff had done his practicum in the school a year before he officially started his professional teaching. Thus, there was something deeper than subject specialisation that influenced his recruitment to the school. This is not saying having good subject knowledge is unimportant, but the passion and motivation for wanting to teach in the school in the first place likely seemed important to the school administration because it is a hard-to-staff school. The principal seemed to have recognised the importance of connecting with students, effective student engagement and learning. He must have seen this and possibly other qualities in Cliff and decided that Cliff would be the kind of teacher his students needed. Thus, here Cliff was, hired to teach a subject he was not trained to teach and had never taught before. It was a change of focus in subject, from certainty to uncertainty. Cliff’s calmness and decision to take on the challenge optimistically were commendable.
4.1.4.1 Lifton Senior High School

From Cliff’s description, Lifton had a current population of fewer than 800 students, having experienced a significant decline in student population over the last three years. Students were from over 30 different ethnic backgrounds, with a high number of Indigenous students at the school. Like Olivewood, Lifton had a high proportion of educationally disadvantaged students and therefore received Commonwealth Literacy and Numeracy funding. Lifton High had a low socio-economic profile and was situated in a low socio-economic area. One of the main priorities of the school was to increase Aboriginal students’ retention in years 11 and 12.

Cliff described the school as having a reputation of students moving into trades instead of university or TAFE. According to Cliff, ‘we had one of the worst rankings in the state last year because of the few students who did TEE, we only had 18 TEE students last year. In fact, the students who attend the school have a very negative perception of the school and of their possibility for achieving success within the school. Most of the students consider themselves as not smart enough for university’. In an attempt to improve the school image, the school leaders and administrators were highly focused on rebranding the school’s image by promoting learning programs and new courses such as music. Cliff was employed as a music teacher to help in constructing a better image for the school. Although he had no qualification in music, he was a band singer.

The principal explained the school agenda to Cliff and his role in the strategic plan to improve the school image. Part of Cliff’s teaching job was to increase the number of students enrolled in the music program and organise musical concerts that would
appeal to students. His employment for the next year was directly linked to increasing the profile of the music department. Cliff enjoyed teaching in the school. The staff was close knit and there was a commitment to low socio-economic students that bonded the teachers together. As Cliff put it, ‘they are in the school because they choose to be in a hard-to-staff school’. In terms of staff profiling, the staff culture was very supportive of each other. Cliff was much younger than all other teachers in the school, apart from the other graduate teacher.

4.1.5 Bella and Ivy College

_Bella’s Portrait— ‘Teaching is really a full-on profession; you’re in control of people’s lives really and shaping their lives’_

Bella was offered two teaching jobs while still completing her Graduate Diploma in Education. She chose her current school because of its positive community, teamwork and supportive environment, which were important values to her. When I met Bella at the Beginning Teachers’ Conference, she was quite nervous about starting her teaching job; she was one of the teachers I met on the mood line as well. Bella described in her first conversation how she got to school at least one hour before school opening time and walked around the school to settle down. Her early childhood was categorised by living in between different countries and changing schools several times, because her parents never lived together. Her multicultural heritage—being half French and half Chinese—contributed a lot to her education and career development. She initially studied microbiology because it was the normal pathway of her family members and then realised after completing the degree that she did not want to be a microbiologist despite many job offers, and later decided to do a Graduate Diploma in Education.
Bella, in her early twenties, taught middle school students at Ivy College and was the youngest teacher in her team. There was no head of program to design the curriculum for her year, so she designed her programs herself.

4.1.5.1 Ivy College

Specifically designed for middle schooling, Ivy was quite different to the other schools in this study. It had a specialised pastoral care program and a creative nurturing environment. It provided a wide range of learning opportunities for its students. Ivy College was located in a suburb that had mostly young families and migrants from the UK, Ireland and South Africa. Ivy catered for over 900 students, with over 50 teaching staff. According to Bella, ‘Ivy caters a lot better for low-ability students and students who are hands on’.

One of the main priorities of Ivy College was promoting cooperativeness and communal living among students and staff. Teachers worked in teams of five in supportive environments and team teaching was often practised within the school. The college, which was a middle school, was divided into three learning communities (sub-schools). Each learning community had all the year classes represented. Within each year group, students were organised into groups of 27 students in which a teacher provided tailored pastoral care programs to individual students. The assigned teacher met with the group of 27 students every week and checked on their welfare and made sure they were comfortable, building a personalised relationship with the students and their parents.

Students were actively involved in deciding their learning activities and they had a well-integrated curriculum. Their voices were well represented at the school level and
parents were involved in decision making within the school. Ivy had a strong focus on IT and had invested a lot in learning innovations that had considerably improved students’ outcomes and achievement. Extension classes were organised for low-ability students.

4.1.6 Summary

It is apparent from these portraits that the five schools had very different school cultures and contexts. However, they all placed much emphasis on facilitating better student learning and engagement by using different methods like traineeships, academic extensions and introduction of new courses. What is interesting here was the unique elements that made up each school culture, which were different from school to school; the established practices within these schools differed from Olivewood to Ivy College. According to Smyth:

> some schools and teachers have quite sophisticated ways of crafting ‘visions’ about who they are and what they regard as being important.... How schools enact and live out their vision has a lot to do with the way teachers construct a culture of what it means to be a teacher and to ‘have a life’ as a teacher making sense of opposition, and moving beyond merely resisting to adopting strategic action with and through the school community. (1999, p. 70)

In a sense, the beginning teachers started by reading the contexts of the school they were at, deciphering the vision of the school and ‘what it means to be a teacher within the school’. Depending on the context, the beginning teachers responded differently. Some found the school contexts more engaging and more congenial than others, whereas some found that they needed to confront and transform the established practices within the school as they constructed their teacher identities. Each beginning teacher experienced a unique transition, which was largely shaped by the unique conditions that they experienced.
4.2 Brief Description of Emergent Themes

The main part of this thesis focuses on the discursive formation of identity; I have picked out the key dimensions that are involved and discussed each separately in the following chapters. In Chapter Five, the first of the research discussion and analysis chapters, I explore the contextual dimension of the process of teacher identity (re)construction of beginning teachers in their first year. In Chapter Six, the second discussion chapter, I focus primarily on the influence of prior and continuing experiences of schooling and teaching on the process of beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I explore the dynamics of how beginning teachers build their identities based on relationships with students, teachers, parents and other relevant stakeholders.

By organising the discussion of teachers’ narratives into three dimensions, my intention is not to compartmentalise teachers’ identity, experience or knowledge but to describe how their identity has been shaped by these different dimensions of learning to teach. Britzman argues that ‘compartmentalization defines the limits of relevancy; it brackets our definitions of context and content, and imposes measures of credibility that determine what we accept and reject as true and false’ (2003, p. 35). The organisation of the dimensions is, therefore, not limited to the relevance of the ideas expressed in these chapters. There are different ways of thinking about teacher identity based on the narratives in this study. Beginning teachers have discussed their identity (re)construction in interaction within the available context around them.

I realise that the sample of beginning teachers in this research is small and may not be representative of other teachers, and that these findings may not be generalised to
other beginning teachers because of the uniqueness of their circumstances. However, as beginning teachers, they have some things in common with all or most other beginning teachers, such as the fact that they are new to teaching and that somewhere at the start of their career they have had to learn how to fit into schools and teach.

In the following chapters, I examine and analyse rich, diverse, interesting and detailed stories of these teachers’ experiences in the first year.
5 CHAPTER FIVE

NEGOTIATING TEACHER IDENTITY IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT: THE STRUGGLE FOR INSTITUTIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ACCEPTANCE
Chapter Five

5.1 Introduction

Research studies have emphasised the strong link between school culture and beginning teachers’ socialisation (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Hargreaves, 1995; Williams, 2002). The professional landscape of schools has a significant influence on how beginning teachers negotiate their teacher identity (Stanulis, Campbell & Hicks, 2002). Learning to become a teacher involves more than learning the techniques of teaching. It involves talking, speaking, acting and thinking as a teacher (Bulfin & Mathews, 2003). Further, school cultures influence how beginning teachers learn to become and see themselves as teachers (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman & Liu, 2001), and how they conform or resist dominant ‘regimes of truth’, which are discursive practices and discourse perpetuated in school cultures (Williams, 2002).

In this chapter, I employ the discursive view of identity (re)construction to explain the beginning teachers’ experiences of becoming teachers. My argument is that beginning teachers are engaged in different discourses in which they try to understand themselves and then create a social space that matches these discourses with their own personal beliefs and values. These discourses are scripted by the school culture and contextual, professional and societal expectations. Their own personal beliefs and background orientation also play a role within these discourses. In this chapter, I explore the contextual influences on the (re)construction of teacher identity, describe the struggles within the process of identity (re)construction, and examine how beginning teachers struggle against notions of the normative discourse of teacher identity that has been culturally scripted in their respective schools.
Chapter Five

Context, as used in this chapter, refers to two different levels of institutional discourse - school institutional discourse and professional institutional discourse—and these are dealt with in two sections in the chapter: (i) the influence of school culture on teacher identity (re)construction, and (ii) the influence of professional expectations on beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction.

School culture refers to the macro-level institutional discourse in which teachers engage, while professional expectations refer to professional discourse that differentiate beginning teachers from other teachers. By considering the impact of the context of teachers’ work on their identity (re)construction using critical and post-structural approaches, I examine how norms, values and discursive practices within schools shape beginning teachers’ experiences of teaching. These experiences are deeply embedded in norms and rules within the context in which teachers work, thereby leading them to adopt particular professional practices and teacher identities (Zembylas, 2003). Since these experiences form the foundations of practice on which beginning teachers build their identity as teachers, it is important to understand how beginning teachers negotiate and (re)construct their identities in relation to these norms and discourse.

Underlying these main processes is the tension between the culturally scripted notion of teacher identity that is shared within the school, beginning teachers’ beliefs and values of teaching, and how they are caught between their desires and professional expectations. This tension is a significant aspect of the process of becoming a teacher, which, as these narratives will show later in the chapter, is ongoing, complex and multiple. Many research studies have shown the influence of the school context on the
process of becoming a teacher (Flores, 2001). In particular, these studies have highlighted the tensions and contradictions beginning teachers experienced in their school contexts (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003).

The key question I address in this chapter is, ‘What do beginning teachers understand of their school culture and how does it influence the (re)construction of their identities?’ In answering this question, I place emphasis on showing the struggles and tensions beginning teachers face in navigating a new set of school cultural discourse, with a view to raising a more critical dialogue on the discursive practices and structures influencing the (re)construction of their teacher identity. By examining how beginning teachers experience these discourses, I intend to demonstrate the struggles they experience ensuing from their interactions, and how they begin to find their own voice in their school contexts.

I study how the influence of professional expectations on beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction influences teachers’ narratives, their struggles in understanding professional expectations and how they negotiate their teacher identity. This section on professional expectations further explains the tension between beginning teachers’ beliefs and professional expectations and concludes with an analysis of teachers’ ideas about professional recognition and acceptance.

### 5.2 Influence of School Culture on Teacher Identity (Re)construction

Every school has its own micro-political reality lived through its culture, expectations, discourse and ideas about what constitutes ‘good’ teaching and ‘accepted’ practices. The culture and practices carry social meanings, which become traditions within the school culture; however, most beginning teachers remain largely unaware of these
traditions and expectations and the influences they have on their work until they start teaching (Bullough, 1990; Rust, 1994). These traditions are habitual ways of thinking that orient beginning teachers to everything within the school and assist their actions and inactions through the use of scripts and guidelines as they transit into a new culture (Blackledge, 2002; Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993). These discourses are scripted by the school culture and context, and by professional and societal expectations of what it means to be a ‘good’ teacher. Within the school, teachers’ personal philosophical frameworks (conception of self as a teacher, knowledge and belief systems) face revision and adaptation to fit with the realities of their situations. As they experience the first year of teaching, beginning teachers may feel vulnerable when there is a mismatch between their ideals and the reality of these cultural contexts.

Beginning teachers are caught in the middle of the competing discourses, expectations and accepted practices about the ideal teacher identity, which Alsup refers to as ‘culturally scripted’ (2006, p. 4) teacher identity within the school. As they interact with the school culture, beginning teachers become aware of their own beliefs and values. Ongoing interactions help them to identify teachers’ positioning within the school and gradually gain an understanding of the expectations they are obligated to fulfil as beginning teachers. Thus, embedded in the process of becoming a teacher is the ongoing nature of integrating both the personal and the professional aspects (Alsup, 2006; Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

This integrating process also involves ongoing tension between their beliefs and established school practices. As a result of these tensions, beginning teachers are
constantly faced with the need to choose, to either confront and attempt to change existing school practices, or to accept and conform to them, thereby letting go of their previously held personal beliefs. According to Reynolds (1996), there are three main forces that influence teacher identity (re)construction: the school context, expectations and the agency of the beginning teacher. She believes that beginning teachers make decisions about what they allow to affect them and actively construct their identity despite the demanding school context in which they work. Conversely, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) give more credence to the influences of the schools’ culture, supporting the argument that the school environment plays a major role in influencing and shaping teacher identity. They see schools as a landscape of ‘interacting stories that bear directly on teacher identity, and by association, on teacher satisfaction with their work’ (p. 100).

Beginning teachers encounter a range of discursive normative practices in schools. For instance: How are students taught and assessed? How is students’ behaviour managed? How do teachers behave? What rules and regulations exist within the school? The institutional norms embedded within the school culture dictate how teachers should behave in the school, but in many cases are contradictory to the beginning teachers’ beliefs and practices. Within these norms and discursive practices are embedded notions of the culturally preferred/scripted ideal of the ‘good’ teacher (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 1999).

Beginning teachers are forced to negotiate these discourses and make decisions on how to respond to them. Thus, teachers are indirectly faced with the notions of the ‘culturally scripted’ ideal teacher in these norms and must decide whether to resist or
conform to the status quo in the school (Britzman, 2003). The institutional discourse has shaped and is being shaped by the creation of the culturally scripted teacher identity (Britzman, 2003). Thus, there is a dialogical process between the discourse and scripts of being a beginning teacher because identity work involves social negotiations—a process of becoming, and of shaping teacher identity within the fabric of school culture.

Thus, beginning teachers are immersed into specific ways of thinking, speaking, and acting in order to be approved, acknowledged and accepted by other teachers, parents and students when they start teaching in schools (Miller Marsh, 2002). These ways of thinking, speaking and acting are discourses that carry particular notions of teaching and learning with certain values and beliefs, which are expressed in the form of discursive practices and structures. As teachers interact with these discourses, they understand the ideologies behind them and how the ideologies compare with their own values and beliefs. Miller Marsh argues that ‘as we are introduced to different ways of seeing, thinking and acting through our interactions with others, various ideologies enter into our consciousness and come into contact with those things that we already hold as “true”’ (2002, p. 334). What happens here is an ideological struggle between ‘various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, and values’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346, cited in Miller Marsh, p. 334) and the values and beliefs that beginning teachers hold to be true. Bakhtin (1981) argues that these struggles are integral to people developing new understandings and ways of being.

By way of example, I will now consider Lok’s struggle with social justice and Lee’s struggle over deficit views of students’ capabilities. In both cases, we see how
preferred notions of the ‘culturally defined teacher identity’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 57) are challenged by the two beginning teachers. The scripted teacher identity is a compilation of cultural expectations and definitions of the teacher—various versions of how a teacher has been defined (Alsup, 2006, p. 6). There are different cultural scripts and stereotypes of teachers that are produced, reproduced, presented and represented to teachers in various forms at school and outside of school. Thus, when the beginning teacher actually starts, they are engaged in negotiating multiple and ‘conflicting subject positions and ideologies while creating a professional self’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 6).

5.2.1 Story 1: The Struggle for Social Justice—Lok’s Story

There have been a lot of conflicts and the latest we’re dealing with is all ongoing and it’s with mainstream and Noongar kids. But with the number of African refugees we’re getting in now, the Indigenous community (Noongar families) are having conflicts with our African kids. It’s just antagonism there, and yes, we are talking assaults. My kids come into class in the last couple of weeks and they’ve been chased by families with knives and stuff. Thus, the stories I have been hearing are that Aboriginal families feel that Homewest3 housing is being taken from them. Thus, there are much bigger community issues occurring. And I think a lot of teachers just have no idea of what is occurring. And so there is a huge amount of disintegration—cultural disintegration, dislocation and complete disenfranchisement. Thus, there is this battle that is occurring.

What’s occurring is that Olivewood segregates students. Each of the five learning programs are in different parts of the school and during recess and lunch time, we have what we call safe areas—English safe area for refugee students, and mainstream safe area, etc. The other programs have recess at a different time to us. Thus, it’s all set up and segregated. And so often what happens is that when we give students the opportunity to actually interact, then bang, bam! And so I just really feel like some things have to change. And you know, if we get to the kids now I mean they are the ones to make the changes in our community.

And you know, I just think that it’s our job; well, it’s our job to show them another way of being with each other. And so I’ve just really taken a stand for it in my classroom as well as in mainstream and with some of the

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3 Homewest—government public housing.
teachers in the Noongar program. And because, you know, I’m Noongar, I’m really passionate about this. And yeah, it is just trying to get other teachers enrolled in the idea that we can all be doing something about this and yeah it’s just happening. I really spoke up in our last meeting.

In the narrative above, Lok raised critical social issues that were present in her school context. She discussed the social conflicts between Indigenous and refugee groups in the community and the limiting structures in her school that contributed to the disintegration and dislocation of her students. The issue of social justice and disintegration among students were real challenges for Lok. As she viewed it, if students do not feel safe in their neighbourhood and they do not feel safe or comfortable at schools, where then, are they going to have the emotional balance they need in their lives? The case for social justice was woven into Lok’s negotiation of her role and identity as a teacher. She saw the need to confront social issues affecting the lives of her students and challenged the school’s attitude of ignoring the problem. She was moved to do this because her students were misbehaving and not engaging in learning. The issues involved went far beyond teaching styles but were ingrained in the social issues occurring in the neighbourhood in which these students were living (Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Apple, 1996). Students were living in fear in their community and facing complete disenfranchisement, as Lok described above.

As explained in Chapter 3, Olivewood was situated in a low socio-economic community, with residents (mostly refugees and Indigenous people) living in discord. Indigenous communities, in claiming their rights on public housing resources, engaged in fights against refugee families who received the housing allocations from government. The gradual increase in allocation of resources to refugee families resulted in more threats from Indigenous communities towards refugee families. As children from both communities attend Olivewood school, learning engagement
became really difficult. Students’ wellbeing and welfare were affected to the extent that the students were unsettled and constantly misbehaving in classrooms, which then affected their engagement in learning activities (Newmann, 1992).

Lok’s description of the competition for public housing resources between Indigenous and refugee communities resonates strongly with McCarthy and Dimitriades’ (2000) account of the discourse of resentment spawned by increasing competition for resources between African Americans and Latinos. McCarthy and Dimitriades (2000) argued that resentment could be used as a tool to understand the struggles such communities face. Although it seemed that the perceived problem of distribution and redistribution of Homewest housing between Indigenous and refugee communities was the main issue, the root cause was likely related to wider social issues of injustice, cultural loss, struggles with oppressive structures and the influences of marginalisation that have upset and plagued these communities, which Lok accurately analysed. Lok’s interaction with her students showed that the influences of social issues occurring in the community filtered into the school and classrooms because students’ engagement in learning activities was dependent on their social contexts (Davis, 1999; Newmann, 1992).

The inseparable connection between the school and community that beginning teachers must negotiate is evident in Lok’s narrative. As Connell (1993) explained, there is an established, historical relationship between schools and their surrounding context such that social issues affecting the community invariably affect the school. Perhaps more important is the relationship between students and their communities because what is happening at home is displayed in the classroom. As Apple stated, the
Chapter Five

‘relationship between schooling and economic, political and cultural power is not an afterthought. It is a constitutive part of the very being of schooling’ (1996, p. 96). Smyth and McInerney argued that ‘inequalities, class differences and prejudices of adults penetrate schools’ (2007, p. 59) because schools are associated with ‘larger economic, cultural, and ideological conflicts’ (Apple, 1996, p. 96). It is important to recognise the relations between the socio-economic conditions in which students live and the influences of these conditions on students’ learning engagements in schools.

Despite the complexity of the problems occurring at Olivewood, Lok believed the school had a neutral response to it. It seemed disinterested and some of her colleagues did not even understand the extent of the problem. In fact, the established school culture contributed to or supported the problem of dislocation and disintegration that these students experienced. The school culture supported segregation of students based on their cultural backgrounds, which fostered non-unity and division among students. For example, Lok’s students who were predominantly African refugees did not share the same lunch periods or play areas with other students in the school. Likewise, students in other learning programs were not allowed to mix. Lok’s perception of this situation was that it was unhealthy and there was too much segregation occurring within the school. According to her:

The problem that is occurring now is that our kids just see a sea of white faces, and for mainstream kids, they just see black faces. There is no identity attached to these people. And if they have an experience of violence with a Noongar kid, then a decision is made about the Noongar people.

This school culture created ‘others’ within the school, such that some students were deemed better, because they behaved more appropriately, than the ‘others’ (many of whom had more complex social problems) who did not. ‘Othering’ in this school
culture involved the perpetuation of hegemonic practices that allow dominant, powerful voices to speak (Giroux, 1997; Smyth, 1999). The teaching staff and administrators exercised the inherent power in their roles to create a culture that was very problematic for some students. Instead of Olivewood providing ‘pedagogy of freedom’ (Freire, 1998), it was apparently creating a situation in which many students were being constricted by schooling structures that did not respect or acknowledge their lives (Smyth & McInerney, 2007, p. 101).

The reasons for these practices appear to be a desire to create order and reduce behavioural problems within the school. As Smyth, Angus, Down and McInerney noted, the ‘social institution of schooling itself has remained remarkably intact around its primary function of sifting and sorting students and maintaining social order and control’ (2008, p. 120). The practice of sorting students and maintaining social order in schools, evident in the practices found in Olivewood, configures the social lives that students experience, enforcing certain views of social existence. Considering that students spend around eight hours of their lives in school every day, one-third of their life is determined by the policies and discursive structures of schools (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). This eventually means students’ identities ‘are constructed with and against prevailing norms of social behaviour, religious beliefs, gender stereotypes and school policies’ in the school context (Smyth & McInerney, 2007, p. 46).

The discourse available to students in Lok’s school scripted how she was to behave and what was expected of her as a teacher, including the segregation of students. Such discourses can be oppressive structures that siphon power out of students and teachers and give them the perception of being powerless within the system. Whereas, in truth,
students and teachers can be agents that can change these discursive practices, although it is more difficult for students and beginning teachers to change situations imposed by the school administration. Beginning teachers, like Lok, enter into these discursive environments and are faced with the challenge of either conforming or reforming the ways things are done (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1986). They are faced with the daunting challenge of choosing to either keep quiet or voice their concerns. For Lok, the intolerance and injustice experienced by students was not right, and in this case, she was unwilling to continue conforming to it.

Due to her entrance into the discursive space of teaching in Olivewood as a beginning teacher, Lok was not afforded the platform to attend to the broader cultural issues that were affecting the students immediately. She ‘played by the rules’ in the first term by being ‘professional’ in her dialogue and her interaction with students and other teachers. Lok thought about establishing partnerships with parents from first term but restrained herself because she was worried other teachers would frown on her if she dabbled in the cultural problems of the school and the community, especially the segregation that existed between her students. However, while Lok was eager to involve herself in reformation of the cultural practices in the school from the first term, pre-ordained social scripts acted against her desire to build more effective classroom and teaching approaches.

As a consequence, Lok confined herself to improving her skills as a classroom teacher until community issues interfered with her students’ wellbeing, causing her to feel an overwhelming need to take action. At this point, she tried to counteract the practice of segregation and started to think of new ways of constructing her practices around her
own beliefs about social justice, education and schooling. In confronting the existing norms of the school, she was choosing to uphold her own belief system, and to instigate change instead.

At the beginning of the third term, Lok decided to engage in the problems and resolve cultural issues in her own way. Lok was tired of restricting herself to the limits attached to beginning teachers. She spoke up at a staff meeting about the cultural issues occurring and signalled the need for urgent attention. When accounting for speaking up at the meeting, Lok described the need she felt to be very professional in her presentation so that other staff members would accept her opinion and suggestions (Zembylas, 2003). She paid attention to using the right rhetoric, intonation and gestures. After the meeting, and other meetings with the local community, she was approached by the school administration with a request to offer a Noongar awareness cultural program to the African refugee kids.

Although Lok was initially forced to live with contradictions, tensions and conflicts within her work environment, what spurred her into action was a desire to find a way to resolve or manage the cultural conflicts occurring in her students’ lives. She perceived the conflicts as deterrents to their learning. By being proactive, Lok took a positive identity position of trying to understand what was occurring in the school environment with the students and also finding out information about the issues that were present outside the school. She found there was a huge disagreement, a pre-existing argument between the two social groups, many of which the students got involved in and transferred to school, taking out their grievances on one another because it was affecting them outside school. The way the school environment was
organised was not helpful in dealing with their differences outside school. The same
groups co-existed in schools but they did not have an amicable way of living with
each other in school, to the extent that they had different play areas from each other.
Lok felt this separation in the playground actually contributed to the divide.

By standing up for the integration of her students and others in the school, Lok began
to challenge the discursive practices of segregation by publicly resisting the
established norm (Reeves, 2009, p. 35). When Lok talked about showing students a
new way of being with each other, she recognised the significance of her role;
arguably, she actually redefined her role from the traditional conception of teaching
subject matter to incorporating the moral and ethical aspects of teaching that are often
ignored (Noddings, 1995). She taught self-respect, integration, and social life skills by
building interpersonal relationship with students. Lok’s teaching practice expressed
one of the key values of transformative pedagogies by acknowledging the different
‘ways in which people live together’ (Biesta & Miedema, 2002, p. 176). The presence
of these discursive structures and practices of alienating students was influential in
shaping Lok’s (re)construction of her teacher identity as she strived to reform them
(Britzman, 2003).

One of the things that inspired Lok in her new role was the fact that she recognised
that her work went beyond simply teaching students in her class; she understood and
recognised the influence of the external environment, community and families on the
learning that takes place in classrooms. Kincheloe argued that when teachers examine
‘the social, economic, cultural, educational, historical and political dynamics of their
students and communities … it helps [them] to comprehend the forces impacting on
Chapter Five

the schools in which they work … [and] understand the students they teach’ (2001, p. 407). Lok understood that learning cannot effectively take place when the teacher has no understanding of what it is that students bring into her classroom. With the kind of students she was teaching, it was important to know where these students were ‘coming from’, since she could not assume anything about the current or past lives they lived. Her experience of life is not similar to refugee students who have been severely traumatised.

Schools are more than the four walls of the classroom; they involve surrounding communities. Societal problems filter into the school because people do not live in a vacuum; they bring with them their problems. Teachers have to deal with problems occurring in the homes and neighbourhoods of their students. In Smyth’s words, ‘teachers are continually having to bump against the barriers and enclosures constructed by others’ (2001, p. 159).

Lok was able to see beyond the unruly behaviour and attitudes of her students. She saw what was really happening—the invisible and unspoken social and cultural differences and contexts. According to Smyth and McInerney (2007), teachers who have a strong commitment to social justice seek to do what is right by the students rather than embracing a managerialist discourse that attempts to impose order on students’ lives. This managerialist discourse (as described in Chapter Two) is more prevalent in schools today due to the neo-liberal reforms that discipline teachers’ and students’ performances through increased levels of monitoring and surveillance (Sachs, 2001). Lok actively confronted this managerial discourse by operating in more
socially just ways or what Day and Sachs (2004) described as ‘activist professionalism’ in the democratic discourse.

Lok’s narrative provides a way of understanding how institutional norms shape institutionalised teacher identities within the school culture. The norm at Olivewood was to separate particular groups of students (refugees and Indigenous), preventing them from interacting with mainstream students. This norm established what Lok’s position should be and also defined the institutionalised teacher identity for Lok, who at least initially had to adapt to the accepted way of doing things before negotiating her way (Alsup, 2006). Institutional teacher identities are constituted by entrenched norms, practices, ideologies and power within schools (Alsup, 2006). They have been scripted in the past by the powerful within the institution and are passed on to new entrants into the school community (Gee, 2001; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sachs, 2001). The ways things are done within a school communicates the culturally accepted professional identity the school expects of teachers.

The school as an institution inscribes and prescribes the patterns of behaviour and these become entrenched and passed on to all members of the school community. When Lok decided to challenge the accepted norm, she was technically going against what others had accepted. She struggled against the institutional identity or, as Ball (1972) and Woods, Jeffrey, Troman & Boyle (1997) described it, ‘assigned social identity’, which was in conflict with her own concept of what a school should be like and how learning should occur. Lok opposed dominant ideologies of administrative authority, teachers and students by electing to ‘teach against the grain’ of the school (Simon, 1992). In essence, Lok was beginning to negotiate and reshape her identity
away from the status quo—her assigned culturally scripted teacher identity—to an identity that resonated more with her beliefs and values (Woods & Carlyle, 2002). This was a conscious effort for Lok. Beginning teachers must be aware of how practices and attitudes are reproduced within the culturally accepted institutional discourse of preferred ‘culturally scripted’ teacher identity. Lok’s narrative showed that she chose the discourse she engaged in and, like McCarthy and Dimitriades argued, the ‘games of truth’ she wanted to engage with (2000, p. 202). As shown by this narrative, Lok negotiated her teacher identity, redefined in the process of changing the discursive practice of segregation in her school context, even though she was still only a beginning teacher in the school.

5.2.2 Story 2: Deficit Views of Students’ Capabilities—Lee’s Story

The influence of school culture on teacher identity (re)construction is also apparent in the experience of Lee. Within her work context, she was set up to assume only average achievement from her students because the school culture had classified them as academically incapable and lacking in motivation.

A lot of the students that we get aren’t academically smart. They’re not getting As and Bs, you know, they’re barely passing maths. And it feels like a lot of the teachers have given up, or it’s just too hard, and they don’t believe that the students can do better. I mean, Forrestville is not a bad school and it’s not doing badly by any stretch of the imagination, but a lot of teachers have given up. They can’t be bothered anymore and it’s stories like ‘it’s too hard so we won’t do it, it’s just too hard’.

They don’t care, it’s as if they don’t care if they’ve got the best for their students. They just want things done, which is basically the attitude of the school, ‘just get the students to pass. Yeah just get them to pass, they don’t need an A, they just need a C’. My ethics are if they’re going to pass they should pass with an A. I push my students to get the highest they can get and it sort of conflicts with the rest of the school because you’re trying to enforce this professionalism and the rest of the school is sort of like going, ‘Oh no, they’ve got a C, they’re fine,’ that sort of thing, so I’m just disappointed for the students.
Chapter Five

By the time students get to year 11 and year 12 they seem very negative about what they can achieve and the students think trying a little bit is good enough. They now have the same mentality that a C is good enough, or they couldn’t do better anyway so they might as well be happy with a C or, you know, C is awesome and I challenged that. I want my students to know what it’s like to strive for something and to achieve something instead of just either being handed it or just settling for second best. Yeah, it was hard at first because the students were like, ‘What? That’s good enough’.

And so I pushed them, kept pushing and kept pushing and I think it has finally paid off. I mean, the concert was a reflection of that. They didn’t settle for second best, they wanted it to be great and they worked hard for it and they definitely achieved it.

This narrative gives an insider’s view of Forestville’s culture as understood by teachers and students. The entrenched notion that students in the school were not ‘academically smart’ was widely shared among teachers because students performed poorly in their subjects. Lee’s portrayal of teachers’ attitudes towards students’ achievement pointed to the values and beliefs operating within the school culture.

Lee’s narrative subsequently displayed how Lee’s teacher identity was constructed through her interaction with the school’s discursive cultural practices. Although she discussed the school culture, she also referred to the attitude of teachers about student performance. Within the school culture is the notion of the culturally scripted teacher identity that accepts average as good enough for students. It was an identity position that was set up for her, which she needed to engage and negotiate with. Lee recognised the discursive practices (discourses) established within the school culture from both her students’ point of view and the teachers’ worldview, and found it difficult to reconcile this with her own strong beliefs and values about students’ learning. The struggle for Lee was the tension between her educational values—who she wants to be as a teacher—and the culturally scripted teacher identity within the school. When she entered the school and noticed this identity position, she challenged
it because it was not how she imagined teaching. Her response to this discursive practice and culturally scripted teacher identity explained how she negotiated her identity as a teacher and the kinds of actions she embarked on.

Lee described the culture of blame attached to students by teachers in her school because of their poor performance in maths, in particular in NAPLAN test results. This discourse of blame focuses on the students’ low performance rather than on the schools’ teaching and learning approaches (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). The teachers in Lee’s school excused low performance because of students’ disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and their family upbringing (Flores, 2001; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Teachers were caught up in a victim blaming process, a process that saw students as problems (Valencia, 1997).

As Lee explained, her school culture accepted pass and credit as good enough grades for these students. The teachers expected students to perform at an average level; as long as they passed, teachers made no effort to help improve students’ performance. In fact, students were not seen as capable of or needing to have distinction grades. Credit was good enough. Thus, teachers were neither encouraging students to pursue higher grades nor challenging students to set ambitious goals for themselves. This view is consistent with Smyth and McInerney’s (2007) view of how students’ learning in disadvantaged areas is often perceived. They argued that:

one of the most common perceptions of students in disadvantaged school communities is that they lack the academic ability and the potential to engage in higher learning (Thompson & Comber, 2003). As a consequence, young people living in poverty are often offered a ‘pedagogy of poverty’ (Haberman, 1991) as an alternative to a rigorous and challenging curriculum. (Smyth & McInerney, 2007, p. 8)
Providing students with a ‘pedagogy of poverty’ (Haberman, 1991; O’Connor, 2001) rather than a rigorous curriculum limits the kinds of knowledge available to students and forecloses higher learning and professional careers. Teachers at Forrestville appeared to be going through the motions, doing the minimum and ticking students off the list. Haberman (1991) argued that the kind of pedagogy offered determines students’ sense of identity. When teachers perpetuated a ‘pedagogy of poverty’ at Forrestville, students came to believe they were incapable of achieving any better and began to adopt these deficit images of themselves. The implication of this mindset is one of creating and perpetuating an inferior academic identity for students, thus limiting the life chances of students.

Lee’s narrative also suggests that by expecting only credit level work from students and paying less attention to them, Forrestville teachers limited their own capabilities by not believing they could help students achieve distinctions. Students’ achievement and performance appeared to be regulated by implicit, context-defined rules of what was possible, based on teachers’ judgement of their students. This discursive practice within the school context prescribed what was possible, thereby influencing teachers’ work and students’ learning.

Although Lee understood the ‘culturally scripted’ teacher identity at Forrestville, her sense of what was morally and educationally right could not be dissuaded. The culturally accepted belief that average was good enough did not sit comfortably with Lee. Alsup argued that there is a problem when a school’s culture of normality is inconsistent with beginning teachers’ values and beliefs (2006, p. 64) because it creates tension between personal ideology and accepted norms, and this is what Lee...
Lee’s decision to confront can be understood in relation to her own personal experience of learning. According to Flores, new teachers’ experiences are a reflection of ‘personal biography, their beliefs and their expectations’ (2001, p. 144). One of the reasons why Lee was strongly committed to changing this ‘average mindset’ of students and teachers was because of her personal experience of striving hard to be successful. She mentioned in one of our discussions that she learnt the skill of working hard from her grandfather and this motivated her through school and university. She worked hard to succeed instead of having people give her things. In her teaching work, pushing students to succeed became her guiding philosophy even
though students and teachers alike resisted her strategies initially. Many studies have discussed the immense pressure on beginning teachers to conform to prevailing norms (Walsdorf & Lynn, 2002; Williams, 2002). However, Lee was able to negotiate her way through the system by resisting the existing norms.

There is evidence of tension for Lee in how she was identified at Forrestville. Her immediate school culture provided contradictory discourses to the kind of teacher she aspired to be. Like Lok, she challenged and confronted the belief about students’ learning potential. The contrast between her beliefs about students’ learning and the school culture was large. However, she was determined to reject deficit notions of students’ achievement. To construct her own identity as a teacher, Lee had to assert her own beliefs about learning and reject her colleagues’ practices. By rejecting the dominant discursive practice, she challenged the culturally scripted teacher identity and the values underlying this identity, which were shared by both students and teachers alike. Throughout the year of the study, Lee confronted this practice while she created an oppositional identity as a teacher, despite the students’ initial unwillingness to change. In doing this, Lee exercised her power and agency to change entrenched practices within the school. She was taking the identity position of a teacher who challenges and redefines the school culture.

Lee’s narrative illustrates the type of tensions and struggles beginning teachers face as they bring their personal values and beliefs about teaching into a context where differing expectations of students’ achievement and performance exist, and where low expectations of students’ abilities prevail. Lee’s narrative suggests that beginning teachers do not always conform to the school norms, as other studies of beginning
teachers have suggested (Reeves, 2009; Miller Marsh, 2002). Lee could easily have accepted the prevailing norms of blaming students for low academic performance but her beliefs enabled her to reject and then recreate alternative forms of action. Lee’s experience is a testimony to the fact that beginning teachers have agency to positively effect changes in their environment and recreate values in their work. The notion of beginning teachers succumbing to socially assigned or culturally scripted identities was challenged in Lee’s narrative. She demonstrated that teacher identity is discursively created and negotiated with her students and colleagues.

Different ideologies are inherent in school discourse due to the different peculiarities of school contexts. Thus, the process of becoming a teacher is different for each individual because of the range of contexts and differing orientation to teaching held by experienced teachers. Lok and Lee were introduced to ways of thinking, acting and seeing through their engagement with the school and their interaction with various ideologies within the school (Bulfin & Mathews 2003). Both Lok and Lee described how the norms and practices in their school cultures differed from their own personal beliefs and values about their own teaching and students’ learning. They recognised the potential power of cultural practices and beliefs among students and teachers; they struggled to negotiate their own strongly held beliefs about students’ learning and tried to create an engaging and socially just learning environment (Bullough, 2001; Miller Marsh, 2002).

Both Lok and Lee faced a decision about whether or not to conform to the ways things were done in their school contexts. Both made conscious, well-informed decisions to stand for what they truly believed in. As they (re)constructed their own teacher
identities against dominant discourse in their schools, they ‘simultaneously created possibilities and constraints’ (Miller Marsh, 2002, pp. 334–335) for their identities as well as relationship with their students. Their struggle was in fact an attempt to create particular kinds of teacher identities for students to relate to and in the process, they demonstrated the kind of teachers they wanted to be (Cummins, 2001).

While there are some differences in Lok’s and Lee’s experiences, their narratives illustrate the processes by which beginning teachers negotiate and reframe cultural practices to enhance student learning in low Socio-economic Status (SES) school communities (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). They faced the risk of being construed and identified as different and abnormal within their school contexts. Their narratives showed that beginning teachers are faced with the challenge of accepting or rejecting certain discourse within their schools early in the teaching career. They have the choice to be passive or challenge norms and practices within the school structure; thereby, creating the types of teachers they want to be.

Lok’s and Lee’s stories demonstrate the powerful influence of contexts on the (re)construction of beginning teacher identities. Although beginning teachers create their own experiences, their experiences are also created ‘within social, political, and economic contexts that define what is seen as desirable, proper, and more importantly, possible’ (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 25). The socio-political and economic contexts create the conditions that both enable and constrain what is possible. Bullough and Gitlin advocated the need to ‘provide assistance to beginning teachers so they can examine and perhaps (re)construct institutionally preferred roles in the quest for a
place within the school that is ethically defensible, morally and politically responsible and personally satisfying’ (2001, p. 12).

As illustrated in this section, the interaction within the school context, especially the school culture and socio-cultural environment of the school, is a crucial factor in the (re)construction of beginning teachers’ identity. The process by which Lok and Lee expressed themselves revolved around ‘culturally scripted’ and ‘socially assigned’ identities and norms within the school context. Both teachers developed their identities discursively in interaction with the context. In the next section, I extend the discussion of how teacher identity is (re)constructed in relation to professional expectations within school contexts, and I examine in more detail some of the tensions and struggles beginning teachers face in negotiating professional expectations within their local school contexts. I pay particular attention to the implicit and explicit expectations placed on beginning teachers.

5.3 Influence of Professional Expectations on Beginning Teachers’ Identity (Re)construction

Many elements contribute to what is professionally expected of teachers and how teachers navigate such expectations, including societal demands, globalisation trends, federal government and state government initiatives, Department of Education policies and guidelines, the mass media, parents and students. Professional expectations in part reflect strong accountability demands within the Australian education system. They also reflect the influence of the larger society and wider context in determining what happens and what is expected of teachers and their professional practice (Musgrove & Taylor, 1969). Professional expectations contribute
to the creation of dominant teacher identities within schools that are culturally scripted (Alsup 2006, p. 6). These expectations are woven into the fabric of schools and beginning teachers are soon exposed to them. Becoming a teacher involves juggling different professional expectations and ideas of what it means to be a teacher. Arguably these implicit and explicit professional codes of expectations are locked up in the socialisation and transitioning process for beginning teachers. According to Alsup (2006), within:

the narrow cultural definition of the secondary school teacher, professional identity development for the educator is arguably more difficult than it is for professionals in other fields … teachers are often expected to teach in certain ways, conform in speech and dress, and take on a narrowly defined identity corresponding to the implicit and explicit characteristics of a ‘good’ teacher. As schools and teachers find themselves placed more and more often under the microscope of a critical society, new teachers in particular struggle with assuming a professional identity that both respects their personal ideologies and functions in the professional arena. (2006, pp. 191–192)

In this study, beginning teachers referred to professional expectations as being what the school, other teachers and parents expected of them. Bullough (2005) further argued that beginning teachers notice and recognise professional expectations from what other teachers are saying and from their responses to them. In this section, I describe how beginning teachers struggled with professional expectations and how their interactions with these expectations constituted and reconstituted their actions and positioning within the schools. I examine three key aspects of professional expectations that mediate teacher identity (re)construction—managing students’ expectations, addressing teacher expectations and managing parent expectations.

5.3.1 Story 3: Managing Students’ Expectations—Jemma’s Story

I haven’t experienced the first term of school before so it is weird, but it is interesting being here at the start of the year where students are all in the primary school routine. In the practicum I had, students had been weaned
off primary school and had started secondary school, so it is interesting being here at the start of the year where students are asking what side of the page do I write on? Do you want me to write on this one or that one? Do I need to use red pen when I rule up? Can I turn my page this side and do it there, that way? They are not independent at all; they need to know exactly how you want them to do stuff. Thus, that has been my biggest learning curve, just saying you know—‘You can do it. You can do it whatever way you want, it is your book. If you want to do half here and half there, then it is not important.’ But my biggest learning curve is seeing that happen and trying to get them to stop being dependent.

In this narrative, Jemma showed she was not accustomed to such dependence, neither did she expect her students to express their expectations of her as a teacher. Jemma started her first year of teaching with year 7 students (the first year in the middle school) and she was quickly thrown into a steep learning curve when she realised that her students were in great need of detailed instructions and specific guidance in their learning. It was a bit strange for both parties because students expected the normal routines they were accustomed to in primary school, whereas Jemma expected students to be more independent. Students wanted a teacher who was exactly like the teacher they had in their previous class. They wanted a teacher who would tell them what to do.

Although Jemma’s students were not interviewed for this research, students’ expectations as revealed in Jemma’s conversations suggested that they had already placed Jemma in the position of their former teacher. The students wanted their new teacher to be like their previous teacher because they were comfortable with the former teacher’s style. Britzman (1986) confirms this notion of students having specific expectations of their teachers because of their continuous schooling experience. Although this may also be an issue for more experienced teachers, what was different for Jemma was that she did not expect students to be so dependent.
Jemma realised that she had to move students from primary school learning to secondary school learning modes and this was her ‘biggest learning curve’. Jemma had to be explicit about what she expected her students to do to be able to do her work as a teacher (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Bullough argued that when beginning teachers fail to act in accordance to students’ expectations, ‘teacherly students will subtly press the teacher to a return to the proper teacher position’ (2005, p. 240). Bulfin and Mathews (2003) reported from their experience of students’ expectations of their teaching during their first year of teaching that they were able to learn from students what was considered important. This is part of the socialisation process for beginning teachers (Britzman, 1986). Britzman argued that when students express their expectations to beginning teachers, the ‘students do coach their teachers in ways which reinforce school structure and, as such, constitute an immediate source of teacher socialisation’ (1986, p. 445).

Jemma’s students engaged in a particular discourse of ‘how things are done here’ and ‘how learning occurs’ that suggests learning starts ‘with the teacher telling us what to do with our books’. The students’ expectations give us some insight into what constitutes classroom learning for these students—the enactment of rules and protocols of how to learn before learning occurs. This kind of discourse illustrates the power of discursive practice that conditions how learning occurs for students.

Because the students had different expectations, Jemma needed to understand their language and make decisions about adjusting or changing their expectations. This might have looked like a simple process of changing protocols, but it was more than that. Jemma had to change the way of learning to give students freedom and
ownership of their learning. It involved revising the instructions several times before students could actually settle and adapt to her teaching style. She basically offered them the opportunity to trust their learning styles without her realising it. And in choosing this response, Jemma’s teacher identity was being enacted. Within this critical episode, there are issues of entrenched discursive practices associated with students’ expectations of Jemma that did not fit with her own core beliefs and values about teaching and learning. By resisting these dominant representations, she was able to renegotiate her core personal beliefs and enact the kind of teacher she believed in.

Jemma’s narrative illustrates how schools and professional responsibilities in schools provide teachers with subject positions that shape their practice and lives (Miller Marsh, 2002; Reeves, 2009). What Jemma did not realise initially was that the students had already given her a ‘culturally scripted’ subject position consistent with their former teacher’s role. Bullough argued that these subject positions are ‘human creations sustained in multiple and often unrecognised ways through various forms of institutional labor simply going about our daily business and doing our jobs’ (2005, p. 239). In Jemma’s case, the subject position was created by students’ expectations, but rather than accommodating these expectations, she managed to renegotiate their images of what it means to be a teacher. Jemma negotiated her own teacher identity—an identity she truly believed.

In this section, I have discussed how beginning teachers navigate the implicit expectations required of their work by students in their school contexts. I now explore how certain stereotypes of teachers are preferred within schools. This extends the
discussion of beginning teachers’ negotiation of implicit expectations that are hidden discourse in the schools in which teachers work.

5.3.2 Story 4: Addressing Teacher Expectations—Lee’s Story

On my first day at school with all the students here, I was pulled aside by one of the teachers because they thought I was a student and asked me for my dress pass. Also, the students have asked me if I’m a year 12 student. How embarrassing!

Lee’s initial experience as a beginning teacher enunciated some of the nuances and practical realities that beginning teachers experience in their first year of teaching. Schools have particular expectations of how they want their teachers to look, which fit into the stereotypical, culturally scripted and accepted teacher in the school (Alsup, 2006). Therefore, when a beginning teacher like Lee who did not fit this stereotype arrived at Forrestville, there was the expectation that she had to place herself in the stereotype of the teacher that had been culturally defined. Specifically, Alsup argued that ‘in addition to mastering the language of a teacher, a new teacher must learn how to physically embody the identity of a teacher’ (2006, p. 88).

Considering this kind of experience on her first day at school, Lee was immediately sensitised to the notion that there was a culturally accepted idea of the teacher identity that she needed to observe and if possible represent if she was going to be successful in the school. Due to this embarrassing episode, Lee was made aware of teachers’ and students’ expectations and how teachers were presented and represented in the school. She was faced with the challenge of enacting a strong teacher identity right from the beginning. As she continued teaching, she began to realise that the culturally accepted teacher within the school was an older, mature person with an average stature. On the contrary, Lee was petite in stature and had a youthful appearance, which explained
why she was mistaken for a student. She was the youngest and only graduate teacher on staff, with the majority of teachers being over 35 years of age. As Lee explained, the ‘average age was 45, meaning a lot of the teachers are quite mature and they have been teaching for at least 15 years’. She further explained:

Just the fact that I look younger than I am, you know, I am small; I didn’t look like a teacher. And if I wore a school uniform, I could easily fit in there, that’s what my colleagues tell me anyway.

There is always the stereotype that teachers are old and are more experienced, like they have lots of knowledge. Thus, when you go to school, you can see who the teacher is because he or she would have the presence. Sometimes they will look older than the student anyway.

This narrative showed that Lee, after studying her school environment, recognised that there was a particular look that teachers have. This ‘look’, which I have described as a stereotype, encapsulates having a teacher’s presence and it is based more on age, stature and experience rather than knowledge, which is a conservative view of a teacher that is publicly shared. Bullough (2005) argued that schools accept certain stereotypes over others, which in a way suggests strongly that certain identities are immediately recognised and favoured within institutions.

It is significant that Lee identified and recognised this stereotypical, culturally accepted teacher identity because it affected how students and teachers initially treated her in school. More significantly, it is important to note that she was less disturbed about how she could achieve this ‘look’ because it was far beyond her means. She could not grow older or look mature all of a sudden. Lee, however, did not strive to express this culturally scripted teacher because striving to be this stereotyped kind of teacher was more difficult than ignoring it and becoming the kind of teacher she wanted to be. She adjusted to the idea that achieving this stereotype was not possible;
so instead she redefined how she wanted to be recognised as a teacher. Further, she tried to be more comfortable and professional in her practice and exuded a strong sense of confidence in herself and her passion for dance. Her strong passion for dance and being excellent in her practice helped her to gain the respect of her students and other teachers. She believed she could influence how dance was perceived in the school, and she did.

Britzman argued that part of the process of developing a teacher identity is understanding the discourse of ‘what a teacher is and does, what a teacher looks like, and whether the teacher’s body is a normal teacher’s body’ (2006, p. xi). In Lee’s case she had to decide what is a normal teacher’s body and whether she could define herself as fitting into the norm. The scenario in which Lee was initially pulled aside by the teacher unsettled how she imagined normalcy as a teacher and provoked her to think about how she wanted to present herself as a teacher. She recognised that she did not meet normalcy in the school; she was happy to redefine how a teacher should look and be because she was comfortable being herself to the extent that she challenged and disrupted students’ perceptions of their academic abilities, as described in section 5.2.

Alsop further argued that the ‘stereotypical, culturally scripted notions of the teacher’s body complicate the situation by providing rigid guidelines for appropriate action and teacher embodiment’ (2006, pp. 90–91). Although Lee was prompted to think about how she appeared to her students and was faced with the challenge of proving she was indeed a good teacher to the administrative staff and within the school community, she refused to allow it to rigidly affect how she practised as a teacher. Lee positioned
herself in a way that she was recognised as a teacher within the school, because she looked for ways of enacting her identity as a teacher publicly. For example, she organised dance concerts for the school.

The process of becoming a teacher is influenced by whether or not there is a strong match between the beginning teacher’s look and the stereotype favoured in the school. The issue of teacher stereotypes and how beginning teachers look is something that needs more attention. Alsup’s (2006) study showed that pre-service teachers who perceive a disparity between their looks/bodies and the stereotyped images of teachers in high school contexts often decided against a career in teaching after graduation. The strong influence of stereotypical body image of teachers on beginning teachers can be emotionally unsettling.

Metaphorically, I will argue that beginning teaching could be compared to adolescents trying to learn about themselves and comparing images of themselves with other people around them. It is a time when people do not want to look different from others. In saying this, I am not conveying the notion that these beginning teachers were adolescents, but it is how beginning teachers negotiate the terrain of having older teachers as stereotypes in schools. This narrative provides a basis for critically rethinking how beginning teachers can be assisted to make the connection between themselves and the culturally scripted stereotypes of teachers within their schools.

5.3.3 Story 5: Addressing Teacher Expectations—Jemma’s Story

I feel teaching is such big shoes for me to fit into with expectations that other teachers have and what I am actually capable of; although I know that at the same time they know I am a beginning teacher.

After a while you stop being the graduate and start being a member of the staff … they stop thinking you are a graduate. I don’t get the feeling that I
am a graduate anymore. I get the feeling that I am part of the team. I think I have earned the right to be part of the team but I felt that I did have to earn the right to be part of the team—not instantly on welcome. But I think it was harder for me because I did my practicum here. Thus, I was a student and then I graduated; you know, it’s just hard to get out of that role.

In this narrative, Jemma explained how other teachers’ expectations influenced how she thought about herself as a teacher, and how she was going through the emotions of fitting into the school as a ‘real’ teacher rather than as a practicum teacher. At first she was out of her comfort zone and did not know what she was doing. It was a personal battle of reconciling other teachers’ expectations with her known capabilities, although she perceived herself as an amateur in teaching. It was hard for her to believe in her capabilities and other people’s feedback on her performance because she knew she was still a novice at teaching. In her words ‘it is a personal battle for me; it is my own demons that I am fighting with’.

As for the transition from being a student teacher to a graduate teacher in the same school, Weber and Mitchell argued that ‘teachers are often aware of the preconceptions and images others hold of them’ (1995, p. 2). The awareness of other teachers’ perceptions makes beginning teachers conscious of their positions and roles. Sometimes it is hard to accurately decipher and understand the messages experienced teachers communicate to new teachers because there are likely to be tensions surrounding new teachers’ transition into schools and experienced teachers’ preconceived assessments of their skills. For example, there was the tension between how Jemma was feeling about being a teacher and other teachers’ expectations of her. Thus, when she stated ‘their expectations are big shoes for her to fit into compared to what she is capable of’, she was alluding to the fact that there was a gap that needed to
be bridged because she did not see herself as being able to perform to their expectations.

The subject position of the wonderful teacher that was created for her based on her practicum experience was difficult to climb into because it did not really fit into how she experienced being a teacher. In fact, she started her first class in uncertainty and was moving from one teacher to another asking for insights into what she could do with her students. What the experienced teachers did not realise was that being a practicum teacher is very different from being a beginning teacher. Thus, it was a tension between a subject position created for her and her perception of her capability. Through this constant tension of other teachers’ expectations and her own capabilities as a teacher, Jemma was engaged in the process of (re)constructing her teacher identity.

The reference to Jemma being a graduate in this context connotes being seen as a novice or inexperienced by other teachers, and it has a negative undertone. The above narrative also explained how experienced teachers within the school choose to accept or refuse beginning teachers into their team because of the experienced teachers’ perception/judgement of beginning teachers’ capabilities based on their level of experience in teaching and how easily beginning teachers adopted the norms within the school. Wenger (1998) argued that new participants in a community are expected to practise a set of norms within the school context in order to be accepted as part of the community. Failure to adhere to these norms serves as a way of identifying those who are part of the system from those who are not. It illuminates points of difference (Gee, 1996).
Pressures to fit into the context keep teachers subject to contextual forces, robbing them of agency, creativity and voice. The power of domination by experienced teachers that marks out the local school context in a way that makes beginning teachers feel out of place is very obvious in Jemma’s story and in the stories of other beginning teachers in this study. These reins of power are so intimidating for beginning teachers that they often choose not to be the target point of attacks. It is frustrating to have the qualifications to teach and yet think you are not a teacher until you are accepted. Jemma felt she was being watched and scrutinised for a while to find out if she was fit enough to be in the league. She mentioned that schools are political places: sites of contest where games are being played and the powerful ones win. It would have been so logical to assume that since Jemma had had her practicum in the school, it would have been an advantage for her in negotiating her positionality and identification as a teacher easily. However, it seems to have made it more difficult for her because other experienced teachers’ mental images of her as a student teacher on practicum remained her own memories of being a student teacher in the school, which could have added to the difficulties of assuming the position of the teacher.

Jemma’s response to being professional was to wait for events to unfold naturally. As she adjusted to her environment and got to know other teachers, collegial relationships developed. By the end of the year, Jemma felt that there was a change in the way she was perceived by other staff. She was no longer seen as a graduate but rather seen as part of the team. As she mentioned, she felt she needed to earn the right to be regarded as a teacher, which took considerable time. What was bewildering was the fact that even though these teachers thought she was a good teacher during her practicum, Jemma was not automatically admitted into the team as a full-fledged teacher. The
established teachers needed time to accept the idea that she was no longer a graduate teacher but a full time teacher in the school. As Czarniawski argued, ‘we are never the sole authors of our narratives’ (2004, p. 3). Jemma talked about term two being a turning point when she felt her experienced colleagues stopped seeing her as graduate and began to listen and value her ideas. This change in how Jemma was viewed by other teachers made her feel more accepted as a teacher and contributed to the (re)construction of her own teacher identity.

5.3.4 Story 6: Managing Parent Expectations—Bella’s Story

I find it difficult dealing with parents, I think a lot of it is to do with my age because I look younger than I actually am and I know that and I deal with it every single day of my life when I get treated like I’m a teenager. When I talk to parents on the phone that is fine. But when a parent comes to meet me, the attitude towards me is that I am just young, another young person. And a lot of them find it really difficult that someone that looks so young could be a teacher. And I get that every day, I get people saying that to me all the time. But I can’t change the way I look. At the moment it is hard. I feel like I get belittled by it and I can’t let it affect me and I have to push it aside and prove that I’m not just, you know, an inexperienced young person.

I don’t know what their view is on what a teacher should look like but at the beginning of the year when I was meeting parents, a lot of them were shocked to meet me. I have a couple of parents who are teachers themselves and they have mixed views on whether having a young teacher is a good thing or bad thing. There are a couple of parents who have either been teachers or have friends that are teachers that don’t like having a young teacher for their child. I’ve had one parent be really up-front with that and actually said to me, ‘I’m thinking of moving my child’, and I don’t really care, like they can move their child if they want, you know, but I don’t think age has anything to do with whether you’re a good teacher or a bad teacher … and sometimes I feel like I need to prove myself but I think, ‘Well if you think your child is going to get a better education somewhere else, who I am to say no. You can do with your child as you wish.’

I am getting a lot better with it and I kind of just have to show them that I am professional and that I do know what I am talking about. And after a little while, they do get over it.

Like Lee, Bella spent considerable time and effort negotiating her teacher identity with parents. For Bella, it was a case of proving her professional expertise to parents.
She talked about parents’ perception of her, parents saying she was too young to teach their children and that there was a particular way teachers should look, which she did not fit. How does a teacher look? Are there some features that set a teacher apart from a non-teacher? When a teacher walks into the crowd, what really distinguishes the teacher from the crowd?

To emphasise how she felt about this issue, Bella also described when she took her students on a camp with an older teacher-assistant. At the end of the camp, when parents came to pick up their children, most of the parents talked with the teacher-assistant because she was much older and assumed she was the teacher. Bella felt like a teacher-assistant when the parents thanked the real teacher-assistant for taking care of their kids. Bella recalled being disturbed by this episode because she was not given the recognition she deserved considering she was the camp organiser. She attributed this to her youthful looks and small stature.

Managing parental involvement has always been a challenge for beginning teachers. Beginning teachers often reported feeling least prepared to handle this challenge in their first year of teaching. Research has shown that relations with parents significantly influences beginning teachers’ satisfaction with their job and the possibility of teachers leaving the profession (Metlife, 2005, 2006). This relation with parents from Bella’s narrative shows that parental expectations for their children and the generational difference between younger teachers and older parents contributed to the challenge of (re)constructing her teacher identity.

Bella was positioned as deficient because she was a young teacher, and parents automatically pigeonholed her as an inexperienced, young person, which literally
means they did not regard her as a teacher or trust her with their children. For a
beginning teacher in her first year of teaching, this was a very difficult experience for
her to manage. Bella’s identity as a teacher and her self-confidence were conflicted
because of the parents’ attitudes towards her. As a result, she was moved into a
position of proving herself as a teacher, so that even though she could not change her
looks, she knew she would have to change parents’ perception of her by working hard
at being professional and doing her job well. In response, she started wearing clothes
that made her look more like a ‘real’ teacher in order to be recognised as a teacher,
and asked one of the teachers on her team about ways of managing parents, which
turned out to be very useful.

The issue of being judged by parents as inexperienced because one looks young
cannot be readily discussed in the staffroom or with other teachers because it may be
deemed ‘unprofessional’ (Alsup, 2006). For example, Bella was told by a parent that
she would withdraw her child from the class just because the parent saw Bella as too
young and inexperienced a teacher, and could not entrust her child’s education to
Bella. What Bella really needed to know was how to negotiate the divide between
how she felt about herself and being the kind of teacher that met parental expectations
(Alsup, 2006). In this context, the question becomes: How do these issues get
addressed, and where do beginning teachers find a space and voice to talk about them
(Bulfin & Mathews, 2003)? Despite these negative experiences, Bella indicated that
some parents thought it was fantastic having a young energetic teacher who could
engage well with their children.
Bella’s narrative shows how beginning teachers draw on discourses within the school culture for their identity (re)construction. Although there are several tensions between the school discourse and beginning teachers’ beliefs about teaching, the tensions and struggles are a fundamental part of teacher identity (re)construction. Lee’s and Bella’s narratives illustrate how teachers are expected to have a specific ‘look’ and if you do not fit the stereotype then there are considerable tensions in fitting into the school community. Research studies on how teachers’ appearances affect their identities have suggested that new teachers worry about how they look and dress, and their professional presence (Alsup, 2006). According to Zembylas, ‘Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogicality helps to make the point that identity is linked to the recognition by others; therefore, if teachers are denied recognition, this may cause them to internalize a demeaning image of themselves’ (2003, pp. 223–224). Recognition by others occurs in relationship with them and influences how a sense of self is constituted. This desire for personal and professional recognition profoundly influences the process of identity (re)construction for beginning teachers.

Included in the school cultural contexts in which beginning teachers work are the discursive stereotypes of what a teacher should look like and how a teacher should dress. These stereotypes are relayed to teachers, and teachers within the context have a cultural understanding of this. The strongholds of these discourses determine the conception of who a teacher is. The influence of the stereotyped discourse of a teacher as someone who looks older was locked in the minds of students, teachers and even parents in this context (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Thus, Lee and Bella, who did not fit into these historically and culturally defined stereotypes, faced particular difficulties. They were engaged in the battle of convincing others about their true value as teachers.
(Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Their experiences were complicated because they were faced at the same time with ‘normal’ issues of first year teaching, such as living up to expectations of their roles as teachers as well as critical judgements about their physical appearance as teachers. Every teacher who fitted into the stereotype was a reminder of who they were not or who they would have loved to be, but in this case they could not change their age, stature or experience. This created more issues of identification for these beginning teachers.

On their own, beginning teachers themselves struggle with fitting into these stereotypes of teachers, but it becomes more devastating when the educational community does not recognise them as part of the community and makes not fitting in seem like a deficit on their own part. This non-recognition evokes feelings of inadequacy and of being substandard, inferior and deficient. These are emotional discourses that affect the (re)construction of the teacher identity. Zembylas (2003) argued that the moments of feeling less worthy are an opportunity for teachers to resist the domination and enactment of the stereotype of how a teacher looks.

Unfortunately, Bella and Lee were not given the recognition they deserved; their authority and positions as teachers were under-acknowledged because they did not meet the expectations of others. Professional recognition and acceptance played a significant role in the process of becoming a teacher for both of them.

The word ‘professional’ implies having the required skills to practise autonomously in a particular knowledge field. In this research, beginning teachers discussed and used the word professional as a way of acquiring the public status of teaching. Jemma and Lok discussed their ways of acquiring professional recognition and acceptance in
ways such as ‘being professional’ and ‘earning the right to be part of the team’. For them, being professional was a way of redeeming their public face and negotiating their way to being recognised as a ‘proper’ teacher. Being professional required a personal commitment to professional activities within the school, and included acting as a professional when dealing with other teachers, exercising their authority in class as teachers and relating well with parents. Being professional was a deliberate act for the new teachers, involving close observation of other teachers and copying some of the things they do based on personal preferences and values.

Often, beginning teachers put effort into appearing to be more professional in the way they talk, dress and respond, as well as the way they comport themselves and ask questions. Lok had a strong idea of what it meant to be professional and looking professional in everything she did. It was locked into her story and dialogue at every stage of the research. She associated being professional with being someone who knows what they are doing, and was very conscious about how she presented herself to other teachers and her students.

There are some core attributes that beginning teachers think they need to take on when they start their new jobs, because they would look strange if they did not comply with these standards, but some are negotiable. According to Alsup (2006), beginning teachers who experience the binary tension between personal and professional identities navigate multifaceted identities. The process of being recognised and accepted means recognising the hidden discursive practices in schools, such as ‘earning the right to be part of the team’, as described by Jemma.
Beginning teachers (re)constructing their teacher identities signify they understand that the system operates in certain ways and by some parameters and are ready to grow within that system—not necessarily through acceptance of the system but through an acknowledgement of a system that is negotiable. Within this process of (re)construction is the opportunity for the place of acceptance and belonging for beginning teachers. It is a journey towards building a satisfying confluence of identities between the culturally accepted identity and personal self. Teacher identity (re)construction is an accumulation of the different experiences that gives teachers an understanding of themselves and the opportunity to improve their lives and selves as teachers.

The (re)construction of teacher identity is not an individual venture but, as these teachers have described, professional expectations within the school context influence how teacher identity is constructed and enacted. To say that teacher identity is more personally developed is to psychologise the development of identity and thus perpetuate deterministic views, thereby reducing the agency of the individual and portraying the powerlessness of the individual in influencing the (re)construction of their teacher identity. However, the contextual environment in which beginning teachers develop nurtures the development of their teacher identity (Gee, 1996; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). It is within this contextual environment in which teachers interact that their professional identity is shaped and birthed.

The process of learning to teach in the first year influences beginning teachers’ understanding of themselves as teachers and their perception of their capabilities. The beginning teachers’ narratives shared in this chapter were filled with struggles and
tensions as they navigated their new contexts. For them, (re)constructing teacher identity involved discovering professional expectations and the discursive practices within the school. Flores and Day (2006) argued that the transition phase is the time when beginning teachers discover the expectations from others and negotiate their acceptance by the students and teachers. Jemma’s story of students’ expectations became an avenue for the revelation of her core identity, unlike the first few days where she shelved her identity.

There are instances when the core identity of the individual is revealed in the space of socialisation and, therefore, activates the formation of a teacher identity that beginning teachers are satisfied with. There are instances when the identity has to be shelved in order to adopt the practices and beliefs within the school. Beginning teachers who allow such occurrences show that they are critical to a certain extent of some of the things they choose to enact. Socialising agents, like such discursive structures, influence how teachers view themselves (Lortie, 1975). Teacher identity (re)construction ‘is an effect of discursive practices’ (Zembylas, 2003, p. 224).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on how the profession of teaching and the contextual environment of schools affected the teacher identity (re)construction of beginning teachers. The different experiences that were the building blocks for identity (re)construction of these beginning teachers provided insights into what these teachers had gone through and how they thought about themselves as teachers. Significantly, the narratives in this chapter illustrate the tension between the context preferred and the kind of teacher desired. Gee’s work on the power within discourse and Zembylas’
work on the post-structural perspective of emotion and teacher identity supported the notion that teacher identities are culturally scripted and are a confluence of political and historical nuances.

The process of (re)constructing teacher identities is very complex and ongoing and the expression of such identities in itself depends on the context and surrounding situation at the particular time. In this chapter, the struggles and tensions of how beginning teachers navigated different binaries/dichotomies of identity (re)construction have been described. These struggles and tensions involved: negotiating, conforming with and reforming school practices; professional expectations and personal beliefs; and stereotypes of teachers’ looks and beginning teachers’ looks. These were real-life struggles in which teachers’ beliefs and ideas were challenged because of the normative discourse within their respective schools.

The beginning teachers took decisions about what they wanted to do. In taking these decisions, and in the narratives they have shared, these beginning teachers declared their identities through the retelling of their stories. Their stories show us that there was an inner tension and battle between these binaries. One side of this binary aligns with the culturally preferred teacher. Beginning teachers, like Lok, who are confident about their teacher selves and what they want to become, may rethink the cultural assumptions and resist preformed cultural identities, thereby interrogating and interrupting assumptions and beliefs about their practice as teachers within the school. This leaves them to be active agents of their professional identity (re)construction process.
In this chapter, beginning teachers’ narratives suggest that identity (re)construction was a discursive process in which teachers negotiate a range of practices within the school culture that include professional expectations. The experiences of beginning teachers negotiating teacher stereotypes, the culturally accepted teacher, and the discourse of being professional as they become teachers in their particular context show how teachers define and redefine important practices within the school.

This process of negotiation further illustrate the notion that teacher identity is not a fixed but an ongoing process of (re)construction and that learning to teach is not linear but rather a complex process (Britzman, 2003). It also challenges views of teacher identity that seek to define teacher self by career stages and phases (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002). Teacher identity is not something to be resolved; there is no such fixed, single or unified entity as ‘a teacher’. Rather, beginning teachers’ identities are constructed in interaction with the social context in which they work as teachers and through attempts to make sense of the multiple views of teacher stereotypes, the culturally accepted teaching behaviours, and the various discourses about being professional that they encounter. MacLure described the ongoing interaction of teacher identity within the school context in this way:

However, the impact upon teacher was no means one-way. While the context certainly made a difference to the teachers’ lives and work, each teacher also partially constructed that context according to her or his biographical project: that is the network of personal concerns, values and aspirations against which events are judged and decisions made. So, although such gross characteristics of context provided boundaries and constraints, they were not predictive in any simple way of individual teacher’s attitudes, expectations or practice. (1993, p. 314)

In summary, it has been shown that teacher identity is fragmented and its formation is an ongoing process. Taking up subject positions is neither without struggles nor without tensions. Becoming a teacher and assuming the identity of ‘teacher’ involves
juggling beginning teachers’ values/desires and the culturally scripted notion of the teacher identity within the school context (Alsup, 2006). Rather than proposing that such tensions should be resolved or avoided, I argue that they are a crucial part of teachers’ identity (re)construction. Viewing teacher identity in this way allows an alternative explanation to the conceptualisation of beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction as developmental and also directly confronts deficit accounts of the knowledge and practices of early career teachers.

A final way of understanding the professional-contextual dimension of teacher identity (re)construction is exploring the different tensions that implicate beginning teachers in different identity positions that they may not understand themselves. Policy documents and media are some of the ways in which the public constructs the identities they want teachers to adhere to. Within these policy documents are narrative plots that attempt to fix teacher identity to a particular form, thereby negating or denying alternative conceptions of teachers’ work and identity (Soreide, 2007). They are expressions of the kinds of identities teachers have that may need to be changed. In other words, policy makers develop policies about teachers’ work on the national, state and the local levels, whereas social researchers research the lives of teachers and produce documents about how teachers teach and what needs to be improved in their teaching.

Parents contribute to this public enactment of identity by either discussing what is in the media, such as policies that have been passed, or by discussing their interactions with teachers and the school. The identity of teachers is being constructed publicly and gradually cemented into grand narratives of teachers and teachers’ work.
According to Weber and Mitchell (1995), these conceptions are engraved in cartoon characters, films and popular culture, which create images of teachers as particular individuals in the landscape of history. In saying this, the historical perspective of the profession of teaching has contributed and still contributes immensely to the (re)construction of teacher identity. This (re)construction of teacher identity is the perception of the public about teachers’ work: who a teacher is, how a teacher behaves, how a teacher looks. These constructions tend to deny the fact that teachers are human agents, thus reinforcing the mechanics and technicality of teaching, which is not equivalent to what it truly means to be a teacher in the first year.
6 CHAPTER SIX

PRIOR SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES, CURRENT EXPERIENCES AND THE COMPLEXITY OF TEACHING
6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five examined the effect that the school context has on beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction. I argued that teachers are engaged in negotiating culturally scripted notions of teacher identity within particular school contexts. As beginning teachers try to make sense of themselves in their school contexts, they are caught in the middle of negotiating their teacher identities in relation to their preferred pedagogy and the actual pedagogical practices that others desire or value.

In this chapter, I address how beginning teachers construct their identities based on their beliefs and values about teaching and learning. For this analysis, I situate their practices within formative biographical experiences, particularly focusing on cultural, social and political influences, and argue that the development of teacher identity is not solely an individualised venture but is shaped by an array of different social influences from both past and present. I draw on Britzman’s (2003) and Brookfield’s (1995) views that values embedded in biographical experiences influence beginning teachers’ identity development, which in turn influences their choices of pedagogical practices—although not in a deterministic way. A key argument is that beginning teachers’ beliefs about learning and teaching help shape the kind of teachers they are (their teacher identities) and the values about teaching that are passed on to students (Hong, 2010; Knowles, Cole & Squire, 1999).

In order to understand how beginning teachers constitute and reconstitute their teacher identities, I ‘need to understand the formative, as well as the continuing experiences and influences that have shaped, and continue to shape their perspectives and practices’ (Knowles et al., 1999, p. 376). I take the position that there is a dialogical
relationship between experience and teacher identity (re)construction. Alsup argued that ‘identity construction not only affects experiences, it also depends on experience … in order to come to fruition’ (2006, p. 78). Beginning teachers’ experiences of teaching and of being taught help constitute their identities and provide contexts for understanding their practice (Brookfield, 1995; Knowles, 1992). It is important to note that beginning teachers’ identities are not simply formed by their past experiences; they are also active participants and creators of these experiences. The underlying thrust of the argument is that beginning teachers are caught in a dance between the experiential discourse of the past and the present, and that teachers are both being shaped by their experience and in turn shaping their experience of teaching (Britzman, 2003). According to Alsup, ‘this connection between past and present experience, is consistent with borderland discourse through which beginning teachers connect their personal ideologies and subjectivities to professional ones’ (2006, p. 77) and thereby begin the journey of teacher identity (re)construction.

Past schooling experience refers to beginning teachers’ experience as students in primary and secondary schools. This foundational experience shapes the beliefs that beginning teachers have about teaching and influences their ideas about who are successful and unsuccessful teachers (Britzman, 2003). In examining past experiences of schooling, I consider what teaching and schooling has done to beginning teachers and how this has contributed to the constitution of their teacher identities. In the next section, I analyse narratives of beginning teachers as students and how this influences their work as teachers. These narratives represent beginning teachers’ attempts to understand and reflect on significant past experiences that influence how they work as teachers and help them constitute their teacher identities. I employ Brookfield’s
(1995) understanding of the role of formative memories and experience in shaping teacher identity.

Building on early experiences of teaching, beginning teachers’ current teaching experience further influences their identity (re)construction. Continuing (current) experience refers to ‘the experience itself, when it is happening in the present moment, is the enactment, the embodiment of a particular identity position [and] how identities are translated into real-world action, and such action affects the lives of others, namely students’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 78).

By examining the prior and continuing experience of teaching, I aim to build in this chapter an understanding of how beginning teachers select certain experiences that influence how they see themselves as teachers and construct their teacher identities. First, the focus is on the influence of past schooling experience on teacher identity; second, the continuing experience of teaching is explored; and last, the complexity of teaching is discussed.

### 6.2 Influence of Prior Schooling Experience on Teacher Identity

As outlined above, the process of learning to teach and becoming a teacher is integrally linked with biographical experiences and formative memories of schooling. The (re)construction of beginning teachers’ identity is strongly influenced by a coalescence of past schooling experiences and continuing experience of teaching (Brookfield, 2001; Britzman, 1986; Knowles, 1992). Theorists such as Lortie (1975), Britzman (1986), Brookfield (2001) and Knowles (1992) have expounded on how past schooling experiences are crucial in influencing a teacher’s pedagogical practices and beliefs.
For students, the long hours of schooling are periods of observation of the gestures and actions of different teachers (Knowles, 1992). It is the period when an indelible foundation for the understanding of the teacher’s role is laid. Britzman described this past schooling experience as a ‘foundational discourse’ (2003, p. 13), which shapes students’ (now beginning teachers’) values, beliefs, perspectives of teaching and eventually their teacher identities. Knowles argued that for pre-service teachers ‘childhood experiences, early teacher role models, teaching experience, significant and important people and significant later experience were pivotal in the development of their orientations and role identities’ (1998, p. 22). According to Brookfield:

> The influences that shape teachers’ lives and that move teachers’ actions are rarely found in research studies, policy reform proposals, or institutional mission statements. They are more likely to be found in a complex web of formative memories and experiences. We remember teachers we have loved and hated, and we imitate those that we admire. We call on values concerning our obligations to others and to the wider society that we have learnt earlier in our lives. We may espouse philosophies of teaching that we have learnt from formal study, but the most significant and most deeply embedded influences that operate on us are the images, models, and conceptions of teaching derived from our own experiences as learners. (1995, p. 49)

The close linkage or non-linkage of past experience with the present informs teachers’ decisions on their pedagogical practice. By connecting the past with the present, they either re-enact the behaviours of an effective, successful teacher in their past or reject negative images of unsuccessful teachers in their past (Alsup, 2006). A match (or mismatch) of the experience informs the teacher’s decision on whether to re-enact the experience or construct another experience within the current environment.

In the sections to follow, I examine five stories of beginning teachers to set the scene for the influence of prior and formative experiences on how beginning teachers think about themselves as teachers. They are:
Chapter Six

- Lived experience becomes lived practice—Bella’s story
- Using lived experience to negotiate opposing discursive practices—Lee’s story
- Using lived experience to stand against negative stereotypes of students—Cliff’s story
- Using previous knowledge of teachers to create a better teacher identity—Lok’s story
- Using previous images of teachers to create teaching reality—Jemma’s story.

6.2.1 Story 7: Lived Experience Becomes Lived Practice—Bella’s Story

One of the most valuable memories that I have is my English teacher in year 11 and 12. Coming from my background, where literacy is my big downfall, I always struggled with it. Up to year 11, I never had an English teacher that believed in me and developed a relationship with me. They automatically pigeonholed me and said, ‘Bad English student’, ‘Can’t do English’, but my year 11 English teacher was different. She got to know me, helped and encouraged me. She was an amazing teacher and because of her, I did English literature. Although I got a C, at least I did it and that’s probably the best thing in building a relationship. If she hadn’t developed that relationship with me, there is no way I would have passed English and there is no way I would have gotten to uni.

Thus, that was probably the most valuable lesson I gained from prior schooling experience. And you know, in the opposite direction as well, I remember my math teacher in year 11; he basically told me that he didn’t like me and trust me. He told me that I was never going to amount to anything and I still remember that and that could have changed my life in the other direction. I could have actually listened to what he said and I could have ruined my life. I did listen to him for about a week and then realised that he was a total loser and I went out to prove him wrong because of the valuable support of my English teacher.

Bella’s narrative takes us through her past experience and her interaction with the discourse of being a student. Bella’s academic performance was largely dependent on what happened in school because she grew up in a non-English speaking family. Her father was French and her mother was Chinese, so her learning of formal English was entirely dependent on teachers in school. In the main, her teachers only saw her as an academically poor student who could not learn, and it was only in the last year of secondary school that a teacher cared sufficiently to develop a relationship with her.
and understood the challenges she faced. Prior to this, Bella had a negative image of teachers and it is thus likely that she had internalised an unhealthy image of teachers’ practice, which may have influenced her development as a person. Upon meeting good teachers in year 11 and 12, she also met a teacher who assessed her to be poor in mathematics. Students encounter different teachers who have multiple and contradictory views about their abilities and, as shown by Bella’s narrative, the ways that teachers practise and assess students’ abilities are significant to students’ learning and influential in their identity development. Teachers can have a tremendous influence on students’ achievement and conception of selves (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Bella’s narrative is a classic example of what can go on in schools, with one teacher helping a student who has been defined as ‘at risk’ and another teacher almost pulling the student down.

Bella’s understanding, based on her experience, helps her give more to her students. She understands the experience of being branded as ‘at risk’. This next narrative shows how this influences the middle school teacher that Bella becomes.

I’ll use my maths class as my example. My little maths class consists of kids who, at the beginning of the year, well their whole lives basically, hated maths and think maths is the worst thing in the entire world. They have been told they could never be good at maths. Thus, I basically have been spending this year making sure that they enjoy maths and that they not only enjoy it but actually achieve something in maths and realise that they can actually do well in maths; I’ve gone out of my way to do activities that are engaging with them. The kids say they enjoy maths now and they never realised that they could enjoy maths and actually do good in maths.

At the beginning of the year, these kids were testing as level 1 and 2, so really far behind, and you know, they’ve slowly been improving in level 2 and a couple are at level 3 and I was absolutely amazed. Recently, two of my kids got a level 3/4; one of them almost got a level 4, she just missed out because she didn’t answer two questions and that absolutely amazed me. I was so proud of them and it made me realise that why I teach is because of that. Like, this girl, she hated maths, absolutely hated school,
hated herself and all of a sudden she starts enjoying maths and wants to learn and she gets a level 3/4, like that’s incredible. You know she was proud of herself when I gave her a little certificate; and the other boy was almost crying in class when I gave him the certificate, he couldn’t believe it, you know.

One aspect that is clear from Bella’s narrative is the importance of her own teachers who contributed positively to her academic learning. Years of being a student were years of observation and apprenticeship (Lortie, 1975). Bella’s experience confirms the notion of ‘apprenticeship of observation’ and the influence of past on the present (Britzman, 1986). According to Britzman, ‘we have all played a role opposite teachers for a large part of our lives’ (1986, p. 443) and these years were spent watching and internalising teachers’ actions and practices. It was not much of a surprise when Bella decided to focus on developing relationships with students in her class because according to Brookfield, teachers ‘attempt [to] replicate the things our own teachers did that affirmed or inspired us as learners’ (1995, p. 49). Bella’s pedagogical approach was modelled around what she was given and not given as a student; it was shaped around the practice that helped her achieve academic success (Knowles, 1992). Flores and Day argued that teachers’ past schooling experiences often ‘play a strong mediating role in the identities which new teachers bring into their first school teaching experience’ (2006, p. 223). Bella’s narrative confirms that teachers teach the ways they have been taught (Bullough et al., 1992; Cohen, 1991). Bella taught in ways she has been positively taught.

Bella faced up to her own past as she taught in the present. Her familiarity with the experience of failure helped her in her struggle to become a better teacher. The struggles she had as a learner were etched into her practice as she taught her students maths and English, because she knew the experience of being taught by a bad teacher
Chapter Six

(Brookfield, 2001). She easily recalled her student identity when she felt her students did not understand what she was teaching. She re-lived what it meant to not understand and then brought that understanding back to the present to inform her own teaching (Brookfield, 2001). In this, her positive past experiences of schooling were being enacted as she herself taught through relationships.

Bella’s narrative also makes us critically aware of the kind of identities that are being made available to students by their teachers. The kinds of knowledge and ways of being in classrooms presented to students have the likelihood of being reproduced later, just as in Bella’s case. Although, Bella reproduced positive practices, her experience shows how stagnant cultural models and hegemonic practices could easily be reproduced (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1986). This shows that past schooling experiences are both non-neutral and political. They carry and embody certain values that have been modelled to students by their teachers. This ‘institutional biography’, as Britzman (1986) calls it, reproduces values and assumptions. According to Britzman, past schooling experiences ‘if unexamined, propel the cultural reproduction of authoritarian teaching practices’ (1986, p. 443). In this way, certain hegemonic or cultural practices can be preserved and sustained. What is quite disturbing is how negative cultural practices can be reproduced unconsciously.

It is not only Bella who discussed the influence of past experience on present teacher identity; Lee, Cliff, Lok and Jemma all talked about this. These teachers discussed their past school experiences in relation to how these influenced their pedagogical approaches and helped them in negotiating school structures. All discussed the connection between their past and present experiences of learning and teaching and
how past experiences influenced the teacher they were becoming. Lee’s narratives of past experiences helped her to be more prepared to oppose negative discursive practices and stop the past from being repeated, as follows:

6.2.2 Story 8: Using Lived Experience to Negotiate Opposing Discursive Practices—Lee’s Story

I grew up at a high school—a specialist dance school—where our principal wanted to get rid of specialist dance totally. Now I’m in a school [Forrestville] where the principal is not behind the dance either and I felt like I was back at school! I felt like I was back there so it didn’t attack me too much personally because I’d already lived that for so long. I had been used to it and it was almost expected that the principal wouldn’t attend the concert. But I was better prepared to handle this because it was familiar.

Lee described how she was well positioned and better prepared to handle her school context because she had experienced similar incidents as a student. In her past experience as a student, dance was pushed aside and discriminated against as a subject. The principal was not in favour of the subject so it was rated as second class and did not command the same respect as other subjects. In her current position as dance teacher, she faced similar opposition.

Although the principal in Lee’s current school wanted to promote dance as one of the new courses in the school, she gave limited funding and recognition to dance. It seemed there was a contradiction between the principal’s stated intent and her actions. Considering that dance had suffered from having a very low profile within the school, and the teacher who used to teach the subject was not a specialist, little respect and recognition was given to dance as a subject. When Lee started to make changes, these were not well received. She mentioned that the senior management’s lack of support for the concert she organised was similar to what she had experienced while she was at high school.
The senior management’s response to the concert was very discouraging for Lee, although she mentioned she expected such a response. She felt that the principal did not trust her enough, and did not expect she was going to pull off the concert successfully. For Lee, this affected her sense of teacher identity and it felt like she was back in high school, only now she was a teacher and needed to fight for what she truly believed in. From her narrative, Lee’s past experience seemed to have prepared her to make her strong and resolved to ensure dance was a recognised subject in the school. Lee’s past experience in addition to her passion for dance helped her to rework her positioning as a dance teacher and attend to the negative attitudes she received.

Lee’s narrative corresponds with MacLure’s (1993) notion of the construction of identity as a form of argument in which Lee tries to make sense of herself in relation to her present experience of substandard treatment of dance and of her past schooling experience. Her strong belief in dance helped Lee to engage effectively in the identity argument that was occurring. She rejected normative visions of dance as a substandard subject and negotiated for more positive images of dance in the present and future.

Instead of accepting the principal’s attitude of lack of support for dance as a subject, Lee chose not to participate in reproducing the negative attitude towards dance. Rather, she tried to establish dance as a valuable subject in the school by organising school concerts. She deliberately created positive teaching experiences for her students, encouraged her students to put in their best and to recognise the benefits and the transferable skills associated with doing the subject they love. She also helped her students to get organised for the concert and deliver an excellent performance. She
created an identity position by going against the grain of both her past experience of schooling and the identity position ascribed to her by the senior management.

In the next narrative, Cliff’s prior experience of schooling shaped his decision to teach in a particular school. Cliff discusses how his past experience of schooling helped him to understand students better. His familiarity with and experience of less privileged situations positioned Cliff well to be able to relate with his students, understand where they were coming from, and know how to improve their academic achievement in his classes.

6.2.3 Story 9: Using Lived Experience to Stand Against Negative Stereotypes of Students—Cliff’s Story

This school in terms of socio-economic profiling is in a low socio-economic area, and being from that background myself, I like it. This school is very similar to the school I went to as a kid, and the area is very similar to where I grew up as a kid, so I sort of understand these kids better than I’d understand kids that come from rich families.

Also, my mum is Indigenous and coming from that I heard a lot of negative stereotyping stuff that goes on. So, if there’s one thing I can do as a teacher it’s to open kids’ minds to thinking that the mainstream way is not necessarily the best way and that’s not the only knowledge. There are all sorts of different knowledge and it’s all equally valuable I think. Thus, if I can open it up to a kid that can’t write ‘elephant’ and yet can speak Arabic, I think that’s amazing, and I’ll let the rest of the kids know that this kid has got another language on you guys, you know, they’ve already got something under control.

This narrative above was extracted from Cliff’s discussion of the reason why he chose to be in the school, which was to contribute back to schools like Lifton High and help students improve their achievements and achieve their potential. Having an experiential understanding of this school context and her students, Cliff is on a mission of showcasing the other ways of knowing instead of the mainstream knowledge. In this narrative, Cliff described the similarities between the school he attended as a kid and the school where he was working. Cliff’s cumulative experience
of schooling, in similar school contexts to those of his students, gave him an informed perspective of how students view school, their world and what is the best way to reach out to students in this context. His past experience of schooling, as well as his cultural background, influenced his idea of what it means to be a teacher and teach. It informed his teaching values and his idea of being a teacher who is committed to breaking down negative stereotypes of students in low socio-economic schools, debunking mainstream ways of thinking and validating other forms of intelligence.

Emphasising the influence of biography and school learning experiences, Brookfield described how these factors ‘frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers, and they frequently exert an influence that lasts a lifetime’ (1995, p. 50). This was true for Cliff at the start of his career, as he confronted the dominant perceptions of how teaching and learning occur and called on his strongly held values and beliefs. His past experience and biography influenced his current decision to teach in this school and what was also significant was that his past influenced his ideals, values and his motivation to help students in his care. He felt valued and able to contribute better to society by helping students in low socio-economic areas with negative stereotypes see the world from a new perspective. His past experience of being treated differently influenced the decision to help others who were being treated the same way.

According to Brookfield, ‘we try to avoid reproducing the humiliations that were visited on us as learners’ (1995, p. 49). As Cliff stated:

I’ve got a bit of a social agenda as a teacher so, like, I’ve got strong beliefs and that probably comes through in my classes and if there are any parents that are rednecks and don’t want their kids mixing with ‘them others’, then they probably won’t be happy with my classrooms. I’ve got a real problem with racism and with closed minded thinking that your way is the best way.
Cliff’s comment shows how negative experiences influence teachers to act in particular ways. Instead of reproducing the humiliations he experienced as a learner, he helped his students question mainstream beliefs about themselves and their abilities (Brookfield, 1995). He did not want to trade off his identity as a working class student. Rather, he called on this identity to empathise with students and help them find and develop their capabilities. Based on his own experience, he developed a pedagogical approach to help students to critically see and appraise their contexts. His ‘social agenda’ was to foster social interaction among his students instead of encouraging racial discrimination and ‘closed minded’ thinking. He encouraged critical ways of knowing to enable students to rethink their view of themselves as individuals who were worthwhile in their own right and not in comparison with the mainstream students.

Cliff’s early experience helped him construct an identity as a teacher who was attuned to students’ needs. He believed in a curriculum that actually helps students to learn rather than labels students as ‘at risk’ kids. He was familiar with the general reasons why students act up in classrooms and understood that most of his students had backgrounds that were different from the mainstream. In another part of his narrative, Cliff shared his strong beliefs in equality of treatment and in providing a transformative curriculum for students so that they were better equipped as individuals to function well in the society (Noddings, 2003; Mezirow, 2003). Having had his own share of being treated differently while growing up, Cliff was better able to understand the problems faced by students in the school. In summary, Cliff’s narratives drew attention to how his past experience of schooling had positioned him to relate better with his students and hence had a key role in constituting his teacher identity. In the
Chapter Six

next narrative, Lok’s formative experience of observing her parents from high school inadvertently prepared and equipped her to become a better informed teacher.

6.2.4 Story 10: Learning to Teach from Observing Parents’ Lived Experiences—Lok’s Story

Both my parents are high school teachers and I was born into that, basically. I’ve spent half my life sitting around in the back of staffrooms and classrooms, waiting for meetings to finish and hanging around school on weekends and stuff and I think there is a lot of knowledge that I kind of assimilated through osmosis, you know, by just hanging around and that has helped.

I think teachers as a cultural group tend to feel like they are really hard done by. I sometimes get the impression that teachers feel like they are owed something because of their service to the world. And again this is just my interpretation. I just think that teachers act like victims and I really rally against that. But I also see at the other end of the scale, we have family friends who are nearing retirement, they are very cynical and very resigned and very despondent about their treatment by the Department of Education, whereas, I don’t expect any special treatment from the department. I know that I have to fight for my own rights and that nothing is certain basically. I want to have choices about where I am at and I want to be teaching because I’m passionate about it and not because I feel stuck. I have seen a lot of teachers nearing retirement who feel like they are stuck and they don’t have choices and they are not valued, and I just do not want to be that person. I really want to create choices for myself.

In this excerpt, Lok touched on three important things that were significant to her (re)construction of teacher identity: her observation of teachers, her understanding of teachers’ attitudes based on her past association with school teachers, and her determination to choose differently—her agency. I will elaborate on each of these in turn.

Lok engaged in the discussion of how she learnt a lot about teaching and teachers just by hanging around and observing the career pathways of teachers and observing teachers in their mid-career and nearing the end of their career. She spent her formative years listening to her parents and family friends discuss teaching and all the injustices that had been meted out to them in schools and by the Department of
Education. She knew a lot about the culture of teaching from a teacher’s perspective, even though she was only a student at that time. For example, she perceived that the trials of teaching and the incessant demands of inflexible departmental bureaucratisation eventually turned teachers into hopeless and cynical professionals. However, there is a difference here between the teachers described by Lok and Lok herself. She saw a divide that separates two generations of teachers in terms of age, experience, practice and ideological mindsets. Of course, the images around her were not enough to make her not choose teaching as a career, but she had some inner conviction to be a teacher who was different. The privilege to observe and the courage to resist dominant teacher images around her helped her create an identity she wanted as a teacher.

Due to the fact that both her parents and family friends were teachers, she was comfortable and familiar with teacher life. She knew the positives and the negatives. She understood teacher language and discourse to a certain extent. Her exposure to this insider knowledge and secrets helped her to define what kind of teacher she wanted to be, and she decided early on to have a proactive attitude and relationship towards the department. She had a blueprint of what she wanted to be as a teacher and understood her rights as a teacher. In her own words, she did not want to be a victim nor live her life as a victim, like some other teachers. She knew the teacher she wanted to be and was confident in pursuing that goal.

We saw earlier how the resentment that she had observed in older teachers made her decide that she did not want to be resentful about the educational system and her career. Her resolution was so strong that she said she would rather stop teaching than
watch herself develop a victim or cynical mentality. This knowledge of the mainstream system or *culture* helped her to choose to position herself as a professional who was committed to an audacious philosophy. She was determined to find a way of bringing hope and happiness to the cohort of students she was in charge of. The victimised images of teachers she saw around her contrasted with her own determination to be a transformative, powerful and *active agent* within the school context. Observing the teachers around her helped to rework the idea of a teacher in her head, which also helped her to work out what she wants out of her teaching career and to position herself differently from the teachers she had observed.

To conclude this section on past schooling experience, I present how Jemma lived out practically the idea of teacher in her head, which was gathered unconsciously from her schooling experience. Jemma described her first encounters with students who had just left primary school and are at the beginning of high school.

### 6.2.5 Story 11: Living the Imagined Teacher—Jemma’s Story

I was in my teaching quite pedantic and not aggressive; I stood my authority at the start but not in an aggressive way. It helps that they were from a primary school and so they knew I was a teacher; I automatically had all the impressions of teachers straight away, I didn’t need to earn it. They already knew how to treat me. Thus, I guess at the start, I acted like a teacher. Now, I acted as a stereotypical teacher—‘You get up now, you pack up your bag now, you don’t pack up now’—like that kind of thing.

But you know, if we had free time, I would say, ‘Let’s not do anymore work now.’ So we had two minutes to go, I will play games with them like Willy the Wolf or something. I just kind of break it up and then like that is opening up my personality a little bit. Thus, I guess them carrying on their idea of a teacher and me kind of setting that up at the start and then opening up you know—this is why we can muck around now, but I guess it’s me kind of not dictating but me saying when that fun time will happen.

In Chapter Five, I discussed Jemma’s discovery that her students expected her to tell them what to do all the time. It is interesting how she picked up on the significance of
the fact that her students had just come from primary school. Initially, this was a challenge for her because she could not handle students’ dependent learning style. What confronted her in her initial transitioning into the role of a teacher eventually helped her to construct and reconstruct her identity. The communication of expectations from her students helped Jemma activate ‘the idea of a teacher in my head’ to take her position in the class. Notice she mentioned that because the students’ immediate experiences were of primary school, it really helped her to slip into the role of being a teacher. She did not need to earn acknowledgement as a teacher because the students already ascribed this role to her. Taking on the position of teacher meant employing the idea of teacher in her head, which created her teacher identity in the process—an identity that was embedded in past experiences of schooling, students’ expectations, and her own pedagogical beliefs. The expectations from students helped her to consolidate her own impressions, beliefs and images of who a teacher is.

One of the interesting things in Jemma’s story is how she described herself with words like ‘pedantic’, ‘not aggressive’, ‘stand my authority’ and ‘acted like a teacher’. These described the images of teachers she had experienced in her past. These images she brought from her past influenced the ways she thought about herself as a teacher. She also described herself noting little statements teachers make in classrooms to organise and get students’ attention. They might be the exact statements she had heard while she was growing up. Although, as mentioned in Chapter Five, she resisted the students’ expectations for her to control their learning, she tried to establish order by giving them clear instructions on how to behave in the classroom. This is a continuation of the struggle of finding the middle ground between friendship and authority. Jemma saying she was standing by her authority shows she was affirming
Jemma said she was pedantic, suggesting she was overly concerned with minute details of her teaching, including gaining respect and ensuring that students recognized her authority. She was concerned about getting her classroom started positively, so her relationship with her students supported their learning rather than hindered it. Taking a non-aggressive position that affirmed her authority was a choice.

Jemma set the format for her classroom based on her past schooling experience. When Jemma talked about ‘the idea of teacher in my head’, it suggests that ‘the idea of a teacher’ is not something Jemma spontaneously developed on her own but something activated by her past. This, however, also draws attention to the fact that teacher identity (re)construction involves the recognition of past influences, both Jemma’s and students’ experiences. Identity is constructed discursively and in relation to other influences (Alsup, 2006). For Jemma, being a teacher was about matching up the idea in her head (which had been influenced by former teachers) with the idea that was predominant in her students’ heads. Thus, it was a case of setting up the classroom based on both her past and the students’ ideas of who a teacher was. From Jemma’s discussion of her experience of constructing teacher identity, there was tension between being an authority and being a friend based on the past experiences of both her students and herself.

Jemma built her practice on ideas of how teachers act or should act. This suggests that she had images of teachers in her memory and her idea of who a teacher should be was shaped from her interactions with different teachers in her life. From the interactions with each of these teachers, a composite impression of a teacher (what a
teacher should be, how a teacher should look, what a teacher should do), was ingrained in her memory. According to Kennedy, ‘teachers acquire seemingly indelible imprints from their own experiences as students and these imprints are tremendously difficult to shake’ (1990, p. 17).

Jemma seemed to fall back on this when taken by surprise by students’ responses. She was a teacher who had control over her classroom; a teacher who was not authoritarian; a teacher who played with her students; someone who was recognised and accepted by her students as a teacher. Thus, there was no single way of defining the idea of a teacher in Jemma’s head—it was numerous and multifaceted. The idea of a ‘teacher in my head’ could be interpreted as a powerful metaphor, with layers of different hidden messages—it was a combination of both normalised and typical images of teacher. These images were consciously and unconsciously picked out from past experiences and replayed when Jemma encountered situations similar to her past experiences.

According to Freeman, ‘the memories of instruction gained through their “apprenticeship of observation” function as de facto guides for teachers as they approach what they do in the classroom’ (1992, p. 3). Freeman further noted that ‘the urge to change and the pull to do what is familiar create a central tension in teachers’ thinking about their practice’ (1992, p. 4). For Jemma, she was negotiating competing ideas of who a teacher was, what a teacher does, and how a teacher thinks based on her past experiences, which were mainly formed from the teachers in her life. Within these ideas and the little statements she made in the class were values that were being reproduced—her own values, as well as the past teachers’ values.
6.2.6 Summary

In this section, I have advanced the argument that beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction is greatly influenced by their past experiences as students, and who they become as teachers is in part based on their engagement and renegotiation of such episodes within their present context of teaching. The images of schooling, classroom experiences and former teachers’ practices influence what beginning teachers believe and value. Alsup (2006) showed that pre-service teachers shared more positive stories than negative stories of their school experiences as students. The student teachers who had more positive stories of schooling continued in teaching, whereas negative stories contributed to the decision of student teachers to leave teaching. In this research, there was a strong link between participants’ teaching practices and their perceptions of their schooling experiences. There was evidence to suggest that beginning teachers with negative experiences wanted to create positive memories for their students, and teachers with positive experiences wanted to reproduce positive experiences. Their enactments of teacher identity were filtered through their formative experiences of schools and teachers.

The above narratives also drew attention to how beginning teachers were often caught in the middle of juggling past experiences and present demands. In a way, one could say that teachers are building identities in relation to their past histories or experiences, which could either mean an inscription, reinscription or renegotiation of identities (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003). What is interesting is how these teachers engaged in the argument of constructing their identities and how they have paid attention to certain voices to shape who they are now. Their schooling experiences
prepared them for the kind of teachers they were now and were becoming. They all had unique stories, but what was common in their narratives was the readiness to reject particular teaching values that were against their beliefs and re-employ values that worked for them. The schooling experiences of these teachers served as reference points for their current practice. The reference points served to assess, critique and guide teachers’ practice. Therefore, attention was drawn to the need for teachers to critically understand and reflect on their past schooling experiences in order to avoid reproduction of those practices that may hinder students’ learning.

Furthering the discussion of past schooling experiences, Jemma’s and Lok’s narratives built on the notion that beginning teachers’ observations of former teachers were configured in their minds as images and ideas. Their narratives showed how their internalisation of teachers’ practice practically influenced who they were and who they became as teachers. It is important to say here that this is different from the ‘look of a teacher’ discussed in Chapter Five, in that this focuses deeply on the internalised (re)construction of teachers based on past schooling experiences and formative memories that have a significant influence on their practice. However, although beginning teachers can easily become comfortable with their ‘internalized narratives of good teaching’ (Alsup, 2006, p. 193), they still need to work it out in their particular contexts to create a plausible internal argument for an expression of their ideals based on this context.

In considering these teachers’ past experiences of schooling, I am literally examining ‘what teaching does to teachers’ (Britzman, 2003, p. 25), or what teaching has done to beginning teachers, and how it has contributed to the (re)construction of their teacher
identities. Beginning teachers’ past schooling experiences give rise to ‘values, judgements, discourse strategies and classroom expectations’ (Britzman, 2003, p. 27). These experiences are not deterministic of teachers’ pedagogical practices; rather, they frame them, because as beginning teachers begin to teach, they engage in a dialogue between the past and the present. This dialogue involves conflict between the circumstances of the past and those of the present. The (re)construction of teacher identity partly involves a negotiation of conflict between the past and present experiences.

Although beginning teachers draw from their past experiences of schooling in the process of constructing their teacher identity, Britzman (2003) argued that there is a danger in assuming that experience makes the teacher. She mentioned that treating experience as the sole determinant of teacher identity construction is, ‘objectifying experience as a map … everything is already organized and complete; all that is left to do is to follow preordained paths’ (p. 30). The problem is that when experience is accepted as a ‘preordained path’, it does not consider either the new realities that beginning teachers are faced with as they teach or the agency they have in shaping their identities as teachers in this new context. The influence of past schooling experience on teaching practice is dependent on beginning teachers themselves and how they create their present experiences. Past schooling experiences do not wholly determine a teacher’s identity or behaviours, as has been shown in this section.

In the next section, I examine the complexities the beginning teachers faced as they tried to work through the available practices in the school in terms of the kind of teacher they wanted to be. Although they had a past, they were faced with working
through current contradictory demands of their work. I will examine how some teachers juggled different ideas of teaching and classroom discourse in the process of becoming teachers.

### 6.3 Influence of the Continuing Experience of Teaching on Teacher Identity (Re)construction

This section continues the discussion on how beginning teachers constructed their teacher identity through their experience of teaching, with an emphasis on how teachers explored the various pedagogical strategies and practices that were available and negotiated the complex roles of teacher. Part of what we understand by being a teacher is that it is through pedagogy that teachers express who they are as teachers and their beliefs about learning and students. Beginning teachers in this study talked of their experiences of teaching and their struggles to be particular kinds of teachers and to use particular kinds of pedagogies in their classrooms. As they practised their pedagogical beliefs, beginning teachers began to understand what kind of teachers they wanted to be, what kind of teachers they were, what kind of teachers were influencing their practice, and what kind of teachers their students wanted and responded to. I start this section by examining Jemma’s experience of streaming in constituting her teacher identity.

#### 6.3.1 Story 12: Streaming Students According to Their Abilities—Jemma’s Story

When I was at university, I agreed with stuff they were saying like, you know, streaming kids on their academic abilities is bad and, you know, if they love peer tutoring, you should do that. Right now, I really disagree with that. I can’t believe that I thought that was a bad thing because I really feel now that streaming is a good thing. And now I just think, especially as a beginning teacher, I don’t know how to handle having a wide range of abilities—having kids that really need me to extend them further and having kids that aren’t getting where I was two weeks ago.
For me, that is too much; it might change, but I really agree with streaming because strong ability kids don’t enjoy helping the weaker students, they want to go further. I’ve just become really cynical. And I just feel like I really do want to practise it, but at the same time it is just so hard to do it right now that I wouldn’t. I’ll just go with the flow and get by day-to-day and even if that is in the traditional teaching kind of sense, then that is the way it’s going to be.

In maths, we stream our classes. I have some of next door’s kids and she has some of mine. Thus, all the stronger kids are in one room doing maths and the weaker students are in that room doing S & E.

For Jemma, there was a contradiction between what was happening in the classroom and what she was taught at the university. She had to reconcile her learning from university with the available discourse of practice in her school. She questioned the knowledge she learnt at university when faced with practical realities that did not fit into the idealised situations presented at university. This ‘wash out’ effect has been widely documented in the literature on beginning teachers, which shows they quickly disconnect from the theories taught in teacher education schools as they face classroom realities (Lortie, 1975; Veenman, 1984).

Flores and Day (2006) mentioned that beginning teachers’ pedagogical theories are challenged when they start practising and this leads to a revisitation of their beliefs in relation to their real experience. Thus, with the discovery of the disparity between university and school came a revisitation of beliefs and values and consideration of actions. Transposing or relocating theories learnt from university to actual teaching was a big challenge for Jemma. Faced with the realities of teaching, she adopted an approach that allowed her to teach comfortably, thus moving from university orthodoxy, because she really did not know how to handle the different abilities in a real classroom situation. Jemma considered what worked easily in the classroom and then put aside theories learnt at university.
The choice between the discourse of teacher training and those of schools was well articulated in Jemma’s narrative above. Beginning teachers are faced with a constant struggle as they choose between accepting and rejecting different discourses. This is similar to the observation of Alsup, who showed that her pre-service teachers were faced with tensions between what they learnt at university and the reality in classrooms, and ‘they could not completely integrate the two or see how what they learnt in the university might be modified and successfully implemented in the secondary classroom’ (2006, p. 75). By ‘going with the flow’, Jemma meant practising in ways promoted in the school and rejecting the discourse on inclusion that was taught to her at university. This is one of the many scenarios in this study that reveal the challenges that beginning teachers encounter. Their responses to these challenges created particular practices that they assessed to be appropriate at that time. Even when such practices contradicted theories learnt during initial teacher education, they were chosen based on the attractiveness of doing something that was practically feasible, widely supported and predominant in the school.

For instance, streaming was practised by some teachers in the middle school at that time; it was a way of getting out of the complex dilemma of dealing with varying academic abilities in a class. Jemma was introduced to streaming by one of her team teachers; this is how practices are passed down to new teachers. It shows the importance of significant others (more experienced teachers) in shaping new teachers’ practices and helping them become comfortable in their roles. It also shows how practices are transferred. Past research suggested that beginning teachers usually succumb to the surmounting pressures of operating in ways that are promoted in the school that may contradict what beginning teachers learnt during their training.
Teachers practice to survive instead of holding on to theory (Britzman, 1986). According to Britzman, ‘within school settings, university theory counts for little’ (1986, p. 447). Usually, the operating pedagogical practices and strategies are norms within the school set up in line with schooling expectations.

Jemma believed streaming would enable her to manage the challenges she faced in her class. From her narrative, it was obvious she made a critical decision not to use the approach she had learnt at university because she could not make connections between her practical situation and the theory. She felt she could not practise it in her classroom because the gap between the higher intellectual abilities and the lower abilities was too wide to be breached in 45-minute lessons. She also drew attention to the discursive structures that made the implementation of theories difficult—the duration of each lesson made it difficult to successfully facilitate genuine learning for students. The duration of each lesson was not enough to be able to help all the students at the same time. Students’ misconceptions could not be changed within these short periods. The constraint that Jemma faced in her teaching practices was the schooling structure, which induced her to adopt particular practices that had been questioned elsewhere as ineffective strategies for student learning.

Bullough and Gitlin argued that ‘one’s conceptions of self-as-teacher, can and do change’ (2001, p. 25). For Jemma, the streaming of students stopped in the middle of the year because the other teacher left the school; therefore, Jemma had to go back to having a normal classroom and she adapted the concept of streaming of students in the classroom by grouping the students according to their academic capabilities.

But you know we set up a peer tutoring scenario in the classroom. Thus, I know that a lot of my bright students sit at that table; so when they are
done, they go through, they check their work and then they check with the
calculator, and if they have finished doing that then they go to students
they have been assigned to or that need help that have their hands up and
they will just be a mini-me walking around the room and help another
student, which works quite well in some situations.

In this narrative, Jemma described how she changed the streaming practice to a more
collaborative, peer-teaching style. By changing her streaming approach to teaching
and managing a wider range of abilities within her classroom, she changed her
mindset and beliefs about how students with diverse academic abilities learned, and
adopted the idea that students learned better in groups, in this case groups of similar
academic abilities in the same classroom. Students could learn at a similar pace and
were tutored by other brighter students who have completed their tasks.

Later on, at the end of the year, she mentioned that she was comfortable dealing with
different abilities and could deal with them without streaming. Thus, Jemma’s
approach of classroom streaming shifted to peer teaching, although this was a forced
change. However, changing the approach of streaming also helped her to change her
approach in teaching students with diverse academic abilities. By adopting another
approach to teaching, her idea of teaching shifted. Jemma’s conception of self as a
teacher changed; her teaching identity shifted from the streaming teacher to the
inclusive teacher. Jemma’s narrative confirms the notion that teacher identity evolves
and can keep evolving as beginning teachers learn and discover themselves as they
practise teaching.

As a beginning teacher, Jemma initially dismissed some of her university education
theories in favour of the ideologies available within the school context. Other
beginning teachers in this study addressed the diverse abilities challenge in their
classroom differently. For example, Lok and Cliff created lessons with multi-level
learning tasks for their students, so that the students could follow different plans based on their learning abilities. Although this seemed to be more work for the teachers, and involved attending to different individual learning needs, it was their own way of trying to breach the ability gap. They mentioned that it was not physically possible for them to help all the students, but they tried to do the best they could in the limited time apportioned them.

### 6.3.2 Story 13: Living with Contradictory Realities—Lok’s Story

Really experienced teachers always say you should be really strict in the first couple of weeks. But I’ve always been like, I am the way I am, I have my styles, and halfway through last term, I just had to switch. Well, it wasn’t out of hand, it was still manageable but it wasn’t a directed, structured flow of learning. This is something that I was reluctant to admit. But it’s all about power and I always struggled with that. And so I was always saying, ‘No we are a democratic classroom and I am the facilitator’.

And particularly, because these kids respond to hierarchy and well-defined instructions often due to their experience, I just had to switch it around and I had to go in there and say, ‘I am the boss’, and that was really hard for me. It didn’t sit well with me because it is not how, it is not the way I live my life. It’s not what I buy into with educational pedagogy. But it actually got to a point where they needed to know that I directed the class. But some of the students just couldn’t handle it. Sometimes, I had to put them right a couple of times and say what was expected and be really clear. And once I did that, I pulled back again. Some kids respond well to that kind of style, and others, you lose them all together.

Lok’s narrative gives a complex display of some of the struggles a beginning teacher faces. These struggles are themselves a result of the schooling structures and the heavily politicised environments that influence teacher identity. Lok painstakingly described the struggles to create a learning environment for her students and how it affected making sense of being a teacher. She described how other experienced teachers had advised her to be strict in class, but initially she did not consent to their ideology because she equated being strict with an authoritarian style of teaching (Smyth et al., 2000).
Again the issues of professional and institutional expectations are revisited here. Teachers are expected to enforce control on students in their classroom. In fact, students want the control, but the difference here is that Lok equated control with power and she made a decision right from the start of her career to ensure a democratic classroom—a classroom where students and teacher equally decided where they wanted to direct their learning. Her decision to do this was challenged by students’ backgrounds and their prior experiences of schooling. Again, the concept of ‘teacher as expert’ (Britzman, 1986) and the banking concept of education (Freire, 1970) were entrenched in the students’ conventional worldview. The banking concept of education is similar to the ‘teachers as expert’ view because it is based on the notion that teachers deposit knowledge to students who are considered to be ignorant. This banking concept of education fosters oppressive practices, which put Lok in a dilemma, sandwiched between her resolution and the students’ pattern of schooling.

Critical and post-structural researchers have argued that traditional teaching practices breed social control and oppression, which is rooted in the dominant culture of schools. The social relations of education are in accordance with the hierarchy within society. This suggests ‘that the logic of domination is reproduced in school as in any other institution, so that when we attempt dialogical education we are necessarily contradicting the dominant ideology, politically interfering with school’s task of reproducing domination’ (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 134). The question is: How does a teacher who wants to practice dialogical education deal with students’ demand for authoritarian and the traditional routine script of learning? Lok was caught between practising her own beliefs and settling to control the students in the first term.
Enacting the pedagogy of control produces fear in the hearts of students—fear of whether they are right or wrong in their thinking and learning pattern, and fear of whether the teacher would approve or disapprove of their learning behaviour and actions. The control practice as mentioned by Lok was exercising power wrongly and thrived on fear produced by the ‘look’, the gestures, the shout. Lok tried to draw attention to the effects of social control and power play in the classroom. Her view was that learning should not be fear based. Children had a right to learn in an environment where they could easily voice their opinions, make mistakes and learn without the fear of being punished.

Lok’s initial beliefs about teaching were quite different from those she had to use later. She believed in having a democratic classroom where her role was more of a facilitator than a teacher or an instructor. She wanted to just facilitate students’ learning and provide resources they needed to grow and learn, but unfortunately her students were locked into a particular pattern of schooling. She saw the power games operating in her class and realised that her students preferred the instructional model and the ‘I am the boss, the teacher in this classroom’ approach to learning together. They preferred more directed learning from the teacher than following their own interest in learning. Shor and Freire referred to the students’ response as a ‘routine script’ (1987, p. 115), which is a traditional relationship that clearly demonstrates how students have been dominated in accordance to the dominant ideology in the society. This routine script produces ‘dependent consciousness’ in which students cannot actively think and do things for themselves in the classroom (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 134).
Most of Lok’s students were African refugees. Their response could be expected because of their culture and the experiences they had gone through. They had been camped in places where they had to listen and follow instructions strictly. These students had been brought up in environments where there was absolute respect for adults, and whatever the teacher said was final even though students may have other ideas. They grew up in an environment in which the teacher was always assumed to know more than the students, and the students awaited the pouring down of knowledge from the teachers into their empty *tabulae rasae*. However, they were not ‘educational virgins’, as Shor and Freire (1987, p. 115) mentioned; they were ‘socialised beings’ who had been ‘practising an elaborate … script’ of school and societal expectations for a long time.

When Lok tried out her own teaching style, students did not respond appropriately. She tried to use the principles of dialogical education to help students learn, but her students did not enable her to use it. They had a different ideology of what learning ought to be; they had the ‘routine script’ of traditional learning operating and they started misbehaving because of their lack of understanding of Lok’s democratic approach. This confirms Britzman’s argument that:

> both teachers and students implicitly understand two rules governing the hidden tensions of classroom life: unless the teacher establishes control there will be no learning, and, if the teacher does not control the students, the students will control the teacher. This power struggle, predicated upon the institutional expectation that teachers individually control their classes, equates learning with control. (1986, p. 449)

Lok had to conform to this style because she was having lots of behaviour management problems and it was difficult for the students to engage in meaningful learning (Beijarrd, 1995). Thus, she was left to the mundane task of controlling and
resolving tensions in her classroom. She saw the power dynamics and had to change her approach. Because students’ traditional routine script completely opposed her philosophies about teaching and learning, she had to alter her practice so that the students could learn.

As she understood the students better and familiarised herself with their experiences, Lok was able to repackage and represent her democratic beliefs to the students. As explained in her narrative, Lok’s critical understanding of the issue of power dynamics and struggles in facilitating students’ learning helped her to understand students’ dominant responses of wanting to be controlled and also to identify ‘the best entry points for critical transformation’ of her students’ learning (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 117). According to Shor and Freire, ‘creative disruption of passive education is an aesthetic moment as well as a political one, because it asks the students to reperceive their prior understandings and to practise new perceptions as creative learners with the teacher’ (1987, p. 116).

I’m not a shouter and it actually just bores me being tough, so it’s not really who I am. I certainly don’t believe there is any need ever because that is just threat, that is just you using fear and that certainly is power. It is all about power, but it is all about power exchange. The whole day you know when you are trying to explain something and somebody is talking and you stop and you look and you draw attention to them and you wait, and all of that is all just games. That part of things gets disgusting.

I think it is all about strategy, I mean games is a funny word because that infers manipulations. But power exchange is life and in the classroom it just seems to be magnified because the nature of the exchange and the dynamics that is occurring there; and also because these students are particularly needy and they are really in your face.

Lok recognised herself as having agency. The narrative showed that Lok had a different ideology or philosophical belief about power and the teacher’s authority in the classroom than her students. She questioned the traditional practices that used
power and authority to dominate students. She had a critical awareness of power play and dynamics within her classroom. She sought to change traditional practice, but the students’ responses showed their desire for traditional practices. Her confession about having problems with power helps us to understand that she opposed the negative use of power to control and dominate people. Shor and Freire (1987) recommended the reformation of traditional teaching from a practice in which ‘teachers are empowered to be active’ to one of ‘withering away of the teacher’ so as to empower the students and thereby reduce the teacher’s authority in the classroom.

The narrative again shows how students’ expectations of learning were based on the past and how they influenced their teacher’s identity (re)construction. Thus, Lok was struggling between conforming to the students’ past experience and enacting her own pedagogical beliefs. The ‘boss’ kind of relationship was stamped all over students’ experience and that was what they wanted from Lok. Without this, the students were misbehaving and did not understand what was required of them. Their ability to function was dependent on the traditional mode of teaching. This narrative also showed Lok’s struggle in implementing what she truly believed in and learnt at university, despite the warnings from more experienced teachers. It showed her commitment and resilience irrespective of the odds. In summary, Lok was responsive to her students’ expectations but retained her long-term goal and only temporarily took her cue from the students.

6.3.3 Story 14: Checking Out the Roots of Students’ Behaviour—Cliff’s Story

I’ve looked into the backgrounds of most of the kids that I have trouble with and what I have found out has given me more respect for them and an
understanding of where they are coming from to why they might have problems behaving properly.

I guess the discipline stuff was a bit weird last term because most of the kids in my classroom want to be there, and if they don’t want to be there, I try to turn them round and then occasionally I have to say, ‘Go sit in the time out room’, which I found really weird because the way I deal with my kids in class if they are acting up is get them on task, and when there is no task to direct the kid to it is really hard to discipline them in the time out room.

My understanding of why kids in my class act up is because they don’t understand, or they are not interested in the task, so then I try to get them interested, or help them understand the work they are meant to be doing. Whereas with this ‘time out’ thing, the kids will be peeling the paint off the walls. There is nothing constructive you can build on from it. It is just discipline for the sake of discipline, which I find hard. And because we try to implement hard rules like, ‘kids shouldn’t be out of the class’, even if they need to go to the toilet sort of thing, which as a beginning teacher I have tried very hard to follow.

I have said to kids, ‘No, you can’t leave the class to get a drink or for any reason other than if it is a complete emergency.’ Whereas other teachers have let kids out when they need to, and not adhering to the strict rules, which I probably won’t do if I wasn’t a beginning teacher and wanted to make a good impression. I am trying to fit in with the whole school plan and if I don’t, if I stick out as someone who is not following along with it, that is going to look bad.

Cliff broke behaviour management and discipline down to two categories: within the classroom or outside the classroom. Within his classroom, he tried to understand why his students were misbehaving and tried to give them different choices for tasks so that they could learn. When it came to students asking for permission to go outside the classroom when he was teaching, his actions had consequences or were visible to other teachers. His decisions were solely in accordance with the desire to not be seen as deviant but as a ‘good’ teacher. As he mentioned in his narrative, he did not particularly agree with the discipline policy but he did it because he wanted to impress so as to gain a teaching contract for next year.

His narrative depicts one of the cultural myths of being a teacher that Britzman (1986) alluded to, where the teacher is expected to be in control of students’ learning and
classroom behaviours. The school’s view of students’ behaviour management was to discipline and control students for their irresponsible behaviours. This is in line with the ‘pupil control ideology’ mentioned by Hoy (1968, p. 313) and Britzman’s (1986) social control ideology. The constant tension between doing what was right and what the school system advocated shaped Cliff’s teacher identity as he conformed with the cultural norms of the school to get through the first year. There were notions of performativity and conforming.

Cliff’s narrative showed how teacher identity was influenced by both personal choices and structural cultural practices within the school. The interplay of these combined to shape teacher identity. Cliff tried to understand the students’ behaviour in ways that were different from the norm of viewing students as problematic and personal failures (Smyth et al., 2008). By checking the backgrounds of his students, Cliff understood the students better and he was able to ‘provide an education that is not only grounded in the lives of students but also academically rigorous, socially worthwhile and capable of providing a hopeful future for disenfranchised and alienated students’ (Bigelow, 2006, p. 7).

Cliff invited negotiations about the amount of work students did in class. Students could choose what sort of work they wanted to do when they misbehaved. He presented choices to students of different academic abilities. He understood that behaviour problems arose from not understanding the students and their learning needs. He believed that students had tantrums in class because they did not understand the work given to them or did not find it interesting or challenging. This approach to behaviour management illustrates a deep understanding of the students’ background
Chapter Six

and a better way of helping the students learn. He drew on students’ experiences to inform him of what the students were facing, an approach that had empathy embedded, and searched for a better way of communicating to the students based on their situations. His understanding also drew on his own experience as a student in a similar school. He understood better the social issues students faced because of his similar experience, hence the decision to teach in the school.

Davies and Harre (1990) argued that we operate within discursive constraints that prevent people from being themselves and mean they are forced to implement the institutionalised way of acting and thinking. Cliff’s story exemplified this as he confronted practices that were opposed to his beliefs in order to not jeopardise his image in the school. Cliff’s narrative leads us into the last section of this chapter on the complexities involved in the teacher’s role. His narrative above explained the complex notion of what the teacher’s role was. Cliff was keen to help students learn, and at the same time adhere to discursive practices about disciplining students because he wanted to be seen as a good teacher.

An integral component of teacher identity is the teacher’s role in the classroom. As outlined in Chapter Two, changes have occurred in the educational system to make teachers’ roles increasingly complex. The influence of economic imperatives and management ideologies pervading educational systems have altered and reconfigured teachers’ work into teaching to achieve outcomes and technically improving test scores. The new performance culture sees the role of teachers as delivering results, accountability, performativity and achieving professional expectations through maintaining classroom management and order. In this next sub-section, I discuss
Chapter Six

Cliff’s, Lee’s and Lok’s conceptions of their roles as teachers as they responded to change, the influence on their teacher identities, and their struggle around the complex roles they play. As Cliff described it, the teacher’s role has been modified from simply teaching to promoting new courses. Lee accounted for her struggle to establish a non-core art subject in the school, and Lok’s reflection on her experience of putting on a performance further exemplifies the influences of the neo-liberal context. The teacher’s role is not only simply focused on teaching for moral purpose; it has been compounded to reflect the broader demands of policy makers and government.

6.3.4 Story 15: ‘I’ve Got Three Roles—One Is a Babysitter, Entertainer and I Guess I Have to Put Educator in There Too’—Cliff’s Story

The principal said he wanted to expand the music program, he wanted to lift the profile of it and I think I’m on the way to doing that. I’ve increased the upper school numbers by about 50 per cent. This year, the school had one year 12 and five year 11s, and now this next year I’m going to have six or seven year 12s and six year 11s. Oh yeah, it’s a bit about drawing people into the school and having good PR, and it’s also keeping the kids at school so they learn to read and write because they stay here, even if it means just wanting to play the drums or muck around with a guitar.

I mean part of my role is to give the kids that have trouble academically something to look forward to in a day, so if that’s playing a Jembay drum or whatever, that’s that, and then another part is trying to get better marks for kids in upper school. If they are talented, it’s an easy way to get good marks by doing music.

I’ve got three roles, one is babysitter, one is entertainer and one is, I guess, I have to put educator in there too, that’s probably the last. I’ve got a lot of babysitting. With the classes being around 15 to 20 kids in a class, you’ve got 10 kids that are really good and you’ve got the rest of the class that are either just not interested or have behavioural problems.

Cliff’s teaching role revolved around expanding the music program and increasing the number of students enrolling in music, which was a condition of his employment. Cliff saw his roles in a particular order, in which being a teacher fitted in last. Thus, the teacher’s role for Cliff had been determined and reformed by senior leadership.
Cliff’s narrative points to the increasing demands that have been placed on teacher’s work and performance. Although Cliff did not specifically mention policies and changes, his employment and expected roles were related to the state’s post-compulsory schooling policy and the introduction of new courses aimed to increase student retention. This means that teachers have to deal with students who may not want to be there but are mandated to stay at school. These changes in the educational environment of schools are affecting teachers’ work.

Institutional demands and the marketisation of education, based on economic rationalisation, affect teachers’ work (Smyth, 2001; Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010; Reid, 1999). The emphasis on and attention to non-teaching duties affected Cliff’s conception of his work. He was faced with issues of working with students who did not want to be in school but needed to be kept in school. The intensification of teachers’ work is a diversion from teaching into bureaucratic matters that teachers, like Cliff, need to perform to retain their teaching positions and obtain approval from senior management.

6.3.5 **Story 16: ‘I Think We Are Teachers, We Are Bankers, We Are Social Workers’—Lee’s Story**

I think we are teachers, we are bankers, we are social workers, we are planners. In the arts, we are directors and performers, we are a shoulder to cry on, we are doctors when they hurt themselves. I reckon we are the closest thing that you can get to being parents without bearing our own children and then, in some cases, I think we are the closest some kids have to a parent, a proper parent.

I have done stage production and I have stage-managed many shows. Thus, that comes first to me. I am not really there as a teacher. I am there as an adviser so that the kids know how to do things and I am coming from more of the background of performing. And as a teacher I only did a one-year degree in university and I have been teaching dance all the time. Since I have been teaching, I never saw myself as a teacher, I see myself as a co-worker, a facilitator for the kids.
Lee described how her teacher identity had been strongly influenced by her performing background. In her experience as a performer, she dug deep into certain aspects of her role as a performer that she transferred into understanding her role and constructing her teacher identity. Lee’s description of herself as a teacher was quite interesting because there seemed to be contradictory realities in the way she described her role as a teacher. Throughout the complex descriptions that she gave, there was an underlying theme that her performing background influenced how she saw herself as a teacher. She saw herself first from the performing platform as an adviser, facilitator and co-worker. However, her identification with teaching seemed limited, even though she had been teaching as a private tutor for many years. Research studies in music education have shown that teachers in the performing arts often view their teacher identities in terms of their performance skills and experience (Arostegui, 2004; Ballantyne, 2005; Bernard, 2005; Bouij, 1998; Pellegrino, 2009). This is exactly what Lee was alluding to in the narrative above when she talked about being a performer first.

Ballantyne’s (2005) research suggested that music teachers’ descriptions of their teacher identities are strongly related to their subject specialisation; that is, they identify with music before teaching. The strong emphasis on the performing content in the music teacher education programs might be one of the reasons why teachers identify with music first. Lee started performing from a young age and her first degree was in performing arts and dance before she completed her one-year Graduate Diploma in Education; this meant that she had a solid foundation in performing and dance, with a stronger connection with the discourse in this field than teaching. Thus,
in a sense, Lee already had an established style of teaching, which had worked for her for a long time, but she also alluded to being there for her students in her description of herself as a teacher. Stephens, when describing music teachers’ passion for their subjects and teacher identity, argued that ‘[t]o separate subject-engagement from subject-application reflects an impersonal model of teaching and learning rather than one that emanates from a dynamic human exchange between teacher and learner—an exchange that draws its life from music itself’ (2007, p. 22).

Drawing on her performing abilities, Lok’s definition of teaching was different from the traditional teacher. Although she was not ‘really there as a teacher’, she was there in other capacities as a facilitator and a co-worker with her students, and an adviser. Her idea of teaching or being a teacher was someone who works alongside students, starting from what students know, instead of engaging in the traditional style of teaching. She described her conception of the roles of teacher as: ‘bankers, social workers, planners, directors, performers, doctors, parents’. However, the nature of the needs presented by students redefined her role as a teacher, and her daily nature of work involved juggling different roles depending on students’ demands.

6.3.6 Story 17: ‘I Think of Myself As a Performer’—Lok’s Story

At times, I think of myself as a performer because if I am authentic all the time, the kids won’t always achieve outcomes. Yeah, it is like a strategy, it is like planning and plotting how I want things to be.

It is such a dynamic career, sometimes you just don’t feel like it. Some days, I’m like, ‘God, I wish I could just go to an office and sit at a desk’, because you know you’ve got to go in there and you are basically performing and you’ve got to put on a show for your class for a day.

In this short narrative, Lok, an ESL teacher, compared teaching to performing and explained how she viewed teaching as acting and performing scripts so as to achieve outcomes. Performing involves acting out a written script of a particular reality. She
mentioned the difficulty of being authentic all the time; if she taught as she would like to, her students may not have achieved prescribed learning outcomes. There seems to be a divide between ‘what is expected of teachers’ and Lok’s view of what ‘real’ teaching should be about. The key phrase in her narrative is ‘achieving outcomes’ and planning to achieve these outcomes. From her narrative, it seems she was sometimes tired of the performative nature of teaching and wondered if she would rather just do office work.

Lok’s comments are linked to her previous narrative about her struggles in establishing a democratic classroom. There seems to be a sense of sometimes switching from the role of teaching to educational outcomes, so that students can meet standard approvals, and then she can move back to her authentic self, which is the democratic teaching style. In other words, she was expressing that she cannot have a democratic classroom all the time because of limiting and inhibiting factors of test scores and students’ performance and accountability measures. This shows the effect of the intensification of teachers’ work on teachers and their identity.

Lok’s use of the teaching as a performance metaphor can also be seen in the light of Shor and Freire’s view of the ‘teacher as artist’ (1987, p. 115). This view was discussed in relation to the liberating teacher’s performance. According to Shor and Freire, ‘The classroom is a stage for performance as much as it is a moment of education. The classroom is not only a stage and a performance and not only a format for inquiry, but is also a place that has visual and auditory dimensions’ (1987, p. 116). Shor and Freire recognised how the ‘classroom is a stage for performance’ (1987, p. 116), for acting out the syllabus and curriculum scripts. They advocated that such
performance should be redirected towards liberating students from the controlling
curriculum. They advocated a democratic, student-centred curriculum that placed
students as active directors of their learning in which, for teachers, recreating
classroom performances so as to draw critical attention to students’ power to create
and recreate their learning experiences is important. Lok’s narrative illustrated a
different understanding of the metaphor.

To Lok, it seemed as if performing to achieve standards was not enough for her
students; they were also very demanding and challenging. In the narrative below, she
explained the challenge of dealing with students who confided in her. Her teaching
role was made more difficult by the intensification and politicisation of her work, but
it was modified by her students’ experience:

They are a very volatile group so, you know, I mean I am not talking
about, ‘Oh gosh, are they learning grammar?’ I mean, there was a bit of
that but also I was having to restrain kids. Kids were confiding in me
about issues from their past and that kind of stuff. And that was certainly
an aspect that I haven’t being supported in, in terms of having the
resources and knowledge of how to deal with those kids.

Lok’s role as a teacher was complicated when she had to attempt to be a psychologist
and a counsellor to her students. She was in a role where she was not well equipped to
deal with students’ traumatised past and to know how and what to say to the students.
However, this also shows that Lok was able to get across to her students and win their
confidence to be able to confide in her.

6.3.7 Summary

The changing nature of teachers’ work affects beginning teachers’ identity in that it
embeds in them another view of the teacher’s role. Beginning teachers are constantly
deciding whether to put more of their efforts into teaching or into non-teaching duties.
Chapter Six

With the way the system is, they have to do both but they are also forced to rethink their duties and ways to practice the moral values underlying their reason for teaching. This comes with critical awareness of their roles and of their school environment. One of the findings of this research is the need for beginning teachers to understand the discursive environments surrounding their work and for them to be critically aware of how these discourses, both past and present, influence the constitution of their teacher identities.

Australian education, being strongly influenced by economic rationality and market-driven ideology, has responded to globalisation by issuing policy that favours economic growth instead of genuine education values (Smyth, 2001; Taylor et al., 1997; Vidovich, 2002). According to Smyth et al.:

Teachers engage in dozens of activities—teaching and assessing, administration, counselling students, extracurricular activities, meeting and planning, to name just a few—to achieve this end. But as disparate and as numerous as these tasks are, there is a pattern. Teachers’ work has been organized in such a way as to facilitate the kind of outcome that is required by the State …. The key element—the glue that hangs all these activities together—is the curriculum … The [official] curriculum is therefore the main specification of the labour process of teaching. (2000, pp. 25–26)

There is a series of policies that have been implemented to hold teachers and schools accountable for students’ performance. These policies are implemented with monitoring mechanisms, such as rules that regulate and maintain conformity of teachers and schools to the policies (Smyth & McInerney, 2007). The regulatory framework on teachers’ work, performance management, is one of those policies.

There is an established link in the literature between the teacher’s role and teacher identity (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beijaard et al., 2000). In the case of Cliff and Lok, the notion of performativity was strongly linked to their identity (re)construction. There
has been a strong emphasis in public debates about how to improve the performance of teachers. Society at large is fixated on measuring performance so that beginning teachers are embedded in this ideology of performing well and being regarded as professional. When they start teaching, teachers have a limited perception of their roles. These perceptions develop as they engage with the culture within the school, interact with other teachers and relate to their students. Although recent policies that lead to an emphasis on performance standards were not mentioned by study participants, the influence on their teacher identity (re)construction was implied in these narratives. Their thinking about the roles was affected by the change in the nature of teachers’ work, which was in response to market-driven policy discourse now being implemented in education. For instance, Cliff was faced with students who did not want to be in classrooms, and so he described part of his role as helping to keep students in school—‘babysitting’ students.

The complex nature of teachers’ work is implied in the narratives of the study participants. Research studies have shown that teachers are practising in a regime that demands inspection of their work, and therefore they are doing less teaching and focusing more on moderating students’ behaviour (Reid 1999). The discourse of managerialism, accountability and performativity, now imported into the educational system, is affecting and changing the school culture so that teachers’ work is heavily politicised. The new school culture is arguably starting to look like a performance culture because teachers are feeling under pressure to fit in and conform to changes related to test scores, thus performance management. This could affect the way teachers do their work on a day-to-day basis, thereby creating a shift in their identities. Generally, teacher identity is now being reshaped and teachers are shifting focus away
from the authentic work of teaching into managerial techniques (Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010). The introduction of scripted lessons, the focus on improving the school’s profile, the move towards teaching to achieve educational outcomes, all these affect teachers’ pedagogy because in the process of doing so, teachers can no longer pursue relationships; they are more interested in delivering test results.

A different understanding of the teacher’s role was evident in these beginning teachers’ narratives based on the complex discourse of teaching available in their schools. Beginning teachers are now faced with the struggle of assuming roles, which are being reshaped in ways that the teachers in this study were not comfortable with. This is repositioning teachers as educational performers and educational marketers rather than teachers, which then passively creates a culture of educational limitations instead of possibilities. The question now is: In what ways will this political environment influence identity (re)construction for beginning teachers?

### 6.4 Conclusion

A key point identified in this chapter was that the past contributes to the (re)construction of teacher identity. Past experiences are reference points—‘frames of reference’ employed in enacting teachers’ pedagogical practices (Flores & Day, 2006). Beginning teachers in this study signified the importance of past schooling experiences, particularly the influence of their former teachers, teacher role models and school environment on their pedagogical practices in classrooms. Both negative and positive experiences influenced the teacher they were in their first year of teaching and the teacher they want to be with their students. Negative experiences
influenced them to (re)construct the teachers they did not want to be, and positive experiences influenced them to (re)construct the teachers they want to be.

However, irrespective of whether past experiences were positive or negative, the past strongly influenced who the teachers were in their first year of teaching and the values that are being enacted or renegotiated in their practice. Understanding the values embedded in their practices and beliefs is very important. What beginning teachers are faced with is choosing between everyday demands based on values that support student learning or values that control student learning, and between values that promote social justice or injustice. It is important to realise that beginning teachers are caught in the middle of struggles between their past and present experiences, and between the complexity of teaching and their relationships with students and fellow teachers.

Beginning teachers in this study showed that, even in their first year, they could make significant changes within the school, which belies the findings of other studies that suggested beginning teachers are not able to change the system and are therefore exiting the system (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Flores, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006). Despite their surrounding struggles and tensions, these teachers’ commitment to social justice and their resilience in fighting for their beliefs was what set them apart. Their teacher identities were linked to helping students learn. The narratives showed them fighting for what they believed in, but all beginning teachers may not be able to do this. These teachers, like other beginning teachers, passed through their share of insecurities, failures, disappointments and fears. These narratives have portrayed their
struggles, and indicate what can be done to ensure beginning teachers are true to themselves in their schools.

Evidence in this chapter suggests that beginning teachers’ pedagogical approaches were highly influenced by schooling experiences. These schooling experiences helped them to develop private theories. More often, there is an implied connection between past and present experiences. To understand the (re)construction of the pedagogical dimension of teacher identity, the researcher needs to examine significant past schooling experiences of participants that contribute to their adoption of particular pedagogical approaches. Britzman (1989) discussed how the process of learning to teach is not solely an individualistic process based on the individual’s abilities but a social issue. Learning to teach involves recognising the social and political context in which teachers work, the school structures and how the curriculum is enacted. Learning to teach requires social negotiation as well as individual effort. Cultural myths of teaching that may be reproduced through teachers’ extensive past experiences of schooling need to be interrupted and interrogated in order to break the reproduction of discursive practices that script a fixed view of teacher identity.

In as much as this study suggests that past schooling experiences influence teachers’ pedagogical practice, these experiences should not be seen as deterministic of their pedagogical choices because of the different contexts they operate in. Interaction with new curricula, students and contexts helps these teachers negotiate and renegotiate their practices. There are practices in the past that are worthy of emulation and there are other practices that need to be interrupted. Beginning teachers need to examine
and study their life histories in detail in order to understand the intricacies of their past experiences and how these influence their present experiences.

Beginning teachers in this study recognised the social context of teaching and were able to engage with it in such a way that enabled them to continue to (re)construct their teacher identities. Beginning teachers negotiate between their prior schooling experience, current experiences of teaching and the complexity in the roles of teaching. It has been established in this chapter that teacher identity (re)construction is a process and continues to be a process. Otherwise, teachers get ‘stuck’ in individualistic notions of teacher identity and do not grow and adapt. Identity (re)construction is ongoing and active in these narratives and this will be shown further in the next chapter, which focuses on the relationships beginning teachers have with their students.
7 CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RELATIONAL DIMENSION OF BECOMING A TEACHER
7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on how beginning teachers develop their identity within relationships, and on what kinds of relationships have contributed to and affirmed their selves as teachers. Relationships are important for beginning teachers through relationships, teachers find out about themselves. Through working at relationships, teachers do a better job, feel more satisfied and have a sense of achievement. Working as a teacher requires a commitment to relationship building (Cummins, 2001; Stillwagon, 2008). Alongside the influence of school context (see Chapter Five), the prior experience of schooling and the complex role of teaching (see Chapter Six), developing relationships with students is the third dimension that influences the (re)construction of teacher identity, as revealed in beginning teachers’ narratives. As discussed in previous chapters, what is being argued here is that the (re)construction of teacher identity is influenced ‘in relation to’ discursive practices in the school, teachers’ prior experiences of learning and teaching, and ‘in relation with’ the teachers, students and parents they encounter (Miller Marsh, 2002).

At the centre of identity (re)construction in socio-cultural, social identity and post-structural studies is social interaction (Alsop, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Jenkins, 2008; Miller Marsh, 2002; Reeves, 2009). The presence of the ‘other’ embodied in discursive practices is significant for the negotiation and (re)construction of identity (Britzman, 1994; Hall, 1996). It is by interacting with others that individuals can claim and ‘assert their own sense of who and what they are’ (Jenkins, 2008 p. 204). What is of essence is the nature of the process of identity (re)construction that is ongoing and relational. The relational nature of identity (re)construction means that identity is no longer referred to as a fixed entity that can
be possessed, but as a fluid, social process through which ongoing interactions and negotiations with others occur.

The relational nature of identity (re)construction means ‘individuals are not the sole constructors of their identity, [and] that identity is no longer viewed as an entirely internal process. Rather, identity is co-constructed with interested others’ (Reeves, 2009, p. 34). Further, Bucholtz and Hall argued for ‘the analytic value of approaching identity as a relational and socio-cultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories’ (2005, pp. 585–586). According to Hanifold (2010), when experienced teachers construct teacher identities, they do so in part positioning themselves in relation to students in their classroom, other teachers, administrators and parents.

Despite the amount of research on teacher identity, there are very few studies about how teachers negotiate their identities in relation to students, especially as it applies to beginning teachers (Reeves, 2009). As Reeves (2009) argued, most studies on identity focus on how teachers shape students’ identities. This chapter focuses on the relationships developed between beginning teachers and their students because teachers’ narratives emphasise how relationships with their students help them in the process of becoming a teacher. According to Proweller and Mitchener (2004), students are one of the most important agents of teacher identity development, yet they remain a relatively unexplored group for understanding the experiences of new teachers. Beginning teachers often pinpoint students as rich sources of support and feedback for them (Bullough, 2001; Clandinin, 1989).
Chapter Seven

My conversations with Bella and Jemma drew my attention to the importance of relationships with students. With the help of the insights on establishing productive relationships from Lok’s, Jemma’s, Lee’s and Bella’s insights, I began to understand relationship building as a very important process in their becoming teachers. I began to understand that the time spent with students was essentially the time when teachers could be themselves as teachers. Being with the students was an opportunity to understand students’ learning needs and respond to these needs. Of course, this understanding comes with negotiating the expectations implicit in certain practices in the school culture and the expectations of students and teachers: a process of confronting, challenging and conforming to certain practices while developing relationships with students.

Participants’ narratives about the teacher they wanted to ‘be’, as informed by memories of teachers in their past (see Chapter Six), highlighted the importance of teacher relationships with students. For instance, In Jemma’s narrative, when she described the ‘idea of a teacher in my head’, she focused on who she wanted to be to her students, not who she wanted to be to other teachers. There is an insistence on having a solid relationship with students in the process of becoming a teacher. What this means for teachers in this study is that the way they make meanings of themselves as teachers is closely tied to their relationships with students. Their primary identity work is with students.

In this chapter, I discuss the stories of four beginning teachers as they reflect on their experiences of relationship development, I also analyse the different kinds of relationships that teachers explored in their stories and why they are important, the
different values that beginning teachers place on them and how the kinds of relationships identified by teachers influenced their identity (re)construction.

7.2 Beginning Teachers’ Stories on Relationship Development and Teacher Identity

In this section, I discuss the four stories about relationship building with students:

- **Relationship for nurturing—Jemma’s story**
  From ‘crowd control’ to understanding that children’s lives ‘come into the classroom’.

- **Relationship for empowerment—Lok’s story**
  ‘Stepping out of myself’—empowering others.

- **Relationship for caring—Bella’s story**
  ‘How I teach is through relationship’—building relational trust.

- **Relationship for friendship—Lee’s story**
  ‘I sort of realised that I didn’t need anybody else’s approval, I didn’t need the principal and admin’s validation. I’m here for the students’.

To start this conversation on relationship building, I draw on Jemma’s narrative to show how she developed her relationships by moving from crowd control to paying attention to her students, which helped her to unlock her nurturing self.

7.2.1 Relationship for Nurturing—Jemma’s Story

Jemma’s process of building relationships with her students involved trying out and juggling the different discourses of what it meant to be a teacher at different times in the year. She started the first term negotiating students’ and professional expectations and weaning students from a primary school approach of learning (dependent on her for directions) to being independent learners. As mentioned in Chapter Five, students’ expectations of Jemma as a teacher were formally expressed and demanded from her in the first few days of teaching. It exposed her to expected roles and helped her to
realise her students’ expectations and that she needed to attend to these expectations. For her, knowing students started from understanding the practices that supported these expectations and then communicating her expectations to students in a way they could understand. Later on, she realised that being the kind of teacher she wanted to be to her students was well supported by the primary school approach, whereby she could practise the idea of the ‘teacher in my head’. This involved negotiation and cooperation with her students, it became harder to be this kind of teacher because of classroom behaviour problems.

Having tried different ways of being with students and teaching using traditional practices such as streaming, she realised that she was actually practising crowd control with her students. Reflecting on the first two terms, she realised that it was essential to look beneath the surface of what she saw happening in her classroom and soon realised that the most important thing was not the doing but the being aspect of her—‘being’ nurturing.

**Story 18: From ‘Crowd Control’ to Understanding That Children’s’ Lives ‘Come into the Classroom’**

I was having a situation where I was doing so much crowd control that I forgot to say nice things to kids over time. I forgot to say, ‘Oh you have done a good job, well done.’ Just the small things I forgot to do because I was so busy saying what they were doing was shit.

And I recognised that and just went, ‘What am I doing?’ No wonder, when I started the star of the week and everyone is trying to do the right thing and I find now that I am not crowd controlling. They are saying, ‘Oh yeah, this is great, I am a star.’ They like it. They like something for them to work towards. I don’t think the levels make enough sense to them yet. You get an award, you know it is an award, you know it is good.

In this narrative, Jemma drew attention to how she used ‘crowd control’ without even knowing that she was doing it. What did crowd control really mean in Jemma’s case? Crowd control represented everything she had done in the first two terms—getting
most of her students through the system and doing what was acceptable within the system without paying attention and caring for each student. Crowd control meant adopting the practices prioritised by the school, such as streaming and being the stereotypical teacher, so as to get the job done. Having a crowd-controlling relationship meant she was not engaging the students; she was busy pushing them through the testing levels and was constantly looking for how students were attaining levels expected of them and was, therefore, caught up with the politics of testing, such that she forgot to notice students’ actual progress.

She moved from crowd control in her classroom to recognising students’ achievements and gathering information to show students’ progress. It was a move from a general, institutionalised relationship to a more personal and friendly relationship. She eventually recognised that her students brought their homes into classrooms, and that how she dealt with home discourse in her classroom was very important. Working as a teacher meant working around and with the issues students brought with them into the classroom.

Although there was no mention of how she realised the behaviour of crowd control, engaging in a reflexive process with her work appeared to have helped. There was a shift in her identity position from crowd control to complimenting her students. This shift in her beliefs about relating to students led to a corresponding change in actions. Getting to know the students and saying positive things to the kids was, in fact, a statement of identity, which implied care, interest and encouragement in her relationship with students. Although Jemma did not discuss this, changing her strategies in the classroom helped her to change her beliefs about how students learn
and this helped her to discover herself as a teacher. Improvement in students’ learning signalled to her that this was what her students really wanted. They wanted her to be more appreciative and positive about their learning. In her view, this approach was more sustainable because she finally understood how she could engage her students. Jemma’s narrative demonstrated how she was experiencing being with her students and recognising how they learn and improve. There was a shift in her approach, as she received validation that what she was doing as a teacher was working out well for the students.

With this shift, she began to realise there were other issues that affected her students. The series of awards and recognition of achievements helped students to feel valued and supported in their learning, which created an open and positive environment for the students. As a result, her students began to open up and share their concerns with her and she began to recognise and acknowledge the wider problems students bring with them to the classroom. The more Jemma critically recognised the powerful forces influencing students’ engagement with learning and employed critical ways of knowing, the closer students moved towards engaging in positive pedagogical relationships with her. The narrative below explained Jemma’s process of getting to know her students better:

It’s not just the kids who come into the classroom; their lives come into their classroom, and you know, when you start getting to know them [students], getting to know what their families are like, you find out what their lives are like. Just talking with them about what they do at home—like students give me a sheet saying, ‘I’m really sorry, my dad’s signature is all over the page, he was drunk last night.’ Or, ‘I am living home alone for a month.’ All these things come in and you are not just teaching. You are looking after them as well. You are like a mother to all of them while they are in your classroom.
Chapter Seven

Jemma really got to know her students and understand their lives outside the classroom in this narrative. Knowing the students, in Jemma’s case, was knowing their backgrounds and the vital things that influenced their performance such as sleeping well before coming to class, eating three square meals a day and knowing what went on outside the walls of the classroom. There was a marked shift from ‘crowd control’ in her understanding of the students, which suggests a shift in the kind of teacher she was to her students. As she got to know more about the students’ backgrounds and needs, she realised the importance of responding to meet these needs, not as a teacher but in a caring way. Moving from her position as a teacher who complimented students on their work to a teacher who performed a caring role was significant in this narrative. Her caring/nurturing nature, a ‘mother hen’ as she described herself, reflected the kind of person she was. Feedback from her friends outside school confirmed her nurturing ability, and her concern for ‘just looking after everyone’ was one of the reasons she chose teaching as a career. She became more attuned to this self in her relationships with students as she moved from crowd control to understanding her students’ lives.

It took her a while to be able to tune into or be more comfortable with revealing her personal identity with the students because of the different discursive practices she engaged with at the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, her personal identity became increasingly part of her professional identity as she explored this aspect of herself. Her focus on knowing her students well and the lives they lived at home helped her to better understand ways of helping her students to learn, and at the same time enabled her to understand how to adapt her evolving teaching ‘self’ to incorporate this aspect of her personal self.
'Being able to actively listen and pay attention’ to students when ‘they or their lives speak’, as Smyth and McInerney (2007, p. 115) described it, was very important in building pedagogical relationships with students. Smyth and McInerney (2007) argued that the only way to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who increasingly drop out of school and disconnect from learning, is to understand the structural limitations of institutions that position students as victims and as inferior. A way of accessing this pathway and building a bridge is building a trusting relationship with students in order to understand what goes on in the home environment. Jemma, following two terms of crowd control, discovered her students’ unique circumstances and began to actively listen to them. Based on the new relationships she developed with her students, she was able to see the connection between her personal self, her role and her students.

The link between relationships and teacher identity (re)construction for Jemma continued when she created a connection between teacher and students’ learning. Jemma’s story clearly demonstrated the relationship between teacher identity and relationships with students. She described this indirectly and showed her belief that students’ responses and performances shaped who she became as a teacher:

I guess it’s the kids that make a good teacher and not the teacher that makes a good teacher because you can be the best teacher in the world and you just have kids that you can’t connect with and they just determine whether you are good or not. You can tell bad teachers just by the way the kids respond to them. If you are good, obviously you will be able to make the kids that are revolting against you want to work with you, but if your kids are mucking up and you can’t bring them back then, I guess that’s what makes a bad teacher. Yes, it is the kids that decide whether or not you are a good teacher or not and you will have a feel of it. I guess there are things you can see, you just know, you can tell by the classroom.
This statement inferred a relationship between a teacher’s identity and students’ responses. Jemma seemed to be saying that teachers knew when they were doing a good job with their students; they knew when their beliefs and values were well communicated to students, and if they were being the kind of teacher they wanted to be with their students. It also showed how teacher identity is discursively formed in relation with students. There was an inherent assumption here that the teacher’s identity was not confirmed until students responded to the teacher’s display of beliefs and values, which corresponds with Stillwagon’s (2008) idea of teacher identity being suspended ‘in its relation to student[s] in whose desire and achievement the teacher’s identity is realised’ (2008, p. 68).

Perhaps, as Jemma’s narrative showed, teacher identity is suspended until you get the response from students that you are their teacher. You have this sense of yourself as a teacher and the students’ response either confirms or contradicts this. Until a positive response from students is achieved, the teacher is still exploring the relational gap that Biesta (2004) alluded to. As Biesta (2004) described it, there must be an interaction between the activities of the educated and the educator before learning takes place. Thus, a beginning teacher like Jemma is still exploring the gap. Until she got that confirmation from her students that she was engaging them, she could not really say she was a teacher. A teacher cannot be good by just saying he or she is good. It has to be reflected in the students’ responses, which, according to Jenkins, means being ‘validated (or not)’ (2004, p. 19) by others with whom one has relationships.

There is also an assumption that the relationship between teacher and students influences students’ behaviour. Being a good teacher, according to Jemma, meant
working through relationships to influence students. In this discussion, she defined a
good teacher in terms of being able to engage students successfully. Exploring this
idea further, Jemma mentioned that her assumption needed to be confirmed with the
students. It was the students who did more of the confirmation than the teachers. She
discussed her students’ response to her below:

My kids like me. They come back from another teacher and say, ‘I am so
glad to be back here.’ Like that is the biggest compliment anyone can give
me, saying that they really enjoy being in the room with me even when
I’m grumpy, like I was today. They would rather be with me. That’s cool,
that is awesome.

This example demonstrates how students’ responses validated Jemma as a teacher and
emphasised how her identity was constructed in relationships with students. This
narrative confirmed the kind of teacher Jemma wanted to be, ‘a teacher students want
to come back to’. It suggested to her that she was doing a good job as a teacher and
she was being the kind of teacher that was recognised and appreciated by the students.
Beginning teachers like Jemma spend more time with students than with teachers, and
it is by being with the students that teachers get the feel for whether they are doing
their job well or not. What is interesting about this is that there is an assumption that
colleagues are not in the position to give the confirmation because all they can do is
say, ‘Well, you seem to be doing what we think teachers should do.’ Arguably, it is
only when beginning teachers are with students that they really know whether or not
they are doing their job well as a teacher. This is a reflexive process. Jemma looks at
what she is doing through her students’ responses, and adapts what she is doing in this
light. By way of summary, Jemma’s real identity work was undertaken in her
relationships with students, and the most comfortable kind of teacher she constructed
was the nurturing teacher.
Chapter Seven

7.2.2 Relationship for Empowerment—Lok’s Story

Lok began her teaching career with a clear vision of how she wanted to teach, using democratic and critical pedagogies in her classroom, a decision based on her own personal testimony and life experiences. Being a Noongar person, she was committed to social justice and helping the least advantaged groups of students. She soon found it difficult to actualise her vision because the teaching environment was not conducive to teaching for social transformation. The school segregated students into groups—mainstream, indigenous and refugee—and each student group had its own school space and safe areas during recess and lunch breaks. Lok’s students, who were refugees and had recently moved to Australia, were also separated from interacting with other students in the school. Combined with the unproductive practice of self-segregation in school, Lok’s students also experienced marginalisation in their communities and had to deal with issues of violence. This issue of segregation challenged Lok to think outside the boundaries of traditional public schooling to investigate and understand the discursive structures that separated her students and affected their engagement in school.

Because of Lok’s personal history, she made a conscious decision about her teaching practices and commitment to social justice in the school. By spending more time critically observing and reading the dominant structures and practices in the school, she recognised the effect of these practices on her students’ lives. By developing rapport with her students and listening to their stories, she was able to understand their home backgrounds and tensions outside the school gate and how these factors affected their learning engagement in her classroom.
Lok worked to get to know her students in several ways, from in-class activities to out-of-class activities. She stressed that the success of her work as a teacher involved creating one-on-one time with students; learning about different approaches to listening, such as active listening; and learning about what would attract and sustain the interest of her students. In this way, she developed relationships with her students during the first term. Her insistence on using democratic teaching practices suggests that she had a different conception of teaching and education from what was practised in the school and from what students had previously experienced. The increased violence experienced by her students outside the classroom compelled her to take a stand for peaceful conflict resolution in her classroom, and by the beginning of the third term she began to speak out for integration in her school community.

Frustration sometimes arose in Lok’s attempt to create a socially inclusive and democratic classroom with her students. She sometimes found herself holding the lone dissenting viewpoint about the value of using democratic approaches to pedagogy at points when her students wanted direct instructions and more control in the classroom. This seems to have been due to the students’ prior experience of institutionalised schooling, as discussed in Chapter Six. She realised that fostering constructive relationships with students could be very difficult, but she saw the importance of relationships to her students’ learning and her mission. The interaction and interconnection of these discourses influenced the way she saw herself in relation to her students and consequently positioned herself in class. She placed particular attention on the importance of creating genuine relationships with students and other teachers by highlighting the relational preconditions necessary for empowering students, such as trust in herself and her students, operating in love and peace, and
acceptance of her students. Within these narratives, she clearly recognised the relati

In the following narratives and the discussion, I explore how Lok’s personal identity and commitment to confronting social injustices was activated through the relationships she developed with her students. I discuss first how she built productive relationships with her students based on her philosophies, shown in the first narrative, and subsequently discuss the need for student empowerment, which emerged from the relationships she developed with her students as shown in the second narrative.

7.2.2.1 Story 19: ‘Stepping Out of Myself’—Empowering Others

My basic philosophy is just to trust myself and trust the students and also be loving because that is why I teach. I think basically I am just trying to approach everything I do from a position of peace and love and when I say that, I don’t mean like airy fairy kind. I am really conscious about that in my career and towards my colleagues, even the ones that piss me off. Like giving them permission to be who they are and not trying to make it wrong and seeing what they make possible through their work and the same with my students. Like, just going in there and asking myself: ‘Why am I here?’

If I am operating in love and peace, then I am not going to be grumpy. I am not going to shout because what is important is that we are here to make a difference to students’ lives that would make a positive difference, you know, so it sounds a bit funny but really I do. And each time I wake up it’s a choice and it’s like, ‘Am I going to operate out of a position of fear, in which I feel threatened and I will be defensive?’ or ‘Do I operate from a position of love?’ In which case, I will be more accepting, I will be peaceful and I will step out of myself and my attention will be with the person I am with rather than on myself, which is what teaching is about.

Lok explained the personal philosophies underpinning her work as a teacher in this narrative. These philosophies, though grand, are founded on building genuine relationships with her students and informed her practice daily. Lok actively recognised and was critically conscious of her purpose as a teacher. For her, having positive relationships was a conscious choice—a choice that positioned her to give her best and operate from a place of love and acceptance of others. Her deep
understanding of the relational side of teaching, which included being aware of power relations and their influences on students’ learning, shaped the kind of teacher she was becoming. In unpacking this complex narrative, I refer back to previous dialogue with Lok and put this narrative in the context of her school, students and personal background. I discuss her narrative under the following themes: trust, love and peace, and the relational gap.

First, trusting herself and students was one of Lok’s core philosophies of teaching. The courage to trust, despite her challenging school context and students’ past histories, is commendable. In an environment where her work was spread across helping students settle into class and adjust to a safe environment in which they were comfortable to learn, trusting her capability and what she knew became an essential tool of negotiating a challenging context. Lok believed she was competent, knowledgeable, resourceful and skilful enough to work successfully as a teacher. She trusted herself to be able to do her best as a teacher for her students and trusted their ability to learn—a confidence that grew with the many years of watching her parents work successfully with different students. She believed her life was about making a difference.

This trust had a purpose beyond Lok, although she needed to trust herself first before she could engage in the kind of relational work she was involved with. Lok’s focus on trusting herself as a teacher and her students was an important part of building productive learning relationships, because it demonstrated confidence in the students’ intellectual abilities and social capabilities, and it was a precondition for students in return to develop a trusting relationship with her (Noddings, 2005; Raider- Roth,
2004; Willie, 2000). As Willie put it, ‘teachers cannot educate students in whom they have no confidence’ (2000, p. 256). This trust, which Willie referred to as confidence, is ‘an activity based in faith—a faith that each student can learn something of value if one is taught in a caring way’ (2000, p. 256).

This faith in students’ ability is active and has a liberating component because it frees students to explore and express themselves comfortably in the class. It is active because it requires a significant amount of activity and actions. For Lok, this took the form of putting her confidence in her students’ ability to learn. Trusting her students was done in the hope and confidence that her students would eventually trust her when they saw the confidence she had in their intellectual and social capabilities. This confidence was freely given despite students’ responses and backgrounds. As Willie suggested, ‘Teachers who have confidence in their students are disinclined to declare that they cannot help them because of their race, social class, or family circumstances’ (2000, p. 256). This confidence in students, which Lok discussed here, leads to an acceptance of students for who they are.

An important way in which Lok demonstrated her confidence in her students was by accepting them as they were. Willie, writing about confidence and trust in the context of students’ learning, explained that students are only able to trust their teacher when they have ‘reliable evidence that the other [teacher] accepts one [student] as one is before attempting to initiate change in behaviour, that the other respects one’s whole being and is interested in one beyond a specific utilitarian purpose’ (2000, p. 259). In Lok’s narrative, this acceptance meant ‘giving them permission to be who they are and not trying to make it wrong’. This confirms that the other, in this case Lok,
respected the students and was genuinely willing to help them. She accepted them first as her students by giving them the permission to be themselves before attempting to change them. She was not condemning them despite the large cultural differences.

In some respects, she identified with these students because she had similar experiences as a Noongar woman. She understood and had the knowledge of the issues that Indigenous families faced and recognised how her students were struggling with similar issues of marginalisation and disenfranchisement from mainstream Australia. Her recognition and understanding of how the various issues that students brought into the classroom affected their learning was important because she tried to create a safe, loving and trusting environment, which was different from what these students were used to outside of her classroom (Smyth et al., 2010).

In allowing students to be who they were and bring who they were to the classroom without judging them, Lok was able to develop a stronger relationship and better understanding of them. This is the type of relationship that her students were not familiar with, but it opened up possibilities for her to help the students and for the students to be well equipped to understand their new cultural environment and to respond positively to it. For Lok, her acceptance of people for who they were was a precondition to helping them. Extending this argument further, it can be claimed that by accepting others for who they were, Lok encouraged a reciprocal relationship. This is another layer to her understanding of relationships that suggests the reciprocity of relationships (Noddings, 1992; Willie, 2000). Accepting the students allowed them to be themselves with her and reveal what was going on, because they knew their teacher
had confidence in them. This confidence was her contribution to building an effective educational relationship with them.

Second, being trusting is also connected with her position to operate in love and peace. Lok’s philosophy of operating out of love corresponds with Freire’s (1998) view of ‘teaching as an act of love’ (Darder, 2002, p. 91). As Freire argued, it is ‘impossible to teach without the courage to love’ (1998, p. 3). In adapting a love and peace approach, Lok did something different from what other teachers did in her school, because in her words, ‘There is a perception that there is something wrong with our kids, and so a lot of people who work in our kind of area can get threatened if you suggest that there is nothing wrong with the kids because they think they are there to fix them’. Thus, instead of fault-finding and ‘fixing’ her students, she started from a position that was partly committed to social justice and partly to a passion for helping others and making their lives better.

Third, Lok’s philosophy of teaching helped her to step into the relational gap between herself and her students. It positioned her to get to know and understand her students’ backgrounds. She described this process metaphorically as ‘stepping out of herself’ and paying more attention to her students. Stepping out of herself was not just stepping out of her own self; it was also stepping out of her space as a teacher in the school, which had been discursively constructed. It was stepping out of the discursive practices—such as ignoring students’ needs, seeing students as having deficits and accepting the segregation from other students in the school—that clogged her role as a teacher. This stepping out meant exploring and understanding her students’ needs, thus reaching out and actively making something out of her challenging environment.
‘Stepping out of herself’ also conveys the idea that Lok recognised a gap between herself and her students, which she addresses by consciously stepping into the relational space with her students. Employing Biesta’s relational gap to interpret Lok’s experiences, we see that stepping into this relational space allowed Lok to reveal who she was, and practice her philosophy of love and peace and thereby ‘come into presence’ of her students (2004, p. 22). Stepping into the relational gap enabled her to enunciate her beliefs about accepting her students and helping them to make a positive difference in their lives.

What happened in the gap between Lok and her students was very important to students’ engagement in learning. The activities of Lok in the gap were as crucial as those of the students for learning to occur; her engagement in the gap and how she set up power relations in the classroom was very important for students’ engagement (Biesta, 2004). Choosing to operate from a position of peace and love was connected to her own personal experiences. It seemed that Lok’s personal background informed her observations and reflections of what was happening with her students and what was going on in her classroom. As a result, she comfortably engaged in the gap because she recognised the particular source of the reasons why students were misbehaving and not engaging in her classroom. She imagined herself in their position. Operating in this love space was not just being sympathetic with her students; she was actually active and had agency in understanding why they had these experiences in the school. She was working in the gap that existed between the other teachers, the school and these students.
Lok was not just ‘airy fairy’. As she said, she confronted the question of why her students were not learning and she understood her students’ needs because she stepped into this relational space. She took a standpoint and understood the students’ needs from their perspectives. Thus, in a sense, she was in two spaces: she was in a teacher’s space and she was in the students’ space. She was moving from one to the other in a really productive and supportive way. It meant partly sharing students’ experiences and also seeing things from a teacher’s perspective. It meant being open and not building a wall around herself as a teacher. It went beyond just being nice and became very deep.

Lok went further to explain her larger purpose for building relationships with her students: the development of critical consciousness and her appetite for social justice. Based on her experience of stepping into the relational gap, Lok became aware of the critical issues of disempowerment that her students experienced. She came to know students in more deep and personal ways. She knew what they faced at home, the issues affecting them; she learnt of the feelings of powerlessness and helplessness that many of her students brought to the classroom every day. She observed certain patterns in her students’ narration of their past experiences and the issues they were currently facing at school. Reading the words and world of her students, she began to see marginalisation and powerlessness.

Lok’s stories revealed that students were experiencing ‘a huge amount of disintegration, cultural disintegration, dislocation, and complete disenfranchisement’ in the school and in the community. Lok’s deeper understanding and reflexive awareness of these issues were accurately displayed when she linked these issues to
the sociological problems in the society: ‘The problem is we live in a community which works quite well in disempowering people who aren’t white, middle class,’ she explained, then continues:

So if I can make them empowered, self-empowered and recognise that really anything is possible for them, you know that will be useful. If I can teach them to read and write, that is what empowers them. I mean, to empower a student is to understand that power is within them, and that sounds grand, but that essentially it is all down to them and anything is possible and to show them through facilitating success what is possible for them. Thus, you know, and in a really practical sense, like give them the skills to be able to read and write well. And to be able to negotiate all the unsaid socio and cultural stuff as well as give them the skills to express themselves to be effective communicators.

In this narrative, Lok moved her discussion from operating in love and peace to empowering her students. This movement to empowerment was a critical step Lok took in her first year of teaching.

With this representation of the problem her students faced—a class problem based on society’s degradation of people with low SES—she took action. Her understanding of how her students had become culturally and ‘systematically disenfranchised’ and disempowered compelled her to facilitate their empowerment and take a stand for their integration into the school (Darder, 2002, p. 57). Knowing the critical source of disempowerment and recognising her students’ need for empowerment, having stepped into the gap to understand the issues her students were facing, Lok searched for ways to facilitate their empowerment. By doing so, she recognised that ‘the task at hand is not to reproduce the traditional social arrangements that support and perpetuate inequality and injustice, but rather to work toward the transformation of these social arrangements’ (Darder, 2002, p. 58).
Her decision to empower her students was not an ill-informed choice; rather, it was a well-conceived and planned decision because she understood that their learning could not be separated from their empowerment. This propelled her into an activist position in which she was ready to teach and to engage in resolving these issues of disempowerment. Her reason for doing this was to ultimately connect students to learning. She believed that to routinely teach like other teachers was defeating her social and educational goals.

Lok further explained how she defined empowerment in her school’s context, as students understanding that the ‘power is within them’ to change their circumstances and it was ‘essentially all down to them and anything is possible’ and also ‘to show them through facilitating success what is possible for them’. From this definition of empowerment, it is clear that Lok recognised students as social agents able to change and redefine their world and her role was to support the process of discovery and change. This definition of empowerment is similar to definitions constructed by Cummins (2001), Darder (2002) and Freire (1994), who have consistently argued against the notion of empowerment being given as a gift to students but rather advocated it as a collaborative, joint venture process between teachers and students.

To think empowerment can be just handed over is equivalent to ‘consign[ing] [students] to the role of passive recipients’ (Cummins, 2001, p. 653), which contrasts with the critical view of education as a transformative and emancipatory process. To empower literally means to enable others to achieve more. Cummins, explaining the process of minority students’ empowerment, defined it as a ‘collaborative creation of power’ (2001, p. 653) between the teacher and students. This notion of empowerment
is a partnership that recognises that the ‘dialogical process of student empowerment is not just an individual phenomenon, but takes place within the solidarity of relationships with others’ (Darder, 2002, p. 110). It recognises the involvement and engagement of students in the process in conjunction with the provision of support from teachers.

In recognising students as social agents for empowerment, Lok worked towards creating ‘contexts of empowerment’ in her classroom, wherein she recognised the knowledge and experiences that her students brought with them to class, which is described as ‘funds of knowledge’ by Moll, Amanti Neff and Gonzalez (1992). Lok saw ‘their incredible skills, inner beauty and their strength to live irrespective of their adverse circumstances’ and ‘gives them permission to be who they are and not trying to make it wrong and seeing what they make possible through their work and allow their lives to speak in classrooms’. By understanding empowerment as a collaborative venture between herself and students, she encouraged her students to experience freedom to be themselves, and ‘the freedom to break through the imposed myths and illusions that stifle their empowerment as subjects of history’ (Darder, 2002 p. 110).

Instead of taking power from students, she facilitated a means for them to realise that they had power and were capable of changing their lives instead of being dependent on her. From her other narratives, she carefully structured her classroom interactions in a way that respected students’ cultural values and made it possible for students to rethink their ideas of themselves. She taught them to ‘develop an appreciation of their own values’. She took responsibility to determine the social and educational goals she wanted to achieve with her students and how she wanted to relate with them.
Thus, she taught them the basic skills of reading and writing that they needed to ‘negotiate the unsaid socio and cultural stuff’ in their environments. Considering her students’ backgrounds and needs, Lok knew that teaching basic communication skills helped them to find ‘new ways of managing, responding and dealing with conflicts’, which was necessary for them to move beyond being violent and aggressive. Having skills to be effective communicators meant the students could decode or read meanings in what others said to them. They could understand the intended messages and decipher the different purposes of communication using language to negotiate, persuade, confirm and clarify.

As Lok explained, empowerment is helping her students see their inner beauty. In helping, she created an environment for the students and engaged them in pedagogical relationships that respected their needs, interests and what they had to say. Her curriculum and instruction put a focus on empowerment. She chose democratic pedagogy because she respected and valued her students’ ‘funds of knowledge’ and committed herself to seeing things from their perspectives to help them build on these knowledge funds. In choosing to teach democratically, she confirmed her beliefs about teaching and learning. She also created an image of herself as a teacher to the students and let the students see the image she had of them—an image of students who were capable of learning. She did not see them as receptacles to be filled with learning (Freire, 1998), as implied by the instrumentalist and transmissive approaches of education; rather, she saw them as co-constructors of knowledge in their learning journey (Kincheloe, 2003). Thus, in allowing them to speak and be engaged in class, she was also giving them the opportunity to be themselves and was demonstrating to them that she had confidence in them and wanted to listen to what they had to say.
Central to the process of empowerment was the critical dialogue in which she engaged with her students. According to Darder, ‘Critical dialogue is a means in the classroom for the development for student empowerment’ (2002, p. 61). Lok had critical discussions with her students about issues of respect and dealing with others in a respectful way. As she stated, ‘my intention for my class is to set an example: respect for diversity, respect for other peoples’ experiences of their own lives, respect for themselves, which is a big one because if they’ve got respect for themselves, they will not engage in self-sabotaging behaviours’. Because of this critical dialogue, Lok was able to bring other students from the mainstream into her classroom, which she referred to as a ‘buddy exchange system’, in which ‘my class is all set up for this carefully structured safe exchanges because of the discussions I have with my students’. This helped the students to spend more time with other students in a safe and structured environment and helped her to pursue the mission of integration and student empowerment.

In line with her definition of empowerment, Lok engaged her critical capacity to build relationships and listen to students’ stories, which helped her to discover and develop ‘new ways of being with her students in the classroom and new ways of introducing experiences that can effectively assist students to connect more deeply with their own critical capacities, in order to explore the worlds and understand themselves more fully’ (Darder, 2002, p. 93). For example, Lok described how she encouraged her students to dance and play drums in the classroom because the boys loved drumming and the girls loved dancing. It was part of their cultural experience and helped them to connect to their historical identities. She incorporated dancing, music and story sharing in her classroom and planned to introduce didgeridoo playing and stick
tapping when Noongar kids came into her classroom. ‘Here we do some dancing and we have some music and we spend a little bit of time and share some stories and just have a bit of fun’.

Lok took a stand for integration both in her classroom and at the school level by promoting safe exchanges in classrooms and developing a cultural awareness program for the different groups in the school. She talked to the relevant people concerned—the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, the deputy of the Noongar program, the deputy of the mainstream program, and some teachers in the mainstream—about her integration mission. As Lok mentioned:

> And so I’ve just really taken a stand for it (integration) in my classroom as well as in mainstream and with some of the teachers in the Noongar program having some cultural awareness learning program. For the Noongar kids, it’s about the experience of African kids that are coming in and for the African kids, about the Noongar experience. And I was approached to offer, like, the Noongar path for the African kids.

In summary, Lok’s narratives demonstrated how she had clearly worked out her philosophies of teaching and learning and created a series of practices based on this philosophy. She was conscious of the fact that she was in a relationship with her students and colleagues, and aimed to make those relationships productive. She was conscious of crafting an identity that allowed her to express her philosophy of trust, love and peace, and a willingness to enter the relational gap.

Choosing to build a positive and affirming relationship involved critical reflection on her values and beliefs in love and peace. There is the sense in this narrative that Lok always came back to the question of ‘Why am I here?’ This demonstrated a strong reflexive understanding of her practice as well as her positioning in relation to her students. This reflexivity helped her to stay attuned to her values and to consistently
engage in reflection on her practice. Being aware that the choices she made affected her students as well as herself and expressed the values she believed in, she clearly paid attention to understanding herself and creating a positive, loving and trusting position as a precondition for helping her students. As she described it, empowering the students meant ‘knowing that there is power within them and anything is possible for them’. Building relationships with these students helped her to develop a professional understanding and build professional knowledge about teaching in this environment. Helping students to see the power that lay within them, that they had agency and that success was possible was Lok’s standpoint on building relationships. Thus, developing this kind of empowering relationship that helped them to see possible success, feel powerful and in control of their lives was crucial for her.

Building relationships with students was Lok’s attempt to reduce the institutionalised barrier to interaction between the teacher and the student, and thereby to recreate and establish productive relationships. Building relationships helps students to make sense of the identities of teachers who are caring, and helps the students to develop healthy conceptions and identities of themselves. Their sense of identity is validated and confirmed in the quality of relationships teachers have with them. This kind of relationship building helps students see what is possible in their lives, and what they could achieve as individuals, because of their teachers’ belief and trust in them.

Continuing the theme of relationship building with students as a way in which beginning teachers’ construct their identities, I now turn to Bella’s story. There are many instances whereby learning scripts constitute an important part of career choices and actions and one such instance is Bella’s story. Bella was not just philosophical;
she talked about how she practically negotiated the relational context of her classroom.

7.2.3 Building Relationships for Learning—Bella’s Story

Bella drew on her high school experiences when describing her passion for teaching through relationships. She used the metaphor of building relationships for learning. Her lived experience of how teachers literally shaped and changed students’ lives helped her to appreciate and value the importance of building quality relationships with students. As an ‘at risk’ student in English and maths from primary to high school, Bella failed so terribly in these subjects that her teachers concluded ‘You can’t do English’ and ‘You are a bad English student’. Her year 11 maths teacher effectively told her he did not like her, and that she was never going to amount to anything.

Alongside these painful memories, Bella also remembered vividly when her life began to change in interesting ways. A first ray of hope shone on her when one of her teachers took a bit of interest in her. It was the ‘first time I had a teacher who actually thought I could do something with my life and actually thought I could learn’, she stated. She met her English teacher in year 11 and 12, who ‘was amazing’ because it was the first time she ‘had an English teacher that believed in me and developed a relationship with me’. This teacher encouraged, helped and got to know Bella more, and asked about her family situation and background. This relationship was quite an important part of Bella’s life, because in retrospect she believed ‘there is no way I would have passed English and gone to university if she [the English teacher] hadn’t developed that relationship with me’.
Because of the trust and confidence her English teacher had in her, Bella became a better student. As a result of this positive learning engagement and renewed confidence in her ability to learn, she was able to complete a Bachelor of Science and a Graduate Diploma in Education. Her decision to become a teacher was based on that positive relationship with her high school teacher and she wanted to have an effect on other people’s lives in the same way. This comment revealed her commitment to help other students: ‘You know, well I could be that teacher for some of these kids that stated, “Hey you know you are bright, you might be a little bit slower than everyone else but you can still do it”, and I might change someone’s life for the rest of their life’.

Based on this experience of schooling, Bella developed values and a set of beliefs about what good teaching was and what constituted good learning, and she based decisions of how she practised as a teacher on those values. One of the things she learnt in being a student was that relationships with teachers really matter and this became her private theory about being a good teacher. Based on her early experience, she made decisions on the kind of school that she wanted to work in. As she stated, ‘I went with the school that was more in line with how I wanted to teach and what I wanted to teach’. She chose the school she now worked in because of its strong commitment to pastoral care. This commitment was not only rhetorical; it filtered through her practice in the classroom and in the way she dealt with students outside the classroom. The strong pastoral care component of the school enabled her to create genuine relationships with her students and change their lives in a positive direction.
As a teacher, Bella’s major interest was in building relationships for learning with her students. Bella was very careful as she laid each brick down, getting to know the students, their interests, their desires, their motivations and how life was for them at home. She knew that this what pivotal —understanding who they were first before attempting to present subject content to them was essential. She believed that she could not teach students successfully without knowing where they were coming from, where they were going and what they already knew about learning. She took careful consideration of what was most beneficial for each student as she prepared to bridge the relational gap.

In the narratives and discussion that follow, I explore Bella’s key beliefs and struggles about building quality relationships with her students.

7.2.3.1 Story 20: ‘How I Teach is Through Relationships’—Building Relational Trust

How I teach is through relationships, and you know, if kids trust me they think, you know, what I have done is good, then they are listening and they want to learn. But if they don’t, then they won’t listen and won’t learn … And also, kids that don’t feel they are part of school life don’t want to be there and don’t want to learn, but if they are in a school or classroom where they feel like they are part of the classroom, then they are a lot happier and feel happy and more willing to learn.

Building relationships with students was one of Bella’s core principles. Given her prior experience of schooling, she believed the teaching process was inherently relational, through which one builds trust and respect with students. She believed that students’ trust in her was a prerequisite for them to listen to her and be engaged in learning. The notion of relational trust is evidently demonstrated in Bella’s narrative. As Smyth et al. argued, relational trust is ‘the most indispensable aspect of the teaching/learning exchange’ (2010, p. 59). It is within these relationships that both the
Chapter Seven

teacher and students exercise their capacities to grow their knowledge as well as build trust. In doing so, an environment in which students can trust their teacher and trust themselves in their presence is created.

Bella deliberately built relationships with students. For instance, in one of her other narratives, she explained how she built this trusting relationship by starting each week spending quality time with her students, in what she called a ‘community circle’. In this circle, students took time to talk about their cares, concerns or celebrations in an atmosphere of love. In this circle, the students understood the community rules. In Bella’s words, ‘this is our special time and this is the time where you can’t put anyone down, you have to listen’ and students were encouraged to freely express themselves. ‘The kids love it and they say they can’t wait to do community circle’.

In return, Bella understood what was happening in each student’s life and used it to nudge them positively and motivate their learning in practical ways. From each listening to the other, a common ground could be forged in which the learning took place. Her courage to actually listen to her students and allow students to direct her classroom was astonishing. Within this place of honouring each other’s perspectives, Bella became sensitive and attuned to the learning process of each of her students. This is similar to the examples described by Raider-Roth (2005) of how a teacher’s relationships with students significantly shape a classroom culture in which students feel safe to express themselves, trust what they know and trust themselves as learners in the classroom.

In the latter part of her narrative, Bella also alluded to the importance of the relational and emotional dimension to learning. She established a strong connection between the
emotional dimension of students’ selves, and their engagement with school, which was as a result of the positive relationships she had with her students. She believed that if students ‘feel they are part of the classroom, then they are a lot happier and feel happy and more willing to learn’ but ‘kids that don’t feel like they are part of school life don’t want to be there and don’t want to learn’.

How students feel about school, the classroom and their teacher is a significant part of the learning process, and by establishing a community circle, Bella created a positive environment and a positive culture for her students to feel part of the classroom and gave herself the opportunity to respond to their social and emotional concerns. This experience supports previous research on how students’ emotional connectedness to school and classroom affects their attitudes to learning (Day et al., 2006; Rogers, 1983). For Bella, there was a strong correlation between a teacher’s relationship with students, their wanting to come to school and their engagement with learning. Feeling part of the classroom was dependent on the kind of relationship she had with her students. If she was loving and trusting towards her students, her students felt happy, wanted to be in school and wanted to learn.

In advancing the discussion of the importance of the emotional dimension to learning, Bella also referred to it as an important part of building quality relationships. In this next narrative, she discussed finding the ‘nice gentle balance’ between students’ emotional stability and learning. This is where she began to analyse the quality of relationships and explain what this actually meant. Bella developed relationships at different levels with each student based on their backgrounds. For some of her students, she tried to balance managing their behaviours with giving them allowances.
to make their own decisions. A sense of balance was part of the quality relationships she developed with her students and this process of building relationships with students while managing their behaviour was a ‘balancing act’:

Well, it’s just caring for them and for quite a few students school is the only safe place they have, so I have to be, it has to be a nice gentle balance between where I can tell them off for doing something naughty and where, if they’ve been told off a bit too much, then they will just burst out crying or they might not come to school the next day because they don’t feel emotionally stable. And it’s just trying to find that balance.

It’s like, you know, one boy today was playing computer games and he knew he wasn’t supposed to be playing computer games so I said, ‘Look, you can’t play games’, and the normal thing to do is if they’re playing computer games they get banned. I said, ‘You can’t play the computer game, so you know what that means? You get banned’. And he looked at me and he knew he was in trouble and it just really upset him and he started crying. I said, ‘Okay, this can be a warning, you can have the computer, but if you’re on the games again you don’t get to use it’.

Just things like that, like you have to make little allowances because he doesn’t have anything at home so to take something away from him is huge. You know, to ban him from using it is a big thing and it’s just things like that, you know.

Bella’s recognition of school as ‘the only safe place’ for some of her students provided a starting place for this discussion because it showed that she had a working knowledge of her students’ home situations. This also engendered her care for them and also advised her to be careful in ensuring that her classroom was a safe haven in which students’ lives could truly speak. As argued by Webb and Blond, when ‘caring is part of knowing’ then ‘knowing is in relation’ (1995, p. 614).

Creating a balance between emotional stability and managing students’ behaviour was really important for Bella as she developed relationships with her students. She understood that emotional stability was very important to students’ learning and she tried to create a balance in her relationship between how she corrected them and how she engaged their attention in learning. Balance in this instance meant being sensitive
towards students and acting in ways that were sensitive to students’ needs. This balance was essential for students’ engagement both with learning in her classroom and with school.

Bella knew that if the student felt alienated at school, they would give less attention in class, and so she tried to make sure that in building her relationships with students, she understood the things that caused emotional discomfort and stopped them from being alert and productive in her class. This was far from being a soft teacher or wanting students to be her friends; it was more about the conditions for relational learning. She understood that if students had grudges towards her, they might refuse to pay attention to her and might not want to listen to her. In the example of the boy playing computer games, she touched on the issues of presence, reflection-in-action and giving allowances.

In recounting ‘what happened’ with this particular student and his behaviour, Bella showed how she was paying attention to what was going on. She demonstrated a heightened awareness of what was happening. Bella’s sensitivity to the student and being present with the student helped her to respond with a considered and compassionate next action, which met the needs and experience of the student. Thus, she allowed him to use the computer even though he did not comply with her rules of computer usage, because she knew the student did not have a computer to play with at home. Instead of allowing him to be upset to the point that he chose to disengage with school, she took a compassionate and well-considered instructional move because she was present with the student. Bella was trying to reach this kind of emotional stability,
although she knew he was at risk of being emotionally vulnerable and doing things that might distort the relationship.

Being present is the ‘experience of bringing one’s whole self to full attention so as to perceive what is happening in the moment’ (Raider-Roth, 2005, p. 267). By being present, Bella was extremely sensitive and very caring, very reflective—she was always aware of the influence her actions were going to have on her students. She paid attention, listened sensitively and thought through what her students might be feeling. She was very empathetic. She understood that the relationship she had with her students was very important and she was careful not to use it in an abusive way. She was also aware that she was developing these relationships to support the learning of her students. This meant a ‘complex amalgam of seeing, hearing, observing, taking notice, playing close attention, understanding, while at the same time comprehending what action is required in the situation, and ensuring that it is authentic and compassionate’ (Smyth et al., 2010, p. 61). All these things were components of how she saw teaching and thus were components of her identity.

Presence is also related to reflection-in-action. Bella’s actions came from her ‘sensitivity to the flow of events’ (Rogers, 2002, p. 235). It was because Bella was present with her students that she observed her student being upset and made a conscious decision to abandon her general classroom management instructions so as to maintain her relationship with the student and retain his connection with learning. As Rogers argued, ‘the more a teacher is present, the more she can perceive; the more she perceives, the greater the potential for an intelligent response’ (2002, p. 234). The worldview that informed her thinking was the knowledge that she must not upset or do
anything that might harm the relationship, which was based on her understanding of
the student’s life at home. The relationship was more important than Bella’s authority
or the student obeying her authority.

For some teachers in this situation, their worldview would lead them to believe the
student was challenging their authority, and they might decide to slap the student
down. But Bella thought differently. She thought, ‘he is challenging my authority; I
want to keep my relationship with this student because it is important for his learning’.
By prioritising the maintenance of relationships over reinforcing her authority, she
optimally influenced students to ‘embrace themselves and their learning’ (Noddings
1984, p. 177). Thus, she behaved differently based on her deep belief about what was
important.

Paying attention was important, as was being sensitive to students in the classroom.
Bella let the students’ in-class behaviour guide her in how she adapted and readapted
her pedagogy to the students. She constantly noted all these things and acted and
reflected as things happened in her classroom. Reflection-in-action is very difficult to
practice. One of the reasons why Bella was able to practice the reflection-in-action
well was because she had a very sound, robust, basic philosophy of how students
learn. She understood what was required in being a teacher, so it was almost like she
had a baseline from which she built her practice. She knew that she needed to pay
attention, she needed to think about students’ lives outside the classroom, and as a
result, seemed to avoid being caught up in antagonism, anger or authoritarian
practices.
By preferring her student’s needs and emotional stability over her own authority, Bella cut him some slack. ‘Cutting the slack … occurs when the teacher bends the rules for a student whom the teacher knows is genuinely disadvantaged by school rules and regulations’ (Smyth & McInerney, 2007, p. 168). What particularly helped Bella in ‘cutting the slack’ was her awareness of the student’s life outside school, which was actively developed by taking an interest in her student. This helped her to develop a knowledge of ‘how’ and ‘what’ to do with students in school and made the difference between ‘success and failure’ for both Bella and the student (Smyth & McInerney, 2007, p. 135). Success in Bella’s view was defined in terms of teaching the students, and when she did that she felt confirmed. Thus, if she did not have a relationship with the student, she could not teach that student. Teaching had to be through relationships.

Bella’s strategies were not just about making her students feel good or making herself feel good or making the students like her, but was a very robust kind of ambition. Teaching was about supporting learning, but she argued that in order to get to learning, relationships with the students were very important. When the student realises that the teacher is interested in him and his learning, the student is more compelled to build a trusting relationship with the teacher. Bella recognised how her classroom was a safety net and creativity hub for her students and encouraged the connection to learning and school. In her classroom, where students expressed themselves because of the layers of trust that had been built between them, students were able to plunge into learning because they knew their teacher was there for them.
The delicate balancing of her actions and inactions was very significant. She constantly had to move, shift, adapt, negotiate and reposition herself with the students. She was constantly trying to create this balance, which was a struggle on its own. Achieving a balance required a lot of work to become alert and sensitive to students’ needs. It involved taking the risk of allowing the students to direct their learning. Bella took an individual, tailored approach to each of the students and this involved being creative and being comfortable in her own skin. She was comfortable playing this role because the school had a pastoral care philosophy and commitment and she felt suited to the school.

She took careful consideration of what was most beneficial for each student and lay down the right brick from her own perspective. She was present in both the teaching and learning processes. She understood how to develop quality relationships at different levels with each student, based on their backgrounds. For some of her students, she tried to balance managing their behaviours with giving them a degree of autonomy.

Bella’s story revealed some of the struggles she faced in building a relationship of care with her students, especially for those students with literacy problems and with the troublemakers in her class:

I really try to develop relationships with students with literacy problems and it’s hard though, because there is one particular boy in my class. He is a little bit of a troublemaker and he won’t let me develop a relationship with him and it’s really difficult because how I teach is through relationships.

Developing relationships with students who resisted her efforts was very hard to do. At times, Bella felt like she was not measuring up to her philosophy of teaching
through relationships and was failing as a teacher because how she taught was ‘through relationships’. She believed if she did not have relationships with her students, she could not teach them well. She understood that if her students did not have a relationship with her, it might be difficult to connect them with the subject matter, which was abstract in the subjects she taught—mathematics and science. Because they were both subjects that did not come directly from the students’ experiences, she had to actually teach concepts and see how she could connect them to their experiences. Relationships for learning were particularly important because of the subject area she was working in.

She discussed further her struggle with another boy in her classroom and explained how she got to know her students by finding something good about each child:

Another boy I just found out has an issue that has been going on yesterday and I feel bad because he’s quite a naughty student and I’ve been trying to find things that I like about him, because I do with every single child and I’ve really struggled with him. Because there is something good about everybody and if you find something nice about somebody you have a positive thing to say about them every day and they respond better towards that, and if they are misbehaving you focus on that good thing about them. They’re always going to shine out that way because it’s better to have good intentions than bad intentions and most kids learn that instinctively, you know.

Anyway I found out this thing about this kid and it made me realise that he is such a lot stronger and braver than I had originally thought, because he was annoying and he was frustrating, but after what I found out what he’s been through in the last two weeks, I was like, ‘Wow! He’s actually been at school every day, even though he’s been going through this.’ I was like, ‘Wow, that’s amazing!’ And I felt bad because I couldn’t find something nice about him, you know, something good about him initially and that was a huge thing. I didn’t even know about it, you know?

This story showed how Bella really struggled to find something positive about this student. It was not until Bella found out that the student was experiencing difficulties at home that she understood why he was misbehaving in her class. That knowledge
helped her to rethink her opinion of the boy and helped her to respect him more. She mentioned her surprise at seeing the student every day in her classroom despite the serious issues the boy was facing at home. This knowledge altered her perception of the student and her relationship with him. It helped her to construct a better relationship that acknowledged his situation and showed an understanding of his choices in the classroom.

Bella’s story revealed the change in her perception of the student when she shifted from just observing him in the classroom to discovering what was happening in his life. Working from this perspective, she believed that when she communicated her care to students, they began to see she was genuine and had a positive intention. The connection between the positive intention of the teacher and students’ learning was significant.

Another important feature of Bella’s narrative was her awareness that students often know when teachers have bad or good intentions towards them. They know when teachers believe in their abilities and capabilities (Webb & Blond, 1995). Bella’s comment about how students instinctively know when their teacher has positive intentions raised an essential issue of relationship building with students. It affects and influences students’ learning engagement. Bella knew that students were more inclined to listen to her if she had good intentions. Cummins (2001) argued that if teachers dealing with English as a second language students had a positive image of students, the students had the capacity to be fluently bilingual, and to increase their ability and their interactions.
Discovering something good about each student was a pedagogical practice that positioned Bella to develop better relationships with students. It branded and defined her as the teacher who cared. Finding something good about each student helped her to establish positive connections with students. She focused on the positive qualities of students and maintained rapport by saying positive things to encourage them. She paid attention to students’ behaviour and watched for the good things that explicitly guided her into motivating students’ learning (Romano, 2004). Constantly, her teacher self was attentive and sensitive to students’ needs and she paid attention to students’ in-class and out-of-class experiences, which guided her into how to help her students succeed and construct a pedagogy that was most suited for them. The positive feedback she received was from noticing improvements in the lives of her students as they learned and made positive progress. However, Bella did not talk about what might happen if the good she found was different from what the students valued as good. Nor did she seem to consider what would happen if she could not find something good about her students at all.

Bella’s narratives highlighted her awareness of students’ lives outside school and finding something good about each student, which were the relational preconditions necessary to make connections with students and consequently help their learning. When there is a connection between the teacher and the student, the student is more predisposed to want to listen to the teacher and actively participate in learning activities in the classroom; the student sees a teacher who is interested in their life and not only interested in disciplining them. They are therefore more inclined to trust the teacher. In return, the teacher, Bella, appreciated the students more and was more caring and tolerant because she understood the relational power that she shared with
the student. Bella’s behaviour exemplified Willie’s concept of ‘teaching and learning as a complementary relationship’ (2000, p. 255). Willie claimed that ‘all real education occurs in a relationship of exchange’ (2000, p. 256). This was borne out in Bella’s story.

I’ve seen huge improvements in some of my kids and seeing things like that is just amazing and that’s really what teaching is about. It is seeing those kids finally one day clicking and understanding something and getting excited about it. You know, all of a sudden they get switched on and they’re like, ‘I want to learn, I want to know, I want to get better, I want to do this I want to do that’. And that’s exciting to see from a student who didn’t want to do anything, who didn’t want to learn, hated reading, to all of a sudden going, ‘Oh I love reading, I read every day’ or ‘I’m going to work hard’. It’s just amazing.

Students who considered themselves as unsuccessful and only capable of low grades and disapproval were now pushing the limits and boundaries, and making distinct progress in their learning. These students were challenging the limits that had been placed on their learning achievements by themselves and previous teachers (Weis & Fine, 2001). Witnessing such remarkable shifts in students’ progress and attitude towards learning was encouraging and affirming to Bella as a teacher because she felt and knew she was getting through to her students and making the difference in their lives. This helped in constructing a robust image of herself as a teacher and helped her to develop private theories around building successful relationships that encouraged students’ learning.

Bella’s narrative clearly affirmed what she did as a teacher and who she was. The end results justified her reason for teaching and who she was as a teacher. Her identity as a teacher was confirmed through seeing the students’ progress, and the huge improvements in students’ learning clearly validated what she believed in, what she did and how she taught. It was the positive relationships and the trust that she built
with her students that finally won the students over to the disposition of wanting to learn and being excited about learning, and this in turn confirmed her work as a teacher. Bella constructed her identity as a teacher through maintaining relationships in a cyclical dance between beliefs, actions and responses from the students. Bella’s experience demonstrated the many variants of relationships.

What stands out for me in Bella’s story is the nuanced way in which she read her students’ lives and her relationships with them, and how these readings shaped their learning engagement. She represented Raider-Roth’s notion that ‘students read the relational tenor of their classroom’ and that they ‘know when their teachers trust them’ (2005, p. 588). How, and in what ways, students believe that their teachers have their best interest at heart influences their performance and learning engagement with school. In fact, according to Raider-Roth, it ‘intersects with the kind of internal trust that students must construct in order to learn effectively’ (2005, p. 588). What Bella was revealing was that these relationships shaped and affirmed her identity as a teacher.

Continuing with the theme that relationships with students are crucial, Lee’s story also demonstrated the importance of relationships with students for teacher identity construction. She revealed a particular shift of understanding, finding that the relationship that was most crucial to the process of becoming a teacher was with students, rather than with senior management.

### 7.2.4 Relationships for Friendship—Lee’s Story

Lee’s story was slightly different from the other stories because it showed how she experienced a shift from the focus on senior management’s affirmation of her as a
teacher to seeing her relationship with her students as more important. Lee started teaching with the expectation of support and validation of her teacher self from the principal, who wanted her in the school to raise the profile of the school as a special dance school. The principal ‘had all these visions that she [the principal] wanted happening and I think she just expected them to happen even though the school had not done any art exhibitions or productions before’. Lee felt she had a lot to live up to to prove to the senior management that she was worthy of the job.

Over the weeks, her priority shifted as she and the students organised a concert. As Lee mentioned in one of her narratives later in the first term, ‘she [the principal] wants all these big things at the school but basically it’s as if she’s trying to get someone else to do her work for her and she doesn’t want to show any support’. Lee expected that since the principal fought to get her into the school and had this big vision of raising the school’s profile, the principal and other administrative staff would support her. Little did Lee realise that she would be faced with fighting for the principal’s support and commitment to her [the principal’s] vision and struggle for resources. Apparently, the school had never had a trained dance teacher in its history. But, according to Lee, the mission of having a special dance school involves ‘a lot more reworking within the system to be able to get the dance department up and running’.

Lee felt let down because the school had not provided what they said they would; for example, Lee did not have a proper classroom space, so she was dealing with that sense of loss and sense of disappointment. In Lee’s words:

I was told that I was important but the practices are telling me I am not because I do not have a place to teach and I do not have the resources. And everybody is saying my work is important but the way they are actually behaving towards me indicates they don’t realise that that is not what
being a good teacher is about. Being a teacher is about being with these kids, and getting to know them and believing in them.

Instead of saying being a good teacher was about being recognised by the senior management, Lee was saying being a good teacher was about being recognised by the students. In terms of the continuum, Lee had shifted from wanting to prove herself to the management to wanting to prove herself to the students. There was an incredible shift in her perspective of what was needed to confirm her teacher identity, as was demonstrated in the following narrative.

7.2.4.1 Story 21: ‘I Sort of Realised That I Didn’t Need Anybody Else’s Approval, I Didn’t Need the Principal and Admin’s Validation. I’m Here for the Students’

I can’t express it in words. I’m not a crier. I don’t cry in front of people, but there were tears there when my students were on the stage at the concert and they performed beautifully. I just felt like I achieved if they can just tell me that. It’s just a sense of achievement and a sense of pride and that’s when I sort of realised that I didn’t need anybody else’s approval, I didn’t need the principal and admin’s validation. I’m here for the students, and if my students are proud of me, I feel I have achieved what I’m here to do as a teacher because it’s about the students. It is about the effect.

In this narrative, Lee’s assumption about the importance of being valued as a teacher by senior management was challenged. She suddenly realised that it was all about the students. Her moment of incredible insight came when all her preconceived ideas—who confirms her as a teacher, how teacher personality grows, and her capacity to be a teacher—were disrupted and she suddenly realised that what really mattered were the students. It was an interesting shift in which she started to see the world in a different way.

Again, it is Lee’s relationships that were at the core of her teaching. She was focused on the relationship with management to confirm her work as a teacher, but every time
she tried to develop this relationship, she was faced with the issues of having no 
classroom space or the lack of support for her concert. Conversely, the students were 
open to her and they let her into their lives. They embraced her as one of them in a 
sense by sharing their lollies and other acts of generosity. There was an incredibly 
satisfying relationship she had with them, whereas nothing existed with management.

My students told me on Friday night that they see me more as a mentor 
and a friend than as a teacher. They said that to me and gave me a massive 
jar of lollies for a present to say thank you because they do know I like my 
sugar, so they know a bit. They get to know a bit about you and they get to 
know that I can get hyperglycaemic sometimes and I get really shaky and 
have to have sugar, so they brought me a whole jar of lollies so I would 
never run out. When they gave it to me they said, ‘Look, Miss, we 
consider you as our teacher and mentor but my score is we consider you 
one of our best friends.’

Hmmm, everything at university tells you you’re not supposed to be their 
friend and I’ve not tried to be their friend, but I’m not their maths teacher, 
I’m not their science teacher so I get to know them a lot more personally 
than that and you want to do all this stuff for them but the school sort of 
like is trying to hold me back as a teacher. Like I don’t want the kids to get 
out of class and go, ‘Thank God I don’t have to see Miss Lee again!’ I 
want them to leave class and go, ‘That’s the teacher that helped me!’ And 
I think it’s a lot easier for me because I am the dance teacher rather than 
the science teacher, because you’re much more fond of a teacher that lets 
you do stuff that you like, although half the time they reckon they don’t.

Lee’s story is a bit different from the other teachers in that the improved performance 
of her students was showcased publicly in a concert. The students organised a concert 
with the support of their teacher and at the end the students were very proud of their 
achievement. Part of Lee’s narrative again clearly conveyed the sense that there was a 
trusting relationship with the students, which was based on an exchange between the 
students and Lee. Lee genuinely offered them confidence, care and high expectations 
and in turn the students accepted her offer and created success. The students’ 
perception of their relationship with Lee was based on how she related to them.
The kind of relationship described in this narrative beautifully depicts a positive and respectful relationship in which students recognised their teacher’s influence and showed appreciation of how she helped them. Students recognised Lee both as a mentor, and as a friend, which meant that there was a trusting relationship that had developed. The students had given Lee access into their lives and were happy at the difference she had helped them to make. It seemed as if she had helped them to see possibilities in their lives that other teachers had failed to do. Teaching dance seemed to have helped her to get to know the students better.

Lee also contrasted her relationships with students with those the students had with other teachers. She felt her relationships with students were better because her subject allowed her greater access to students’ personal lives. It was easier to build rapport with them because her subject allowed her to coach the students. Perhaps her youthfulness and closeness in age to the students, which she mentioned in her narrative, allowed her to understand the students’ needs and to want to spend more time with them. The fact that she had a younger brother of similar age to her students might also have been a significant factor.

As dance is a performance-oriented subject, where students need to develop routines and learn new skills, Lee’s work involved getting to know her students and knowing what sort of dance genre interested them. She started from where the students were. Her role as a dance teacher involved showing them how to perform routines, modelling routines and constantly coaching them on how to improve their skills and styles. Thus, her relationship with the students was more intimate than that for other teachers because she had to be personal and often talk to the students one-on-one,
showing them how to improve their skills. This eventually developed into a trusting relationship in which the students could rely on her.

Having a younger brother meant Lee knew the games and popular culture/fashion that were in vogue and was able to converse with them on this level. Fashion and movies were part of teaching the art of dance to her students, thus connecting with who they were and what they did outside school. All of this helped the students to relate to her on a different level and they felt they could trust her and gave her access to their lives. They knew she was there for them and they knew she could understand them as well. The students also did what they could do to make her happy. However, Lee was not soft on her students nor did she lower her standards or expectations; rather, she drove them hard to succeed.

Being considered a mentor and best friend did not mean that Lee presented dance as a lazy, non-rigorous subject to the students; in fact, she described how demanding she was with her content, in keeping with her role as a professional dancer and director. She wanted the students to understand the art and theory of dance, but she presented it in a fun way to the students. In fact, when she started teaching the students, most of them just wanted to learn a genre, particularly hip-hop, and did not want to learn the classical genres, so she had to look for ways to connect with the students to help them understand the relevance of other genres to their lives. Being a mentor and best friend was quite important and significant for Lee. Her face lit up when she said it, because it affirmed her identity as a good teacher.

Also, as Lee’s positioning in her narratives showed, her experience of building friendly relationships in which students perceived her to be a best friend was frowned
upon by other teachers in the school. Her recognition of the limitation that was placed on developing a partnership/an exchange relationship with students suggests that not building relationships with students is intrinsically accepted as a norm. Despite all the warnings from other teachers, she took the plunge to get to know her students personally. Taking an active interest in the students meant being supportive and encouraging to them; it meant being there to help them.

Lee faced struggles in maintaining and developing good relationship with her students because there was a norm that limited the relationship with students:

Sometimes the teachers say ‘You don’t have to do that [establish good relationships with students]’. And when I tell them, ‘But I want to’, they say, ‘Yeah, but you shouldn’t have to, you’re going to stretch yourself out or wear yourself out’. And when I tell them, ‘I’m concerned about this issue’, they say, ‘Oh the students will be alright, you shouldn’t get to know your students that personally.’

Here, Lee reveals the level of ‘professional’ relationship that was deemed acceptable by teachers within the school. Her genuine intention of getting to know her students and helping them was concealed because other experienced teachers did not approve of this attitude. This narrative suggests the perceived boundary of teacher-student relationships expected of teachers in Lee’s school. Teachers were meant to be professional, which meant not getting too involved with their students. However, maintaining a distant relationship with her students was not what Lee was comfortable with because she loved relating with her students. Lee’s account was powerful in showing her dealings with individual students to get to know them and their activities. Of course, the issue of building relationships is complicated by the harm it could inflict on both students and teachers if pursued to an extent, but when it is a positive
relationship purely focused on students’ learning, it is important for the quality engagement of students.

7.3 Analysis of Stories

The stories discussed reveal the diverse relational experiences that beginning teachers have with their students in the process of becoming a teacher. Underneath the apparent peculiarity of each teacher’s experiences was the core theme that becoming a teacher and constructing teacher identity involves building a strong relationship with students. This reinforces the relational aspect of teaching. With the kinds of relationships discussed, there are some commonalities in the ways beginning teachers develop their teacher identities. These include: meeting students where they are at, building productive relationships with students and a teacher’s investment of their self as part of the process of becoming a teacher.

They may not have been consciously aware that in building these relationships they were positioning themselves as certain kinds of teachers and creating identities based on their positioning. However, they were aware of the fact that building strong relationships with students was central to their effectiveness as teachers and to the students’ learning engagement. This awareness seemed to be something that developed from their personal experiences of schooling and their personal values and beliefs of what constituted good learning and being a good teacher. In the light of the narratives discussed above, it is important to pull together the threads of the different types of relationships that these teachers pursued in the process of becoming teachers in their first year.
I now move forward to analyse the different kinds of relationships and the different values beginning teachers placed on them. These relationships have been captured with metaphors that describe their identities. I also discuss the reasons why these relationships were important and the underlying values that beginning teachers placed on them. I explore common themes across the four beginning teachers that helped them in constructing their identity positions: meeting students where they are at, a teacher’s investment of their self, presence and building relational trust.

These beginning teachers’ stories and experiences of building relationships are unique and the kinds of self and relationships they have developed represent the kinds of teacher identities they were constructing with their students. An analysis of teachers’ narratives about their relationships with students showed that there were particular types of relationships that teachers were building with students, which were predominant in the process of becoming a teacher. These types of relationships were at the core of how these teachers identified themselves. From the different stories and the range of relationships that have been explored in these narratives, the teachers wanted relationships for nurturing, empowerment, learning and friendship. The kinds of relationships beginning teachers were developing in this research that relate to supporting students are listed in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 shows the diversity of the kinds of relationships that beginning teachers formed with their students, and the metaphors they used in the narratives of their teacher identity construction process with their students. Underlying these key relationships were values that influenced the particular kinds of teachers beginning teachers expressed in these relationships.
Table 6.1: Types of Relationships with Students That (Re)construct Teacher Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of relationships</th>
<th>Nurturing (Jemma)</th>
<th>Empowering (Lok)</th>
<th>Learning (Bella)</th>
<th>Friendship (Lee)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>caring</td>
<td>critical</td>
<td>caring</td>
<td>being there for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>welcoming</td>
<td>transformative</td>
<td>community circles</td>
<td>expecting students to put in more effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>humane</td>
<td>stepping out of myself</td>
<td>trust myself and trust students agency—students have power anything is possible</td>
<td>expecting higher levels of achievement from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>like a mother to all my students</td>
<td>trust myself and trust students agency</td>
<td>if kids trust me, they listen</td>
<td>providing adequate support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>providing meals</td>
<td>anything is possible</td>
<td>making little allowances</td>
<td>mentoring students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>looking after them</td>
<td>negotiate unsaid socio and cultural contexts</td>
<td>students feel emotionally stable in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>finding something good about each student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An identity position that emerged from Jemma’s narratives was the nurturing teacher. Jemma’s early narratives showed her toying with the crowd control metaphor, influenced by the complexity of the demands of the teaching role, but her narratives also shifted into a ‘mother hen’ metaphor that reflected her personal self and values. This finding, that Jemma’s initial teacher identity shifted, is in line with the post-structural and discursive view of identity that is ‘not fixed’ but fluid and changing (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 1996; Miller Marsh, 2002; Morgan, 2004; Reeves 2009; Watson, 2006). Moving from crowd control to being motherly is a significant shift that emphasises the ‘being’ aspect instead of the ‘doing’ aspect of teaching. It demonstrates an incorporation of personal identity into the teacher identity position.

By allowing her personal self to be released into her teaching, Jemma moved from a focus on students’ achievement to being in a relationship with her students. The construct of the ‘mother hen’ was formed around ‘caring’ and ‘nurturing’ values,
which is ‘who she really is outside the school’. She realised that most of her students
needed someone to play the caring, motherly figure, which was missing in their lives.
This motherly nature has been referred to by Alsup (2006) as one of the most common
metaphors and identity positions that female teachers find themselves adopting in
relationships with their students.

By just being herself, Jemma allowed her value of nurturing and caring for others to
be expressed to her students. She connected this back to the main reason why she
started teaching in the first place, which was spending more time with her students
and doting on them. She recognised and placed particular attention on understanding
students’ needs and supporting them in the learning process. This nurturing
relationship with her students was an identity position that allowed her to connect with
her students in a nurturing way and the students in return connected with her,
presumably because they found this emotionally beneficial, especially students that
did not have such relationships at home with their parents.

Lok’s narratives showed a series of moving metaphors, from stepping out of herself to
being present with her students, which was a strong reflection of her personal values
and beliefs about social justice in education. Like Jemma, Lok’s relationships were
reflective of her personal beliefs and identity, although she saw the institutional
structure of her school more clearly than Jemma and was more conscious of the
influence of power relations on her students’ lives.

The predominant teacher identity position in Lok’s narratives was that of a socially
critical educator with a strong social justice goal that was strongly influenced by her
Noongar heritage experience. Her personal identity subconsciously influenced her
worldviews about life and teaching, about how she created her experiences as a teacher, and about her critical awareness of the complexities in society that affect students’ learning, including the influence of marginalisation on the lives of students she was teaching. Her main aim in teaching was to see her students ‘empowered’. She was able to move into this critical role because her context demanded she use these beliefs and values. Perhaps if she was in another teaching context, she might not have been as successful in empowering students and calling for school-wide system integration.

Her personal identity and familiarity with this kind of discourse helped her move into this role; it enabled her to undertake the difficult task of confronting how things are, changing the discursive practices of student marginalisation within the school, and helping her students to see that they were social agents capable of changing the direction of their lives. There was a connection between her practices and values and the kind of identity position she was creating for herself. In standing up for social justice, she was undeniably saying to her students and the school what she really believed in and what she wanted to be known for. This sort of relationship is different from Jemma’s, but the common underlying theme is helping students and having an interest to help them improve. She valued trusting her students, loving them and accepting them for who they were, which was linked with her idea of empowering students.

For Lok, empowering students was the way she made sense of herself as a teacher and understood her success. There are claims that powerful discourse in the school context often overpowers beginning teachers’ values and influences their actions; however,
the post-structural and critical notion of teacher identity allows teachers to assert the kind of identity they want and introduce a sense of agency in their work, which is what happened in Lok’s case (Haniford, 2010; Jenkins, 2008, p. 13).

Bella’s idea of building relations for learning was predominantly expressed in her narratives, which showed how teacher identity could reflect personal identity when she described her teaching as building relationships with students. This identity was claimed and asserted from the start of her teaching career and she continued to improve on this through the year, as she updated in her narratives. She also highlighted the importance of interpersonal and emotional elements in teaching. She started with the premise that finding something good in each student was a precondition for their intellectual engagement, so it was important for her to get to know her students’ lives outside the classroom. Therefore, she consciously created time for students to talk about their concerns and their interests. The idea that teachers’ identity is constructed in their relationship with students was strongly confirmed in her narratives, because it was in this relationship that she understood who she was as a teacher and who she really wanted to be (Reeves, 2009).

Her relationship with students helped her to continuously define herself as the teacher who was unequivocally interested in building relationships. She had to continuously assert this identity, even when she was struggling with students who had literacy problems and were in a sense challenging her attempts to build relationships. Her constant identity position with students since the beginning also opened up a space for her to receive coherent and confirming feedback from her students, validating her conception of her identity as a teacher. Bakhtin (1981) and Stillwagon (2008) made
the point that identity is linked to recognition and validation by others with whom one has relationships.

Underpinning Bella’s strong values for quality relationships with students was her personal experience of schooling, which influenced her choice of school and the way she practised in her classroom. She valued individual connections with students, creating emotional balance between students’ learning and managing their behaviours. She made the choice of being present with her students and looked for things that were hindering her students’ learning and she tried to resolve them. She was emotionally sensitive to the learning aspect of the individual student and did everything to protect this relationship.

Bella’s narratives emphasised the emotional and relational aspects of teaching; this was a significant finding that confirmed emotion as central to identity (re)construction (Boler, 1999; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Zembylas, 2003). Invoking the post-structural notion of identity, Zembylas acknowledged that ‘emotions and teacher identity inform each other and (re)construct interpretations of each other both on a conceptual and on a personal level’ (2003, p. 214). Therefore, placing emotions in the teacher identity (re)construction process, as Bella described in her narrative, blurs the dichotomy between the personal and professional identities. This means that there is a reciprocal link between the two constructs. Bella, Jemma, Lok and Lee openly discussed their emotional involvement in the course of becoming teachers and (re)constructing their teacher identity. From their narratives, emotion is an important ingredient in beginning teachers (re)constructing their teacher identities.
Lee’s narratives showed a significant shift in how she \((re)\)constructed her teacher identity. Underlying her narratives was the idea that she was a friend to her students. From the outset, she developed a good relationship with her students, but also focused on approval from the administrative staff to confirm her teacher identity. This concept may have been informed by her experience in the performing and entertainment world, where performers look to producers and directors or other stakeholder companies for confirmation or validation of who they are and who they want to be. What has been confirmed in Lee’s narratives is that the realisation of her students’ exceptional performance in their school turned her attention back to the students and it became the main focus for her validation as a teacher. Although she did this relational work well with her students, and her students recognised her influence as a teacher in their lives, she did not realise it until her students drew attention to how they had enjoyed having her as a teacher. There was an incredible shift in her story. Because there was no uniform or fixed notion of teacher identity \((re)\)construction, the way Lee experienced her becoming a teacher process was very different from other narratives described here.

Based on the kinds of relationships that the beginning teachers developed with their students, there was a sense of each person’s identity, values and beliefs. Their values were played out in the way they formed relationships and also in their becoming particular kinds of teachers. It was not just about being kind and lovely; beginning teachers were very specific and clear about the kind of relationships they wanted to develop with their students. For example, Lok had socially critical values, which explicitly influenced the empowering relationship she built with her students. These
types of relationships were influenced by beginning teachers’ personal identities and backgrounds.

The emergence of beginning teachers’ personal values in their teacher identity (re)construction exemplified the interrelationship of the personal and the professional (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). From these narratives, there was a dialogical relationship between who the teacher was outside the school and the person the teacher was at school. Perhaps the reason why these teachers were able to be themselves was the fact that there was no dichotomy between where the person starts and where the teacher ends. Both are the same, only in different contexts. By placing relationships with students at the centre of their work, they allowed themselves to connect with their personal beliefs and to be more humane, which reflected their normal selves outside school. This translates to a ‘dialogical discourse’, which Britzman (2003, p. 25) discussed as shaping and being shaped by the activity of teaching, and to Alsup’s ‘borderline discourse’, in which there is ‘evidence of integration or negotiation of personal and professional selves’ (2006, p. xiii).

The findings from this research show that there were no boundaries of ‘where a teacher begins and where the teacher ends’ (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 310). This does not mean that all beginning teachers are able to allow the emergence of their personal beliefs in their work as teachers in the first year, but even if they did, there are struggles and conflicts that beginning teachers in this study experienced and negotiated before they were comfortable enough to allow their personal beliefs about learning and place relationships at the centre of what they do. There is still an ongoing negotiation of the personal and teacher identity that teachers face in their work and
everyday life. Because identity is ‘ongoing storying of selves’, beginning teachers continue to undergo teacher identity (re)construction and the conflict and struggles play an important role (Giddens, 1991). As Alsup explained:

> the integration of personal aspects of the self and professional expectations or demands is more complicated than simply bringing together two binary opposites (i.e. the self and the other); such a synergy involves bringing together, mixing and merging and even welcoming a collision between personal ideologies and perceived professional expectations. For some teachers, such a merging or meeting of subjectivities is relatively simple—theyir personal lives and sense of self are more or less parallel to the conservative expectations of most secondary and elementary schools. However, for others, such a satisfying combination of the self and the professional other is more of a challenge. What happens if you are a student teacher and you don’t look like the teachers in the school where you are working? Or act like them? Or value what they value? How do you develop a teacher identity that is both accepted by the school and palatable to you? How do you get and keep a job without giving up the very essence of who you are? (2006, p. xiv)

Another important finding in this study was that teacher identity grows out of beginning teachers’ personal identities and the particular context they are working in. It appears that in different contexts, different kinds of relationships are appropriate. Teacher identity is constituted as beginning teachers understand who they are in their contexts. They grow out of the circumstances that people are working in, plus who the person is—their personal identities.

For instance, Jemma saw herself as a mother hen because she was a nurturer and most of her students needed caring attention. Jemma in another school might do differently. To be truly successful as a teacher, she would have to understand her new environment. Lok saw herself as an activist/social justice worker because she was in a context where there were a lot of social injustices occurring; if placed in Bella’s school, Lok might think about her work as a teacher differently. Bella saw herself properly aligned with the school she was working in because her school allowed her to
be the caring teacher she wanted to be. She was able to build quality relationships with her students. Lee’s context was again different from other teachers because she was able to consciously recognise that the relational work she had with students helped her make sense of herself as a teacher; perhaps if she were to work in a context in which the school administration supported her, she might not value her students’ feedback as being a friend or she might understand herself as a teacher in a different way. In these four different sets of experiences, there is a strong relationship between the context in which teachers work, their values, and how they are able to create their teacher identities in these settings.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter echoed what beginning teachers in this study believed to be truly important in their process of becoming teachers. Relationships with students were important to these beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction. As these narratives have demonstrated, it was with and through students that teachers actually understood what it meant to be a teacher. An essential element in the (re)construction of teacher identity is social interaction with interested others (Haniford, 2010, p. 988; Britzman, 2003). The ‘interested others’ in this case were students. Cummins drew attention to the importance of interactions with students as a significant way in which teachers define their identities (2001, p. 653). Beginning teachers in this study defined their own identities through their practice and in their relationships with students.

In drawing attention to the relational dimension of teacher identity (re)construction as discussed in this chapter, I assert that the notion of identity as fixed and intrinsically constructed is debunked. Rather, identity is multiple and shifting in social relations
with others. Relationships were at the core of the beginning teachers’ sense of teacher identity. Relationships with students were central because they had more opportunities of ‘being teachers’ in the classrooms with these students than with any other people. It was actually having relationships with students that helped them present particular teacher selves to the students, and it was from students’ responses that they received feedback on the kind of teachers they were.

When they discussed their relationships with teachers and parents, it was mostly positioned as secondary to their relationships with students. Their teacher identity (re)construction was validated (or not validated) externally by these parents and teachers. Their relationships with other teachers were about how they positioned themselves professionally in relation to other colleagues, how organised they were and how often they asked for help from other teachers. However, the complexities involved with developing relationships with teachers, such as politics in staffrooms and gossiping among staff, was one of the few things beginning teachers mentioned they were not going to be engaged with considering they were new. This could possibly account for why they had fewer narratives in relation to their colleagues. The infrequency of meetings with teachers and parents could also be a significant factor.

Drawing on Gidden’s notion of identity as an ‘ongoing “story” about the self’ (1991, p. 54), beginning teachers’ narratives in this chapter exemplified this. For these teachers, their ‘stories about self’ were rooted in the struggle to explore and develop the relational side of their teaching practice, which was establishing productive relationship with their students. Developing productive and quality relationships with students in the classroom seemed to be an important step in (re)constructing
productive teacher identities. As teachers made meaning of their roles in the classroom, such as how they fitted into their classroom and got to know their students, they explored teacher identity with their students. This process of understanding themselves in relation to students allowed for continuous discovery of themselves, which fed into the ‘ongoing storying’ that Giddens (1991) described. This ongoing process suggests the notion of identity (re)construction as a becoming process, which many post-structural researchers have discussed (Britzman, 2003; Gee, 2008; Hall, 1996; Miller Marsh, 2002).

Although teachers took identity positions within relationships, there was no clear conclusion of beginning teachers’ identity because they were still exploring themselves in these relationships with their students, as well as in the school context, with colleagues and parents. Since teachers spent more time with students, they had more opportunities to practise, exercise, learn and develop being a teacher with their students. Jenkins pointed out that, ‘It is not enough to assert an identity … identity must also be validated (or not) by those with whom we have dealings’ (1996, p. 21). Stillwagon also argued that a ‘teacher’s identity remains suspended in its relation to the student in whose desire and achievement the teacher’s identity is realised’ (2008, p. 68). Beginning teachers’ sense of themselves as teachers was further developed as others saw them. The presentation of self, reactions from others and their internal response all affected how individuals represented themselves in the next encounter. As they encountered various experiences, they built stories of themselves as teachers, which helped them in their teacher identity (re)construction.
The beginning teachers’ narratives exemplified how they ‘take up, assert, and resist identity positions that define them’ as mentioned by Reeves (2009, p. 35). Most of the teachers positioned themselves as actively wanting to know more about students’ lives outside classrooms, and positioned themselves as open, friendly and caring in relationship with students, believing that students would recognise this openness and genuineness and want to relate with them. They had a strong desire for establishing productive relationships with their students and positioning themselves in these relationships with their students.

Significantly, beginning teachers’ narratives showed shifts in their positions as they (re)constructed their identities in relationships with students. These shifts corresponded with the idea that identity positions are temporary and are ongoing, as teachers discover and rediscover themselves in their relationships with their students.
The process of identity development is difficult, messy and complex, and it must be exactly this way to be successful.

Janet Alsup (2006, p. 5)
The first year of teaching is one of the most interesting, yet complex phases of beginning teachers’ lives. As Britzman argues, ‘learning to teach - like teaching itself - is always the process of becoming … a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing and who one becomes’ (2003, p. 31). In this thesis, I have examined how beginning teachers (re)constructed their teacher identities as they recognised and negotiated their new school context with its norms and discursive practices, and navigated the complex interaction between their beliefs, values and contradictory discourses in their schools.

By studying beginning teachers’ journeys of their first year, I acquired an in depth knowledge of how beginning teachers learnt to become teachers in their schools. In particular, I developed an understanding of how beginning teachers negotiated, resisted and or conformed to competing discourses in the school and the consequences in terms of their own teacher identity. In essence, I have argued that (re)constructing beginning teachers’ identities in the first year of teaching is a very complex, highly conflicting, contextual and relational process.

I identified three key dimensions that influenced beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction in their first year: the influence of the immediate school context, the influence of beginning teachers’ formative and continuing experiences, and the influence of teachers’ relationships with students within their classrooms. These dimensions enabled a detailed and more nuanced understanding of each teacher’s identity (re)construction. These dimensions will be discussed in the next section.

Underpinning the research design for this study was the belief that knowledge can be garnered by listening to the voices of beginning teachers. Therefore, personal stories
of five beginning teachers in public schools in WA were used to explore how participants identified with their roles as teachers, (re)constructed professional identities in their different contexts and formed the different selves needed to perform their roles as teachers. These voiced stories provided local knowledge based on the frontline experience of beginning teachers. Each beginning teacher narrated their experience in purposeful conversations during the first year as each became socialised into their context, learnt about themselves in practice, and learnt how to be, act and understand themselves as teachers (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). These teachers’ narratives formed the basis of the data analysis and discussion in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

8.1 Main Findings

In this thesis, I have identified three main forces that influence teacher identity (re)construction: the school culture and professional expectations, the past and continuing experience of teaching, and relationships with students. In particular, relationships with students significantly contributed to teacher identity (re)construction. However, underlying these three forces was a sense of the beginning teachers’ agency, which significantly influenced how beginning teachers (re)constituted their teacher identities.

The findings from this research supported Giddens’ (1991) argument that identity is not fixed, but part of an ongoing process. In order to understand the ongoing and complex nature of identity (re)construction, I reflected on some of the stories to present ‘layers’ of narratives that showed the growth in beginning teachers’ understanding of themselves and the kinds of teachers they were becoming. This
understanding of teacher identity was not something that was fixed, but evolved and grew based on their daily experiences.

The findings in this study have illustrated that beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction involves the intersection of both the personal and professional identities and that for these teachers, much of their teacher identity (re)construction process often happened at both conscious and unconscious levels. There was certainly a personal element in the way beginning teachers went about their identity (re)construction. Unknowingly, their personal backgrounds, biographies, values and belief systems seeped into what they valued pedagogically and how they communicated these values. The personal element and the professional discourse strongly influenced the kind of teacher identity they (re)constructed.

Sometimes, teachers’ practices were directly related to their own experiences (negative or positive), such as the kind of teacher they wanted to be or they did not want to be. At other times, the connection between the personal and professional selves was less conscious. For instance, Lok did not consciously talk about her Noongar heritage; it was not at the forefront of her thinking when she talked about social justice. However, it was clearly at a subconscious level shaping her perspective and worldview, even though she was not openly saying, ‘I am a Noongar woman’, it was implicit in her narratives.

Alsup (2006) described the integration of the personal aspects of self and professional expectations as a complicated process. In this research, beginning teachers expressed a strong sense of who they wanted to be, what their values were, and what was their purpose; and they were able to connect with and practise immediately their
aspirations, values and intentions, although not steadfastly. A deep sense of who they were and what they stand for, a result of their critical reflexivity and awareness of their purpose as teachers, was very important in shaping how beginning teachers in this study became teachers.

In the next section, I outline the key ideas that emerged from this research. Three dimensions have been employed to organise this part of the chapter.

8.1.1 Beginning Teachers’ Identity and School Culture

The experiences that were the building blocks for identity (re)construction of the beginning teachers in this study provided insights into what these teachers had gone through and how they thought about themselves as teachers. Several studies have concluded that the professional landscape of schools has a significant influence on how beginning teachers negotiate their teacher identity (for example, Stanulis et al., 2002). Both the school institutional discourse/school culture and professional expectations influenced beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction.

Beginning teachers’ narratives in this study illustrated lucidly how the school culture in which they engaged in and the professional expectation discourse that differentiated beginning teachers from other teachers played a prominent role as they negotiated their teacher identity. Two examples of how the school culture communicated the culturally accepted professional identity that the school expected of teachers are Lok’s struggle with social justice and Lee’s struggle over deficit views of students’ capabilities. These examples showed how preferred notions of ‘culturally scripted teacher identity’, a compilation of cultural expectations and various definitions of teacher, were challenged by these two beginning teachers (Alsup, 2006, pp. 6, 57).
Thus, beginning teachers negotiated their teacher identities within the fabric of school culture. Lok’s narrative provided insight into one of the ways in which institutional norms shape teacher identities and make evident the inseparable connection between the school and community, which beginning teachers must negotiate. Similarly, Lee rejected the discursive practices of deficit views of students’ academic capabilities in her school and challenged the culturally scripted teacher identity as well as the values underlying this identity shared by both students and teachers. Beginning teachers faced the challenge of either accepting or rejecting certain discourses within their schools. Both Lok’s and Lee’s narratives clearly indicated that beginning teachers do not always conform to the school norms as previously suggested (Miller Marsh, 2002; Reeves, 2009). Lok’s and Lee’s stories demonstrated the powerful influence of contexts on the (re)construction of beginning teachers’ identities, as well as their agency. Both teachers developed their identities discursively in interaction with the context.

Within the school environment, professional expectations exerted a strong influence on beginning teachers’ identity. Three key aspects of managing professional expectations in the (re)construction of beginning teachers’ identity arose from this study, namely: managing students’ expectations, addressing teacher expectations and managing parent expectations. As beginning teachers discovered the expectations of others, their core identities were revealed within the space of interacting with students, teachers and parents (Flores & Day, 2006). The beginning teachers navigated the implicit expectations required of their work by students in their school contexts. Jemma’s narrative about students initially demanding detailed instructions and
specific guidance in their learning illustrated that the implicit expectations of students led to the negotiation of a particular identity position by the beginning teacher.

Beginning teachers also received messages from their colleagues about expectations depending on their contexts and the rapport they had with other teachers. The awareness of other teachers’ perceptions makes beginning teachers conscious of their positions and roles. Jemma started her first year of teaching with the knowledge that some of the teachers expected more from her because she had performed so well as a practicum teacher in the same school the previous year. Jemma preoccupied herself with being ‘professional’ in her dealings with her colleagues and satisfying their high expectations of her.

On Lee’s first day at school, both teachers and students mistook her for a student because they were not expecting a teacher to look so young. The process of becoming a teacher is influenced by whether or not there is a strong match between the beginning teacher’s ‘look’ and the stereotype favoured in the school. Part of the process of developing a teacher identity is understanding the discourse of ‘what a teacher is and does, what a teacher looks like, and whether the teacher’s body is a normal teacher’s body’ (Britzman, 2006, p. xi).

Although managing parental involvement has always been a common challenge for beginning teachers, it is not emphasised in this study. Bella discussed this in terms of her identity (re)construction. Bella’s youthful look was unacceptable to some parents who confronted her with their views that as a young person she was incapable of looking after their children.
The desire for personal and professional recognition profoundly influenced the process of identity (re)construction for the beginning teachers. For Bella and Lee, professional recognition and acceptance played a significant role in the process of becoming a teacher. There were discursive stereotypes that beginning teachers’ identified with and embodied, especially in regard to what a teacher should look like and how a teacher should dress (Alsup, 2006).

Teacher identity is, therefore, an accumulation of the different experiences that give the teacher an understanding of themselves and the opportunity to improve their lives and selves as teachers. This view of identity (re)construction occurring as it did within the prevailing context highlighted the evolving, ongoing and dynamic processes involved during the career stages and phases of becoming a teacher (Stronach et al., 2002). Beginning teachers like Lok, who were confident about their teacher selves and what they wanted to become, were most likely to rethink the cultural assumptions and pre-formed cultural identities, interrogating and interrupting assumptions and beliefs about their practice as teachers within the existing school culture.

**8.1.2 Beginning Teachers’ Prior Schooling and Present Teaching Experience**

Foundational schooling experience shaped the beliefs that beginning teachers had about teaching and influenced their ideas about successful and unsuccessful teachers (Britzman, 2003). There was a dialogical relationship between prior schooling experience and teacher identity (re)construction.

Beginning teachers’ identity in this study was strongly influenced by the relationship between past schooling experiences and the continuing experience of teaching (Britzman, 1986; Brookfield, 2001; Knowles, 1992). Past schooling experiences
influenced teacher’s pedagogical practices and beliefs by shaping their values, and perspectives of teaching and ultimately their teacher identities. Beginning teachers in this study identified the significant influence of their former teachers, teacher role models and school environment on how they thought about themselves as teachers. Both negative and positive experiences influenced the teachers they were now and the teachers they wanted to be with their students. Beginning teachers selected certain experiences that influenced how they saw themselves as teachers and their teacher identity (re)construction. In this study, the beginning teachers’ past experiences informed the decision on whether they chose to re-enact past experiences or (re)construct different experiences within the current environment, so there was a connection between their past and present experiences of learning and teaching.

For instance, Bella’s lived experience became lived practice. One of Bella’s teachers had a tremendous influence on her achievement and teacher identity. Bella’s past experience of learning helped her to develop a more nurturing relationship with her students, thereby confirming that teachers teach the ways they were taught. Lee, conversely, used her lived experience to renegotiate alternative discursive practices in her school. When she was in high school, her principal was not in support of dance. Based on her previous experience, she attempted to negotiate a way in which dance was established as a valued subject in the school by using her talent in organising concerts as the main vehicle for persuasion.

Previous lived experience was also used to challenge negative stereotypes of students. According to Brookfield, school learning experiences ‘frame our approach … and they frequently exert an influence that lasts a lifetime’ (1995, p. 50). Cliff’s prior
experience of schooling shaped his decision to teach in a school similar to his own and this helped him to better understand his students.

Observing the teachers around her as she grew up helped Lok form an idea of what a good teacher should be early in life. When she started teaching, the experiential knowledge of teachers’ lives helped her to rework the idea of the teacher in her head. This helped her to work out her ambition as a teacher and to position herself differently from the teachers she had observed. She was comfortable and familiar with teacher life. She was well placed to negotiate her teacher identity based on her interactions with different teachers in her own life. The interactions people have with their teachers in early schooling leave definite impressions of ‘the kind of teacher’ (what/how a teacher should/should not be, look, talk and do) that beginning teachers like Lok want to become. These narratives emphasised the fact that teacher identity (re)construction involves the recognition of past influences. According to Britzman, past schooling experiences ‘if unexamined, propel the cultural reproduction of authoritarian teaching practices’ (1986, p. 443).

The complex nature of teachers’ work also influenced how teacher identity was constituted. In response to newly introduced education policies, teachers have additional roles and their identity is thus constantly being reshaped. The beginning teachers constantly had to decide whether to put more of their effort into traditional teaching or non-teaching duties. A different understanding of the teacher’s role was evident in these beginning teachers’ narratives, based on the complex discourse of teaching available in their schools. The nature of the needs presented by students redefined the teacher’s role. Lee’s daily work involved juggling different roles
depending on students’ demands. Learning to teach involved recognising the social and political context in which teachers worked and the curriculum that was enacted. As beginning teachers negotiated between their prior schooling experience, current experiences of teaching and the complexity in the roles of teaching, their teacher identity was enacted. This clearly established that teacher identity (re)construction is a complicated process.

8.1.3 Teacher Identity Shaped in Beginning Teachers’ Relationships with Students—A Way Forward

As emphasised several times in this thesis, the nature of beginning teachers’ relationships with their students was a significant factor in the process of them becoming teachers. Based on the findings in this study, building relationships with students was at the core of the beginning teachers’ practices and their identity (re)construction. The beginning teachers demonstrated that it was through relationships with students that teachers actually understood what it meant to be a teacher. It was through these relationships that both the teachers and students exercised their capacities to grow their knowledge as well as build trust (Cummins, 2001; Stillwagon, 2008). The beginning teachers described particular kinds of relationships they wanted with their students: nurturing, empowering, caring and friendly kinds of relationships, which informed the kinds of positions they held and the identities they created. The relationships beginning teachers developed with their students promoted the enactment of each teacher’s identity, values and beliefs.

The idea that teacher identity is (re)constructed in relationships with students is strongly confirmed in Lok’s narrative because it was in these relationships that she understood who she was as a teacher and who she really wanted to be (Reeves, 2009).
Bella’s strong values for quality relationships with students reflected her personal experience of schooling, which influenced her choice of school and the way she practised in her classroom. Consequently, her students’ exceptional performance in the school turned her attention back to the students, which thereafter became the main focus of her work as a teacher. Being with students provided Bella an opportunity to understand students’ learning needs, to respond to their needs and express an identity position.

With the beginning teachers in this study, the time spent with students was the time that the teachers could sincerely be themselves as teachers. Relationships with students allowed for continuous discovery of themselves as teachers, which fed into an ‘ongoing storying’ of their selves. As noted in this study, the beginning teachers’ individual perspectives changed as they interacted with their students in and out of classrooms with other teachers and with parents. Although these teachers took identity positions within relationships, there was no finality to their identity: these beginning teachers were still exploring themselves in these relationships in relation to their students, as well as to the school context, colleagues and parents.

By placing relationships at the centre of their work, beginning teachers created a relational space to get to know who they were and what was necessary for their students’ learning. The relational nature of teacher identity (re)construction means that identity cannot be viewed as solely internal or (re)constructed by an individual; rather it is (re)constructed in ongoing relation to others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Reeves, 2009). This challenges and extends the traditional notion of identity as fixed.
The findings also highlight the idea that teacher identity is mostly (re)constructed in relation to students.

The relational (re)construction of teacher identity was particularly important for my analysis of teachers’ narratives because it showed that the different discourses teachers encounter in their schools are interrelated. It is within these relationships that beginning teachers reconstructed their identities by knowing what they were prepared to accept, negotiate and/or confront. For instance, the narratives in Chapter Five emphasised that the (re)construction of teacher identities was as a result of the relationship each beginning teacher had with their school context. As beginning teachers were exposed and adjusted to school contexts, their teacher identities were shaped.

Interaction with students was where the relationships began to take shape and it was where ‘who I am as a teacher’ began to take shape as well. Their teacher lives were engaged with other social beings—students and teachers who had been socialised and acculturated into the context. The context also interacted with them before their identities could be (re)constructed. According to Biesta, ‘as soon as newcomers begin to take part, those who made up the practice up to that point will also need to respond, and hence to adjust themselves and their outlook to the newcomers’ (2004, p. 16).

Beginning teachers’ participation within the school helped them to understand and attribute meanings of social actions and inactions and search for ways of adjusting or maintaining their own social positions. Beginning teachers understood themselves as they related with others and made minor or major adjustments in relation to the students, to the context, professional expectations and discursive practices within the
school. Some of the teachers had to resist adoption of discursive practices that did not align with their personal beliefs and, in doing so, they (re)constructed a teacher identity that was more active and transformative because they were not just engaging with the context to fit into the school.

For example, Lok’s relationship with the school context enabled her to understand the needs of her students and the discursive structures within the school, which sharpened her role as a transformative agent within the context. When the (re)construction of teacher identity was viewed in relation to other factors, the individualised conceptualisation of becoming a teacher was disrupted and the social/relational notion of teacher identity (re)construction was resituated at the centre. The relational notion of teacher identity (re)construction recognised that becoming a teacher was actually a struggle against established discourse and discursive practices in school. Therefore, teacher identity was seen in relation to and co-constructed in seamless interaction with the complex contexts surrounding teachers’ work. For beginning teachers, it was even more important because they were just beginning their practice, so their teacher identities were (re)constructed in relation to their environment and people within that environment (Pearce & Morrison, 2011).

Understanding the significance of the relationality of education helps us to understand that teachers’ work and identity exist in relation to the different features and contexts that make education possible. Relational identity explains the in between space or interaction between the teacher and other significant factors within the school. For beginning teachers to understand the process of becoming a teacher, they needed to understand that their identities were formed in relation to the various influences and
factors they came across. Teacher identity is just not an individualistic process; it is birthed in relation to significant others.

In summary, it was found in this study that teacher identity (re)construction was both relational and discursive. The negotiating process was relational in the sense that there was an interaction with the school culture, students, prior experience and professional expectations. Hence, beginning teachers’ identity was discursively constructed, co-constructed and birthed in relation to the different discourses and different educational dimensions that teachers encountered.

Understanding teacher identity as relational and using it as an educated way to (re)construct teacher identity, aware of negotiating discursive practices, may be necessary in this managerialist era.

8.2 Implications and Recommendations

Teacher identity is an important aspect of beginning teachers’ lives. It shapes their pedagogies of teaching, their decisions about whether they stay or leave the teaching profession, their commitment to teaching, relationships with students, and how they perform their roles as teachers (Hammerness et al., 2005). Perhaps even of greater importance, according to Cummins, is that teacher identity (re)construction sketches an ‘image of our identities as educators, an image of the identity options we highlight for our students, and an image of the society we hope our students will help form’ (2001, p. 654). The findings in this study confirmed the importance of relationships with students, parents and colleagues in beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction. The implications of the findings of this study are centred on six major issues, which are discussed below.
First, the relational dimension of beginning teachers’ work appears to be threatened by neo-liberal reforms around notions of performativity, testing, managerialism and accountability, as discussed in Chapter Two. In this context, teacher identities are being reshaped in ways that diminish the more authentic dimension of teaching (Reid, 1999). Scripted lessons, teaching to planned tests and teaching to meet the national curriculum affect the (re)construction of teacher identities because in the process of doing these things, teachers commit most of their time to delivering test results rather than nurturing relationships. Amid the rhetoric of performativity and accountability that has entrapped the work of teachers at the macro- and micro-institutional levels, beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction may need to be refashioned around issues of relationships rather than managerial prerogatives. In this highly politicised context of teachers’ work, there is the importance of emphasising the continuing need for further study of how teacher identities are being (re)constructed.

Second, the findings of this study also affect teacher attrition and retention. The link between teacher attrition, retention and (re)constructing teacher identity needs to be established. This research focused on understanding how beginning teachers (re)constructed their identities and the factors that contributed to this (re)construction. The only evidence from this study is that it appeared the beginning teachers continued teaching after their first year of teaching because they were able to (re)construct a somewhat satisfying teacher identity that worked for them. As teacher identity is an ongoing process, they were still in the process of (re)constructing their identities. They engaged in the negotiating process and they were still teaching.
Perhaps the attrition rate and retention rate of teachers could be reduced if beginning teachers were able to understand the process of becoming and being a teacher as one full of struggles, which involves negotiating discursive practices and integrating their personal and professional subjectivities. Identifying the fact that the personal is very important to teacher identity (re)construction allows beginning teachers to comfortably choose how they want to practise in schools. It also brings them back to the reasons why they chose teaching in the first place. Bringing the personal to the professional is an informed, critical and political choice that beginning teachers have to be trained to do during their teacher education programs.

Third, the significance of understanding the (re)construction of teacher identity helps to redirect the argument on beginning teachers’ attrition to issues of ‘Who am I as a teacher?’, ‘What are the things that contribute to how I am as a teacher?’ and ‘How can discursive practices be interrupted or negotiated in the process of becoming who I want to be as a teacher?’ When this focus is redirected in these ways, it is possible to start engaging in the discourse that shapes beginning teachers’ identity. With all the rhetoric around beginning teachers’ attrition and the performance culture, more research needs to be conducted on whether beginning teachers are leaving because they were unable to successfully (re)construct satisfying teacher identities. The influence of the performativity discourse on how beginning teachers see themselves as teachers and do their work as teachers also requires proper evaluation. There is a link between teacher identity and teacher attrition that can be strengthened to better understand how to help teachers stay in schools (Hong, 2010).
Fourth, the profound importance of relationships on how beginning teachers (re)construct their identities needs to be further researched with in depth case studies. By bringing relationships to the heart of beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction, the notion of teacher identity as a solitary effort is challenged and reinforces the idea that relationships with students do actually help beginning teachers develop a meaningful sense of their work. It creates a focus on doing meaningful work that counts and re-ignites teachers’ passion for teaching. In doing so, the idea of accountability and performative discourse that is creating an individualised culture for teachers (a culture that is pushing relationships out of teaching and emphasising data-driven procedures that obscure what teaching is about) for teachers is challenged. By providing teachers with the tools to conceptualise teacher identity as relational, we offer them other ways of (re)constituting teacher identities. We offer a different process of experiencing the teachers they are becoming in a proactive way. This helps beginning teachers to recognise the power of the choices they make and how these choices influence the teacher identities they construct and the identities of the students they work with.

Fifth, a good understanding of the schooling structures and professional expectations influencing beginning teachers’ work is essential to the understanding of beginning teachers’ experiences and the interventions necessary to create meaningful experiences for new entrants into teaching. Beginning teachers need to understand the political, social and cultural structures in which they move to do their work as teachers. A more critical way of knowing also helps beginning teachers to be prepared to be agents in redesigning their own lives as teachers. Beginning teachers need to be in the active gear of constructing their lives and identities themselves and to be
responsive to the demands and professional expectations placed on them. Due to their lack of practical experience, many beginning teachers’ choices may be made for them at university rather than by themselves when they are in positions to exercise their power in deciding what it is they really want.

To encourage teachers to stay in schools, school authorities need to consider giving beginning teachers autonomy in making decisions that affect their lives and identities. Some of these teachers might not think of themselves as teachers; there might be unresolved tensions for them as teachers because of their limiting contexts and there might be other schooling structures that impinge on their perception of themselves as teachers. Based on further research, the education systems and other employers should pay attention to these and other issues affecting new teachers.

Finally, beginning teachers need to consciously think about how their teacher identities are \((re)\)constructed, actively engage in the process, and actively consider the discourse influencing how they think about themselves as teachers. I contend that this thesis helps readers to understand teacher identity \((re)\)construction as an important aspect of beginning teachers’ lives—something that happens within relational contexts. In so doing, this thesis contributes to the development of a more practical platform from which to improve beginning teachers’ experience of their first year of teaching. In essence, understanding the process of becoming teachers helps us understand the struggles beginning teachers face in \((re)\)constructing their identities. Understanding these struggles, in turn, helps us to unveil the complex issues that affect teachers, and more importantly, helps us to continue the discussion about the challenges the beginning teacher faces in the process of becoming a teacher.
In response to these findings the following recommendations are made under the following sub-headings:

1. *Teacher Education*

- All teacher educators need to learn about the process of teacher identity (re)construction so they can help beginning teachers build a satisfying teacher identity as they move into their teaching roles.

- Teacher educators need to be aware of pre-service teachers’ identity images and help pre-service teachers examine the narratives they tell themselves about teaching right from year one. By re-surfacing the stereotypes and cultural scripts of teachers that influence beginning teachers’ practice, narratives and cultural scripts can be examined and interrupted. This is not a means of proliferating or reproducing teacher stereotypes, but a way of understanding the stereotypes graduate teachers have internalised and making them aware of the dominant values that are being represented in such stereotypes.

- Teacher educators have the opportunity to choose the ideologies and discourses they use in the educational programs they teach as they work with pre-service teachers. It is important that teacher educators reflect on these discourses and provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to openly discuss and articulate the ideologies within these discourses and their influence on the (re)construction of their future teacher identities.

- Teacher education programs need to create opportunities for the exploration of new and developing teacher identities. Teacher education programs need to be reshaped to include a unit that focuses on teacher identity reconstruction as a component in preparing teachers. By incorporating this unit into the teacher
education curriculum, the process of teacher identity (re)construction is made conscious and recognised as a rite of passage of beginning teachers. This will help beginning teachers to:

- make decisions about reproducing or not reproducing discourse that negatively affects identity (re)construction.
- examine their past schooling (primary and secondary) experiences. The history and biographies of beginning teachers need to be re-examined and interrupted to identify the teacher identities (teacher models and images) that were available to the pre-service teachers while growing up, as these shape beginning teachers’ images of successful and unsuccessful teachers.
- develop skills and tools to challenge cultural scripts and ideologies that promote negative images of who a teacher is.
- understand how educational discourse continues to socially, culturally, historically and politically influence teachers’ lives and work, so they can be actively engaged in the changing contexts of schools and teaching.
- develop a balanced sense of who they are, so they have the ability to stand back, reflect and pay attention to what is going on around them, and understand what the core/crux of their work really is. This sense of who they are and the purpose of their teaching depends on their understanding of why they want to be teachers, their values and beliefs.
2. School Culture

- School leaders and beginning teachers’ mentors should organise communities of learning, or communities of practice, in which beginning teachers come together to discuss their teacher identity development and (re)construction. For example, staff with less than five years’ experience of teaching can be involved and explain and introduce the new culture and norms to these new beginning teachers. This learning community structure could enrich the understanding of how beginning teachers constitute their identities in schools, as well as provide peer support as they socialise in their new school contexts.

- This community of practice could also provide beginning teachers with opportunities to examine their own personal biographies in order to scrutinise how discourses of race, culture, class/status, gender, religion and sexuality shape their lived experiences and worldviews. These opportunities provide teachers with a forum to ‘examine consciously how particular ideologies have worked in their own lives to define their past, present and future identities’ (Miller Marsh, 2002, p. 346).

3. Educational Policy Makers

- With the high beginning teachers’ attrition rate, national educational policy makers ought to consider the effects of new policies on beginning teachers before enacting them. There needs to be a national study to voice beginning teachers’ experiences in their first year and more accurate statistics of beginning teachers’ attrition rate in their first year and first five years. Accurate statistics will help every stakeholder (teacher educators, school leaders, educational departments) to
be more prepared in helping beginning teachers have a better first year experience and will invariably help students as well, since high attrition rate also contributes to students’ performance.

- At the state level, the coordinators of beginning teachers’ appointments into public schools can create beginning teachers’ community of practice programs. These could cluster beginning teachers according to their geographical locations or subject areas. They could have easy online forum access or social media platforms substantiated with face-to-face meetings where they could discuss their experiences and challenges. A way to do this is to introduce beginning teachers to the idea of the learning community at the state-level orientation programs before they commence teaching. For instance, in WA, there is an orientation program that is conducted for new beginning teachers every year; this orientation can also be used as a way of creating communities of practice among these teachers.

4. Research

- There is a need for in depth studies on the effect of beginning teachers’ identity on the attrition or retention rate. In addition, more research studies are needed to find out how, by bringing the personal together with the professional, beginning teachers can successfully (re)constitute teacher identities that allow them to stay in teaching rather than leave teaching early in their career.

- Based on these research findings, we need to study the dimensions that influence the (re)construction of teacher identities with students. More studies are needed to understand the nature of the interaction with students as a significant influence on beginning teachers’ identity (re)construction, and also on the influence of teachers
and parents—using a large cohort of beginning teachers over two to five years of study.

Finally, I acknowledge that the beginning teachers’ openness to sharing their individual experiences in this study has helped to unveil the place of relationships with students in teacher identity (re)construction. By sharing their experiences in establishing relationships with students, beginning teachers provided us with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the link between teacher identity and these relationships. The beginning teachers have thus extended our knowledge of teacher identity (re)construction and have made a significant contribution to the growing knowledge around the identity construction of beginning teachers in their first year. The way forward for teacher identity construction is clearer because beginning teachers in this study have invested themselves in being the best teachers they can be, creating meaningful experiences both for themselves and their students.
Appendix A: Beginning Teachers Invitation Letter and Consent Form

Information Letter and Consent forms for Beginning Teachers

26 October 2005
School of Education
Division of Arts

Dear Beginning Teacher

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research study that I am presently conducting at Murdoch University in Perth. I am a PhD student investigating Beginning Teachers’ Identity Development in their first year of teaching in Western Australia under the Supervision of Prof. Barry Down and Dr. Jane Pearce. The purpose of this study is to find out the current situation and the conditions that support, promote and sustain effective professional learning and identity development of beginning teachers.

You can help in this study by consenting to participate in informal interviews. It is expected that participation will mean participating in four sets of face-to-face individual interviews occurring at different intervals spread over the duration of 1 year. It is anticipated that each interview would take no more than one and a half hours. Contained in the interviews are questions related to beginning teachers’ experience in their first year of teaching. Depending on the interviews, it might be possible to develop networks with other people engaging in this research. I envisage this study to be valuable to you as you discover yourself as a teacher and share your experiences of becoming; it will also form part of a growing knowledge of beginning teachers’ identity development in Western Australia.

While it is hoped that all participants will be willing to participate in all the four interviews and the associated research, participants can decide to withdraw their consent at any time. All information given during the interviews is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. Feedback on the research findings will be provided to you in form of executive summary upon request.
Appendix A

Transcripts of tape recordings will be provided to participants for checking. In no way will any of the participants be disadvantaged through their participation in this study.

I wish to thank you in anticipation of your consideration of this invitation. If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Olabisi Kuteyi on 9360 2171 or email O.Kuteyi@murdoch.edu.au or my supervisors, Prof. Barry Down on 9360 7020 or Dr Jane Pearce, on 9360 7021.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours Sincerely

Olabisi Kuteyi
PhD Candidate

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I have read the information above in the letter dated 26 October 2005. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.
I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.
I agree for these interviews to be taped / videotaped.
I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information, which might identify me, is not used.

Participant/Authorized Representative:

Date:

Investigator: Prof. Barry Down

Date:

Secondary Investigator's Name: Olabisi Kuteyi
Appendix B: Invitation Letter and Consent Form for Professional Learning Institute

Information Letter and Consent Form for Professional Learning Institute

26 October 2005
School of Education
Division of Arts

Dear Sir or Madam

Project Title: Beginning Teachers’ Identity Development: An Examination of Current realities and the Way Forward.

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research study that I am presently conducting at Murdoch University in Perth. I am a PhD student investigating Beginning Teachers’ Identity Development in their first year of teaching in Western Australia under the Supervision of Prof. Barry Down and Dr. Jane Pearce. The purpose of this study is to find out the current situation and the conditions that support, promote and sustain effective professional learning and identity development of beginning teachers.

You can help in this study by consenting to participate in informal, recorded interviews and allowing the researcher to attend and observe the professional development programs. It is anticipated that the time to complete the interview will be no more than 1 hour approximately. Contained in the interviews are questions related to the support programs, workshops and seminars organized for beginning teachers’ in their first year of teaching. Participants can decide to withdraw their consent at any time. All information given during the interview is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. Feedback on the study will be provided to participants who have not requested anonymity. Transcripts of tape recordings will be provided to participants. In no way will any of the participants be disadvantaged through their participation in this study.

Telephone: (08) 9553 7021
Fax: (08) 9553 7091
Email: B.down@murdoch.edu.au
jpearce@murdoch.edu.au

Prof. Barry Down
Chair of Education (Rockingham)

Dr Jane Pearce
Senior Lecturer in Education

School of Education
Murdoch University
Dixon Road
Rockingham
Western Australia 6168
Appendix B

I wish to thank you in anticipation of your consideration of this invitation. If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Olabisi Kuteyi on 9360 2171 or email O.Kuteyi@murdoch.edu.au or my supervisors, Prof. Barry Down on 9360 7020 or Dr Jane Pearce, on 9360 7021.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours Sincerely
Olabisi Kuteyi
PhD Candidate

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I have read the information above in the letter dated 26 October 2005.
Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.
I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.
I agree for these interviews to be taped / videotaped.
I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative:

Date:

Investigator: Prof. Barry Down

Date:

Secondary Investigator's Name: Olabisi Kuteyi
Appendix C: Invitation Letter and Consent Form for professional Development Course Coordinators

School of Education
Murdoch University
Dixon Road
Rockingham
Western Australia 6168

Prof. Barry Down
Chair of Education (Rockingham)

Dr Jane Pearce
Senior Lecturer in Education

Information Letter and Consent Form for Professional Development Coordinators

26 October 2005

Dear Coordinator,

Project Title: Beginning Teachers’ Identity Development: An Examination of Current Realities and the Way Forward.

This letter is to invite you to participate in a research study that I am presently conducting at Murdoch University in Perth. I am a PhD student investigating Beginning Teachers’ Identity Development in their first year of teaching in Western Australia under the Supervision of Prof. Barry Down and Dr. Jane Pearce. The purpose of this study is to find out the current situation and the conditions that support, promote and sustain effective professional learning and identity development of beginning teachers.

You can help in this study by consenting to participate in informal, recorded interviews and allowing the researcher to attend and observe the professional development programs. It is anticipated that the time to complete the interview will be no more than 1 hour approximately. Contained in the interviews are questions related to the support programs, workshops and seminars organized for beginning teachers’ in their first year of teaching. Participants can decide to withdraw their consent at any time. All information given during the interview is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. However, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed considering the limited number of professional development providers in Perth. Feedback on the research findings will be provided to all participants in form of executive summary. Transcripts of tape recordings will be provided to participants for checking. In no way will any of the participants be disadvantaged through their participation in this study.
I wish to thank you in anticipation of your consideration of this invitation. If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details below. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Olabisi Kuteyi on 9360 2171 or email O.Kuteyi@murdoch.edu.au or my supervisors, Prof. Barry Down on 9360 7020 or Dr Jane Pearce, on 9360 7021.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours Sincerely
Olabisi Kuteyi
PhD Candidate

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I have read the information above in the letter dated 26 October 2005.
Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time.
I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.
I agree for these interviews to be taped / videotaped.
I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify, me is not used.

Participant/Authorized Representative:
Date:
Primary Investigator: Prof. Barry Down
Date:
Secondary Investigator's Name: Olabisi Kuteyi
Appendix D: Research Flyer

Are you commencing your first year teaching next year?

Project Title: Beginning Teachers’ Identity Development: An Examination of Current Realities and the Way Forward.

International research indicates that up to one half of teachers leave the profession in their first five years and over a third of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years. The reasons for such high attrition rates are found to be attributed to:

- Lack of support from administration
- An inundation with extracurricular activities
- Teaching outside their fields of expertise
- Being given the most difficult classes and students to teach, and
- Isolation from colleagues.

Here is a wonderful opportunity to engage in a research that would affect your practice and contribute meaningfully to the professional learning and development programs of beginning teachers in Western Australia.

Your experience as a first year teacher will form part of a growing knowledge on professional development and contribute ways of improving beginning teachers’ practice. The research will be based on:

- One-on-one interviews spread over the year
- Confidential
- And will take place in a suitable location for you

As part of the process, the value for you will be the opportunities of:

- Sharing your experiences with someone who understands
- Having an empathetic listener listening to you
- Making your voice/feelings heard.

Let your experience of professional growth and learning in the critical first year of teaching be

Please do not hesitate to contact me by email

O.Kuteyi@murdoch.edu.au
References


References


References


References


References


References


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