

THINKING WHO WE ARE BECOMING: A COLLAGE OF POSSIBILITY FOR TEACHERS

by

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the degree of Master of Arts

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## Abstract

As society becomes increasingly influenced by neoliberal ideology, and knowledge and education become slaves to the economy, the concept of the teacher is becoming less rooted in relationships and more in instrumentality. I find this increasing instrumentalization of my profession dehumanizing, where I am left “feeling like a chess piece or a cog or even an accomplice of some kind” (Greene, 1995, p. 11). If we are not to be accomplices in the damaging structural change occurring in our world and profession, I contend that teachers must think ourselves differently—must think the world differently.

In this thesis I ask: How might teachers respond to such socio-political forces in ways that recover the relational and open up possibilities for themselves, their students, and the world? I then present one possibility in the form of this thesis as a collage or assemblage of ideas.

The deliberate poetics of this piece of creative scholarship is both an exposition *and* an example of thinking the world differently. By juxtaposing autobiographical, theoretical, and poetic writing in textual collage, I demonstrate how thoughtful articulation and action in myriad forms can succeed to effect change in as yet unimaginable ways.

The *Prologue* and *Epilogue* are pieces of life writing “promoting emancipatory projects of learning and teaching” (Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan, 2010, p. 2). Together with poetic interludes created from the text of the *Prologue*, life writing provides the frame of the thesis. I also include historical and contemporary narratives about the education and work of teachers. I conclude the thesis with an exploration of what might be possible for teachers, teaching, and teacher education when we acknowledge the contingency of the educational project.

## Lay Summary

As society becomes increasingly influenced by neoliberal ideology, and knowledge and education become slaves to the economy, the concept of the teacher is becoming less rooted in relationships and more in instrumentality. I find this increasing instrumentalization of my profession dehumanizing. If we are not to be accomplices in the damaging structural change occurring in our world and profession, I contend that teachers must think ourselves differently—must think the world differently.

I ask, How might teachers respond to socio-political forces in ways that recover interpersonal relationships and open up possibilities? How might we think ourselves differently?

I present one possibility: this thesis, as a collage or assemblage of ideas and writing—autobiographical, theoretical, poetic—that demonstrates how thoughtful articulation and action in various forms can succeed to effect change in as yet unimaginable ways.

# **Preface**

This thesis is an original, unpublished, and independent work by author, Gunita Gupta.

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For Vega—even though you can't read—thank you, small dog, for walking the world with me as I worked through all of this in my head.

And lastly, I would like to thank my partner, Jane Gill. Jane, you will always be my biggest fan and my one true reader. Everything I write is written for you.

# Exegesis

## The Form

Between past and future, there exists a gap. This gap is not real but, rather, metaphorical: a space for thought in “an interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet,” and which “may contain the moment of truth” (Arendt, 1993, p. 9). To be clear, Arendt is not claiming that *truth* exists in this gap, but that, in the gap, *a truth*—understood as an unseen possibility—may be revealed in a moment to the person who enters the gap and commits to thinking about what she is doing. In the metaphor, a constructed past and an indeterminate future progressing from this past together make the gap possible. The gap, then, is a moment of cleared space in the ever always present of being that occurs when we suddenly break free from routine ways and acknowledge the contingency of our existential situation—that our present and future do not travel a predetermined path, that myriad possibilities exist for both. However, with such a revelation often comes confusion. The gap that is created, then, is the space in which we have a chance to seek clarity through thought. And in the gap we may also find it, even if only for a moment.

In this thesis, I endeavour to extend this moment created by my acknowledgement of the contingency of my situation as a teacher, by prying my fingers into the gap to make an opening large enough that you, the reader, may climb in and think along with me as I work to find clarity and *a truth*. This thesis is an example of what I think Hannah Arendt (1998) means when she implores us to “think what we are doing” (p. 5): it is an exposition of thinking about what has been done, what I am doing, and what I will do within the context of my position as a teacher in

British Columbia (BC) in 2019. As an exposition, this thesis is not a claim to the truth of a situation, nor a prescription for a more right or just way to live or teach. In intention and purpose, this piece of writing is a thinking exercise arising “out of incidents of living experience” that does not “attempt to design some sort of utopian future” (Arendt, 1993, p. 14). It is a collage of ideas, both descriptive and creative, that has been assembled with deliberation. If Arendt’s notion of the gap between past and future is as I have described it above, then I believe the thinking which occurs in this space can only be profound if it is done deliberately.

Collage, as an art form, is a set of “extraordinary juxtapositions” where “the net result is greater than the sum of the parts” (Nicholson, 1990, p. 18). To achieve such a result requires deliberation: collage is not a careless affair. And neither is thinking. As a collage, this thesis is an artifact of thought—a whole constructed from parts historical, political, philosophical, and autobiographical. Within this larger collage there are also smaller collages—poetic interludes made from, and juxtaposed with, pieces of the whole. As a deliberate set of juxtapositions, the *result*, if you will, of this thesis is a discovery and illumination of possibilities for the future of teaching. Because I am a teacher, I have written this thesis for all the teachers who have ever felt powerless about “the way things are.” I hope my words will provoke us to question what we see as the supposed facticity and linear progression of our past, present, and possible future, so we become empowered to create new and different juxtapositions and, in doing this, create ourselves (and the world) anew.

The deliberation for this piece begins in form. The *Prologue*, *Poetic Interludes*, and *Epilogue* provide the frame for the work which serves as an analogy of how being, though it may

be constructed from the narratives of one's past and one's current existence, is only always a *perpetual becoming* into a future which has not happened yet.

I begin the piece with the *Prologue* where I introduce both my personal situation and my onto-epistemological becoming. In it I write about my childhood and how I changed from an instrument of my father's ideas to someone with the power to make decisions for myself about my future. As you read on, you will eventually come to the first of five poetic interludes—small poetic collages—deliberately created from the narrative of the Prologue to create successive and succinct textual artifacts I have then placed upon the timeline of this thesis. These collages show the process of making or creation (*poiesis*) that can occur in the gaps between what was and what is to make what can/will/might be in the future. Although we all have a history and a contemporary situation, I designed the form of this thesis to demonstrate how the narratives of the past and present are just collections of words and ideas that, in slightly different arrangement, can profoundly change how we understand ourselves, thus opening possibilities for different ways of being.

## **The Content**

The content of this thesis, like the form, is also deliberate. Woven through the frame created by the life writing and the poetic interludes you will find four *Parts* that deliberate the past and present narratives informing the world of teachers in BC. As explained above, the gap that I am interested in occurs in a moment of thought between past and future. Therefore, the content of the *Parts* move in succession from a past, to a present, to thinking in the gap, to an imagined future. It is worth mentioning here, once again, that, in this thesis, I am not *prescribing* a way of

being. That said, I am imploring teachers to think *themselves* into being. As such, my audience is the thoughtful educator: the teacher who, like me, wishes to think and do things differently. The form and content of this work is but one example of how this difference might be manifested. For my purposes, I choose an historical narrative as the starting point.

Since the beginning of compulsory public schooling in BC in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *who* a teacher is has been based on *what* she does (and where she does it) to achieve a predetermined end or a practical purpose. Throughout its history and to the present moment, teaching in BC public schools and, consequently, BC teacher education, can be understood as being mainly about three things: control, knowledge, and readiness for the adult world of work (Osborne, 2008). Teachers *control* (read: manage) their students such that *knowledge* (in various forms including, at present, skills and competencies) can be imparted (and which the child can accumulate) so that children graduating into society are ready to face the challenges of the *work* (read: become part of the economy) necessary for their survival and the survival of the country.

*Part I* begins with a definition of what I mean when I use the terms “education” and “schooling” throughout this work. I then apply historical method to secondary sources and archival evidence in order to compile a short (hi)story of teacher education in BC that tells how teachers were always conceived of in instrumental terms: as a means to an end within a larger process of institutionalized education. Heesoon Bai (2003) writes, “Treat something as an object, that is, having no intrinsic value but only an instrumental value, then it will exist as an object for us” (p. 42). In her definition, an instrument is an object to the will and power of a subject (p. 41). Thus, *Part I* traces the different ways that the institution of schooling has conceived of the teacher over the years and how this conception has developed alongside society’s values as

reflected in government documents. In this initial section, I demonstrate that, for 150 years, teachers in BC have been instruments of the schooling system, capitulating to the powers that determine what that system looks like and how it operates. I describe how the situation in which we *now* practice is inextricably connected to this version of the past. In the historical moment of creating from scratch a burgeoning society, while some form of instrumentalism may be expected, since then, the concept of teaching has not changed very much and many of us still see ourselves and what we do with our students as a means to an end.

Continuing her thoughts on instrumentalism, Bai (2003) believes that, although the relationship between subject and object delimits the agency of the latter, we are able to move through the two states of being as (we work to make) power dynamics shift—that the positions of subject or object “are not absolute identities that beings and things inherently come with” (p. 41). Given the ways in which the foundation of our education system was built, it is perhaps not surprising that many BC teachers do not feel powerful enough to change the system that conceives us as objects. I believe that this is partly because too few of us are aware of the historical context of our profession, even while we carry the burden of that legacy. Simply put, because we do not know where we come from, we are unaware that the stresses of our present situation have been embedded in our profession from the beginning. Even though every teacher in BC has been taught in a school and by other teachers, there still remains a disconnection between the origins of the profession and its present iterations. Rarely has the history of the institution of schooling, in particular, been given enough consideration as to be seen as *forming* an integral part of the present situation. Discussions surrounding the current state of education in BC and proposed possibilities for the future can only be deeply and meaningfully had if there

exists historical consciousness of the institution. *Part 1* aims to provide this consciousness and to give teacher-readers a shared past from which to begin to extract patterns and draw meaning.

Where *Part 1* demonstrates that, historically speaking, the concept of the teacher defined by specific means and ends may not have been dangerous in spirit, *Part 2* takes up the narrative and moves it into the present. In *Part 2* I explain how now, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teachers find ourselves at a moment where the will and power of few are seeking to change the institution of schooling in ways that could spell the end of teaching as we know it. At the time of writing, it is 2019 and schooling is still built upon the same foundations as in the one room schools of the newly settled west: grade school is organized by subject with a focus on both content knowledge and skill building, the overall objective is to produce a certain kind of person, socialization undergirds much of what we do in schools, and students and teachers are overwhelmingly “graded” according to remotely determined standards in an effort to build a nation. The major difference in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that nation-building now means becoming competitive in the global race for power.

In current times, the push for global free-market capitalism informed by neoliberal policies, and the rise of the knowledge economy are greatly influencing what goes on in schools and what comes out of them. However, this time the desired “product” is an individualistically-minded consumer and life-long learner with unparalleled flexibility, bottomless creativity, and an insatiable desire for the accumulation of private goods. And in order to achieve this result, capitalist global forces and neoliberal thought are taking advantage of the instrumentality of the teacher to the school system by seeking to reduce her further: into a mere functionary valued only inasmuch as she is effective doing (read: instructing, controlling, administering, managing,

facilitating, assessing, guiding) what is required to prepare children to become valuable commodities in the global marketplace and willing contributors to the economy. Moreover, the teacher, as a product or commodity herself, is also implicated in this scheme from the other end when she enters teacher education as a student. Looked at in this way, a teacher is no longer a *who* (subject) but rather a *what* (object): both a product *and* a tool comprised of the functions, skills, abilities, and techniques to make more products according to global economic purposes determined by transnational organizations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Paine and Zeichner, 2012).

In *Part 2*, I begin by defining my understanding of neoliberalism and how it is presently affecting a changing global attitude toward the purpose of education in the competitiveness and wealth of a nation. After an explanation of the concept of the knowledge economy and how education and schooling function within it to invest in human capital (Becker, 1994), I examine various BC Curriculum documents and discuss how they are informed by a neoliberal (re)conceptualization of schooling. I then go on to show how this (re)conceptualization is succeeding in changing the concept of teachers to become even more instrumental (and, ironically, dispensable) to an educational project that puts the learner at the centre of an enterprise now largely unconcerned with the human relationships.

*Parts 1* and *2* present typical narratives of the history and context for the changes that the concept of teacher has undergone and is undergoing due to the will and power of those with power. As a teacher and scholar of education, I find both the historical and present instrumentalization of my profession dehumanizing, where I am left “feeling like a chess piece or a cog or even an accomplice of some kind” (Greene, 1995, p. 11). And with this thought, the

gap reveals itself. If we are not to be accomplices in the damaging structural change occurring in our world and profession, I contend that teachers must think themselves differently—must think the world differently. *Part 3* is an exploration of what becomes possible when we pry our fingers into the gap and create room to think differently.

In *Part 3* I begin thinking differently with an assumption that people who enter the profession of teaching have been trapped by the *idea of a teacher*—that we have been subsumed by an unchanging concept of a teacher (created in history and exploited in current times) that has limited our possibilities to imagine our selves otherwise. Using the works of Jacques Derrida, John-Paul Sartre, and Hannah Arendt, I go on to present a philosophical collage of the concepts of these thinkers. As a collage, this section—like the poetic interludes—is a “splicing together of [a] unique collection of things” (Nicholson, 1990, p. 17) which, as I show, can help us think our way out of the subject/object relationship of teachers to schooling, policies, and neoliberal ideals. This way out begins in language and then extends to Sartre’s (2015) concept of the original project juxtaposed with Arendt’s (1998) concept of natality. In this section I work to trouble the uncritical acceptance of a dominant ontology, or way of being, by questioning the understanding of “teacher” existentially. In *Part 3* I ask, “Who is a teacher?” and then splice Derrida, Sartre, and Arendt together in such a way as to think through to one possible answer.

Inevitably, when presenting ideas to destabilize the taken-for-granted in order to imagine possibilities, people want to know how: *How can we do this? What can we do?* In *Part 4* I engage in a “what if” situation by using the possible “answer” generated in *Part 3* to return full circle to the impossible situation of teacher education presented in *Part 1*. What if teacher education were to change drastically from the way it has been? What might these changes look

like? How might teacher education change to support alternative ways of being in education and schooling? *Part 4* is me wondering aloud how curricula for pre-service teacher preparation might be altered to allow for the emergence of different ways of being as teachers in schools, even while these different ways are in no way predetermined. This short section does not actually suggest practical changes but, rather, is necessarily self-reflexive and eventually asks more questions than it answers.

The whole collage ends with the *Epilogue*, another piece of life writing that completes the frame begun in the *Prologue*, and which seals the endeavour as a creative/generative piece. Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) state that life writing is “committed to promoting emancipatory projects of learning and teaching” and that “constantly explores, contests, and negotiates the imaginative possibilities of knowing and being in the world” (p. 2). Indeed, this entire creative project is aimed at promoting such emancipatory and imaginative possibilities by placing together, in collage, autobiographical, theoretical, and poetic writing in order to fuel “the desire to locate something that is not known” (Nicholson, 1990, p. 23). I see this thesis, like the poetic interludes, as the physical manifestation of what I write about: that it is possible to assemble information, facts, evidence, ideas, concepts, and language from disparate sources and place them next to each other deliberately and thoughtfully to form a whole greater than the sum of its parts that works—at least until next time—to change the way we see the world. In writing about the Deleuzoguattarian concept of *assemblage*, Manuel DeLanda (2016) states,

An ensemble in which components have been correctly matched together possesses properties that its components do not have. It also has its own tendencies and capacities.

The latter are real but not necessarily actual if they are not currently manifested or exercised (p. 5).

While DeLanda's use of the word "correctly" might be contentious to some, I read it as part of the deliberation or thoughtfulness required for the creation of such assemblages and the deliberation and thoughtfulness required to imagine things differently. This thesis, then, is a singular entity—a collage, an assemblage, perhaps—that retains tendencies and capacities heretofore unseen and that is as subject to reiterations as anything else. I have crafted the poetics of the piece thoughtfully, with as much attention paid to form as to content. This thesis is a collage depicting collage-thinking (Nicholson, 1990): an ensemble of components (writings) that describes a way of thinking the world and ourselves as an ensemble of components able to be manipulated and (re)placed to create new ways of thinking the world and ourselves that might then be manifested or exercised in action.

*patterns everywhere*

*every moment of every day*

*an opportunity to*

*learn something*

*seeking something else.*

## Prologue

*My father immigrated to Canada in his 20s. After completing a mechanical engineering degree in India, he embarked to Vancouver to attend the University of British Columbia's prestigious Engineering program where he graduated with a Master's of Science in Metallurgy. Both of my father's older sisters also had advanced degrees, and it was clear to me from an early age that our family was educated. Back home, his own father was an exacting man: a scholar and a professor. In my mind's eye, he lived in a small, dark room full of books, with no time for anyone or anything except reading. I met him only once when I was very small, but I knew he was very smart. I wanted to be smart, too.*

*All my memories of my father are not entirely positive. He also was exacting—even harsh. His sayings still occupy space in my mind, and I have recounted them many times to students over the years. He instilled in me and in my brother a stubborn and arrogant awareness of our intellect and agency. He drilled into us that we could do anything we put our minds to. When he would ask us to do something, if we replied, "I can't," he always retorted with, "You can't? Or, you won't?" In this way we came to understand that we were only limited by our intentions and will and our perceptions of our abilities—not our actual abilities themselves. If we "put our minds to it," he said, we would be able to do anything.*

*For his part, and in my childish eyes, my father could also pretty much do anything. He was mechanically gifted and never accepted that something was broken without first trying to fix it. He abhorred waste and thought that things could always be repurposed for another use. He was ingeniously resourceful. He was able to understand, it seemed, everything, and his constant questioning and teaching meant that we came to understand many things, as well. He could*

*repair cars, work computers, build a better hamburger, improvise recipes, find the most efficient way to clean my guinea pig's cage or extract the last dregs of ketchup from the bottle, and design a weight loss program that actually worked. He approached every problem with a scientist's mind, determinedly correcting inefficiencies and never believing in conclusions unless repeated experiments yielded the same findings.*

*My father saw each and every situation of human life as a possibility for learning about the workings of the world. He recognized patterns everywhere and taught the same skills to me and my brother. I recall a trip we once took to Disneyland, just the three of us. I was ten and my brother was eight. We drove down in two days because my father wanted to drive the first 1000 miles in one shot: we made it to San Francisco that night. The whole way (when we weren't sleeping or reading), every time we saw a sign, my father asked my brother and me to convert miles to kilometers in our heads and to compare this answer with the speed we were currently travelling in order to calculate how much further it was to the next town. For my dad, every moment of every day was an opportunity to learn something new or to exercise your brain. He read anything that claimed to improve the efficiency of the different aspects of existence, but he seemed always to be seeking something else. Enlightenment, perhaps?*

*When I was a child it was understood that I would become a doctor. I accepted this future as if it were of my own making and took all the appropriate courses in school to get myself admitted to UBC pre-med. In grade 12, though, I abruptly changed course and decided that a life of letters was my destiny. I was afraid to tell my father, not because I feared his rage, but, rather, his disappointment that I was turning away from science. I worried that he would denigrate my choice. Even though my parents were divorced and I was allied with my mother in the war that*

*ensued, I still needed his approval and his help to fund my university education as he always said he would.*

*I told him on my seventeenth birthday. He had come over to my mom's house to give me a present: an illustrated anatomy book. The inscription read, "To my future Doctor!" After I told him that I no longer wanted to be a doctor; but that I wanted to major in English Literature, he said that I could still become a doctor by getting a PhD—just a doctor of a different sort. But, he would never live to see this.*

*On December 20, 2000, my father suffered the third of three heart attacks in five months. He died about three weeks after his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday. A few days later, my brother and I traveled with my mother to India to scatter his ashes in the Ganges river as he had been requesting for as long as I can remember. I was 25 years old and that trip taught me one last thing about my knowledgeable and highly educated father that I never truly appreciated in his life: that, for all his intelligence and limitless ability, he was torn, always, between the ancient ideals and traditions of his ancestral past and the new ideas and possibilities of the future that the Western world promised. I came to realize that, perhaps, his incessant search for enlightenment in the form of irreproachable knowledge was a life project seeking to reconcile, once and for all, what he knew in his being with what he had learned in his becoming. In his paradigm (a word he taught me, by the way), the scientific approach was key to unlocking this mystery. However, I don't believe he ever found the answer this way.*

*My father was guilty of being the teacher who only ever saw the world through a scientist's lens and way of being. As a child under his tutelage, I was schooled to believe in the absolute rationality of the world. I did not believe in unfinished wholes and I was sure that my*

*life would feel complete upon my death if I just put my mind to it. However, it was not until my own father's death rocked my stable structure of pragmatism that I realized that I was wrong. In retrospect, I think my father died dissatisfied. Even though his life was spent always wondering and experimenting, he believed—and had taught me—that answers are required and are only discoverable by the application of a scientifically tested formula. He adhered to a paradigm that values organization, methods, systems, linear thinking, and rationality—all of which are not dangerous ideas, in and of themselves. But his paradigm also presupposed that there is but one ultimate truth, that questions will be answered, and that arguments will be closed. It counseled that completeness is not only possible, but preferable. I now know that this is untrue. Or, rather, to remove truth from the equation altogether: I now know that this paradigm is no longer mine.*

*Since I first learned how to read, I have been an avid reader. The decision I made in my last year of high school to devote my own life project to language and literature was not a surprising one, in retrospect. What is surprising, though, is that the education I got from my father never really included any focus on the arts. We were scientists, first, last and always; we approached problems logically and systematically. There was no process, my father believed, that could not be made more efficient—no problem that could not be solved with rationality. And, to a certain degree, I still hold this paradigm in my way of being—even while I am now much more aware of the nuances that define human existence. My adolescent decision to move away from my predetermined future of science and into the arts allowed me to appreciate other ways of knowing and expressing my insights. And in my undergraduate program at UBC, my experiences reading fiction, writing literary essays, and reading and writing poetry changed my previous*

*single-minded understanding of myself and my world and finally allowed me to entertain new possibilities for my life.*

*After my father's death, and with my eyes opened by language and literature to the pleasures of incompleteness, I finally found freedom from the systems and organization that had structured my childhood. I did not reject all of my father's wisdom summarily, though. I still believe that one can do anything one puts one's mind to, and I am still highly critical of normative situations. I also teach this to my students because I do not want to become the kind of teacher my father was: exacting, harsh, and a progenitor of truth. Unlike my father, I want to leave paths open to my students to appreciate the myriad possibilities of their own life projects. But to appreciate possibility requires an acceptance of the incompleteness of life and the unpredictability of the future. It requires the power to see what is not yet in front of us. It requires imagination.*

*I was told from as far as I can recall that medicine was my future. I accepted this uncritically because it made sense and would give me everything I might ever need in my life. When I was seventeen and I changed my mind about medicine, it was not because it no longer made sense or that the "facts" had changed; rather, it was because, suddenly, I could imagine a different future for myself. And as my imagination grew more and more detailed, the idea of staying my predetermined course became intolerable to the point of physical sickness. But what fueled my imagination such that I gained the strength to overcome the "education" of my father and decide to change my life project? How do I understand the narrative(s) that form(ed) me such that I can imagine a different future for myself and students? And how can I open up similar possibilities for my students to experience a view of the multiverse of their own lives? Big*

*questions, to be sure, and without forthcoming answers. But situations like this no longer frustrate me as I search for things I may never find. For now, the pleasure is in the pondering.*

## ***Poetic Interlude #1***

*All my memories  
are not entirely positive.*

*My father  
he said, we would be able to do anything.  
and never accepted that something was broken  
I knew he was  
trying to fix it.*

*His sayings  
occupy space in my mind,  
ingeniously  
instilled in me*

*it was clear to me from an early age  
constant questioning  
    intentions and will  
        intellect and agency  
            and in my childish eyes,  
arrogant awareness*

*In this way we came to understand  
over the years  
a small, dark room full of books,  
with no time for anyone or anything  
meant  
educated.*

## **Part 1: Past**

In *Part 1*, I begin by making a distinction between education and schooling so that the reader is aware of the ways in which I use the terms (sometimes interchangeably, if required) throughout the text. After defining my terms, I go on to describe a history of teacher education in BC in order to provide a context in which teachers and teachers-to-be can situate themselves in the present to set themselves up for thinking about how to proceed. In this section I trace the beginnings of teacher qualification, training, and preparation through the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, into the teacher education programs of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. I examine both primary and secondary sources to determine what aspects or qualities were seen to be constitutive of teachers and teaching throughout the history of BC. In addition to being a fascinating history, *Part 1* also provides a context for *Part 2* where I explore the extent to which the perhaps understandable instrumentalism of the past has, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, been reconfigured to now threaten the being of the teacher and her role in education and schooling.

### **Education and Schooling**

In the inspired piece “Continuing the Conversation” that begins the special edition of the *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, David Coulter and John Wiens (2008) wonder “Why do we educate?” The scholars go on to describe an exercise known as the Educated Person Exercise in which one is asked to think of and describe in detail a person they believe to be “educated.” The three examples they transcribe are heartfelt and sensitive renderings of the lives of ordinary people—a subsistence farmer, a best-friend’s sister, a grandmother—whose words and actions have profoundly touched those who describe them.

In the examples, the educated persons may or may not have had formal schooling, hold degrees, or even have a high school diploma. They are described as thoughtful, attentive, and intentional in conduct. People who “wonder about the world they inhabit” and “are deeply curious, continuously striving to learn about what they believe matters,” who also “insist on caring for others” (Coulter and Wiens, 2008, p. 9). Coulter and Wiens go on in the exercise to have the participants look for commonalities in order to make generalizations about what it means to be educated. Overwhelmingly, they find that similar criteria arise from the exercise: educated people possess knowledge (of varying kinds), are curious and critical of the world, and act in socially beneficial ways. They also find, most surprisingly, that formal schooling is not a necessary constituent of an education. Coulter and Wiens (2008) write,

Schools are, of course, institutions intended to further education, but conflating schooling and education risks confusing means and ends. Our audiences consistently separate the two: not only were educated people not necessarily well schooled, but well-schooled people were not always deemed to be educated (p. 11).

So, what is education, then, if it is not found in schools, and why do we educate?

The word “education” comes from the Latin *educere* meaning, “to lead out.” Similarly, a pedagogue is “one who leads children.” Where are they being led? To what? Out of what? Childhood? Darkness? Ignorance? And does it even matter if education is only the word for the prelinguistic inclination we have to make sure that new, tiny, defenseless humans live long enough and well enough to do the same for the new, tiny, defenseless humans they bring forth into the world? As Ken Osborne (1999) states,

For most of history, children spent their lives with their parents and other adults and learned what was expected of them from all they saw and experienced around them.

There was some teaching in the modern sense, but it took place as needed, in the context of some task whose relevance and importance were obvious, and was done by whatever adult was most concerned, not by a specially trained and appointed teacher. People learned through the family or on the job, but not in school. Within broad limits, it was assumed that the future would not be all that different from the present, so that what children learned today would be useful tomorrow. (p. 4)

In Osborne's description, learning and teaching is a relational situation in which values, skills, beliefs, and knowledge are often tacitly passed through a family as children are born and raised. Viewed in this manner, education is a matter of human development—a characteristic feature of human civilization that will necessarily change as the circumstances in the world change around us. Over time, though, ancient tribal organization in the Western world changed, and we moved from an agrarian society to an industrial one, from a rural society to an increasingly urban one. As social, political, and economic changes took place, the way an education was both imparted and received changed as well.

In this thesis, education is understood as a human inclination and a relational phenomenon of initiation (into ways of knowing and being) manifested in interactions between human beings—usually children and adults but not exclusively. Schooling, by extension, is understood as the contrived manifestation of education that humans institute(d) to respond to needs and changes determined by the social order of a certain kind of human civilization—the most important need being the passing on of an ever-increasing body of accumulated knowledge.

Modern notions of compulsory schooling are relatively recent in the whole of recorded human history. In British Columbia (BC), this history is even shorter. Osborne (1999) believes that “three forces—industrialism, nationalism and democracy—created a climate of opinion that by the end of the nineteenth century made compulsory public schooling a reality” in Canada (p. 7). Specifically, “school” became the best place in which to supply the need for educated workers in industry, a way to encourage citizenship, and a means to promote the dominant political ideology in Canada: democracy. And along with the compulsory schooling system came a requirement for teachers to work in those schools.

### **Teacher Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The beginning of public schooling in British Columbia can be traced back to the heyday of pioneering times in the west of Canada and the first formal school in 1849: “This first school was held in Bachelor’s Hall, the large dining room of the Hudson’s Bay Fort, which was located near the corner of Fort and Douglas Streets in today’s downtown Victoria” (Adams & Thomas, 1985, p. 9). More importantly, the first teacher of this school was the “Reverend John Staines, briefly chaplain to the Hudson’s Bay Company...who...was immediately assigned the job of schoolmaster along with the performance of his clerical duties” (Storey, 2003, p. 19). He was finally let go from his position in 1854 due to disagreements with some of the Company’s administrative policies (ibid.). However, it seems that his wife, Emma, “was the more competent of the two” in regards to teaching ability (Dunae, 2018). The next teachers were a couple comprised of the new chaplain, Rev. Edward Cridge, and his wife, Mary. Both the Cridges and the Staines arrived from England into the fledgling West of Canada (Storey, 2003).

In 1852, the first non-sectarian school was opened in Fort Victoria. This “common” school was the first government-funded school in what would soon be known as British Columbia; Charles Bailey was the teacher (Dunae, 2018). From this point on, expansion was the order as “the young province established a nonsectarian public school system to address the challenge of schooling children in a vast region that as yet was sparsely populated” (Storey, 2003, p. 20). Along with this challenge came the equally daunting, and perhaps more important challenge, of finding teachers to lead<sup>1</sup> the young out into the new world of the Western-most province of Canada.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were a few measures taken to standardize the process of teacher qualification in BC. In 1870, The Common School Ordinance designated a Board of Examiners to certify teachers (Dunae, 2018). The document, however, only states that Inspectors would rule on “the character and qualifications of the Teachers” (Dunae, 2018). Since BC lacked a teacher-training facility at the time, these qualifications likely came from elsewhere: “Though some teachers in local schools and in others west of the prairies had received formal preparation for their craft, they certainly had not acquired it locally” (Storey, 2003, p. 20). The first school superintendent in BC, John Jessop, “qualified teachers [who] came to BC from eastern Canada and Britain” (Calam, 1984, p. 30). If these teachers had come to BC from Ontario, they would have been educated in one of the “fifty country model schools...established in Ontario to meet a growing need for teachers” in which a “student teacher, after a period of observation and practice teaching (originally eight then fifteen weeks), primarily under the supervision of the school principal or local school inspector, earned a third class certificate” (Clark, 2014, p. 31).

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<sup>1</sup> To “educate” comes from the Latin word, *educere*, to “lead out” into, presumably, the world. A “pedagogue,” similarly, meant the slave who led children to school—*paed-* “child” and *agogos*, “to lead”.

Qualification and certification in BC was done “through their knowledge of history, geography, English literature, arithmetic, algebra, bookkeeping, and English composition” (ibid., p. 33). Depending on one’s performance on the exams, candidates received first class (70% and above), second class (50-69%), or third class (30-49%) certificates that clearly indicated “a statement of marks in the various subjects of examination” (Calam, 1980, p. 13). John Calam shows that “as for the content of the examinations, the questions rarely probed knowledge of the history and current affairs of British Columbia” (ibid.). “Certification,” he explains, “was to be determined as a result of annual examination based upon the ‘Education and the Art of Teaching’ as well as the subjects of instruction” (ibid., p. 12).

In his book, *Learning to Teach*, Vernon Storey (2003) describes how, in 1872, John Jessop, Superintendent of Education, examined the first 18 candidates:

Those first candidates for teacher certification chose from a list of examination subjects that included: Arithmetic, Geography, English Grammar, English History, Vocal Music, School Organization and Government, and Composition. (p. 21)

Based on this list, the prospective teacher would have to be competent in the subject(s) of which they had the greatest knowledge, as well as administration of classroom duties. Storey (2003) points out that the questions on the exam on School Organization and Government were “focused strongly on regulation and control” (p. 22) both of the learning environment and the pupils themselves. Given the state of human affairs in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, school became the place where the prevailing social mores of the time were instilled. And since those mores necessarily included the inculcation of a work ethic, they became a necessary part of the curriculum:

In this process of changing long-established work habits, schools were seen as having a useful part to play. Employers wanted reliable, productive and clock-based work habits from their workers and saw in schools a way to instill them. Schools would train children to tell the time, to run their lives by the clock, to work hard even at tasks they saw no point in, to obey orders and generally to accept what life offered them without complaint. (Osborne, 1999, p. 6)

In addition to a focus on content knowledge, control and regulation, work ethic and rule-following, the teachers in John Jessop's era were determined in part by their gender. On the certification exams, questions were different for women and men in such a way as to reinforce the sexual dichotomy of the era. Men were examined on problem-solving, science, and politics; whereas women solved computation questions, and wrote about beauty, manners, and female literary characters. The requirements for a teacher in the era before 1900 included the knowledge of "a very broad western tradition reaching back to the ancients" (Calam, 1980, p. 14). In addition, a teacher was controlling and in control—both of the school and pupils, as well as him/herself.

Teachers so prepared were qualified (to some degree) to teach a subject or subjects (eg. reading, math, writing, geography, history) given a certification to do so for a specific period of time based on examinations performance. They had possibly even practiced teaching for a period of time and had been evaluated to teach in BC by the Superintendent who held first class teacher qualifications himself (Storey, 2003, p. 21). Taken as a whole, this formula seems foolproof for the times. However, given the geography and climate in BC, as well as the pattern of settlement and relative low numbers of settlers in the late 1800s, the reality of the situation was that when

an area was settled, a school was built, and a teacher was needed regardless of suitability or credentials. Moreover, when assigned a teaching position, this teacher was solely in charge of a one-room school with children of varying ages, abilities, behaviours, and attendance. The teacher of the late 1800s would be an excellent candidate to teach in ideal circumstances. In BC in the early years after confederation and before the turn of the century, however, the situation was less than ideal. Lacking a teacher training school, teachers came to BC from all parts of the British Empire, which meant that attempts at regulation and control would be interpreted by differing world-views (Storey, 2003, p. 30).

One of the first alterations to be made to this original means of teacher preparation had to do with method. In 1874, John Jessop established a summer institute for BC teachers in which “lectures and addresses will be delivered, papers read, and discussions held on various subjects connected with education and the different methods of teaching” (as quoted in Storey, 2003, p. 31). In 1876-77, a change to the certification process as a graduated program based on ongoing experience and re-examination was put forth but never materialized (Storey, 2003, 32). Jessop, himself, had graduated with a first-class certificate from the Toronto Normal School and was a devout follower of Egerton Ryerson (Johnson, 1971, p. 26). He believed that BC needed a school in which to educate, examine, and certify teachers (Calam, 1984. p. 30). Subsequent Superintendents also advocated for the building of a Normal school in BC, claiming that “[i]t would produce devoted, methodical teachers” (ibid.). However, this change in method would not be realized for several more years. When the province’s first Normal School in Vancouver was finally established, it was in an effort to address the shortcomings of the profession by increasing control of pre-service teacher education in BC.

## **The Putman-Weir Survey and the Normal School Curriculum**

### ***The Normal Schools to 1925***

The first Normal school in BC was opened in 1901 in Vancouver. The second would open in Victoria in 1915. The term “normal” comes from the French *normale* and refers specifically to the notion of a normative education—that is, one in which the norms and standards of the day are promulgated by the institution. As a part of teacher preparation, the term “normal” represented an over-arching theme of standardization in education that persists to this day. Although the standards themselves have changed (and in some cases substantially), the desire for an education system that creates a conforming and (minimally) informed citizenry and work-force still exists (McLaren, 2015).

Preliminary training at the Vancouver Normal school consisted of courses in psychology, pedagogy, literature, nature study, drawing, and teaching methods (Calam, 1984, p. 33). By 1908, the courses included management, history of education, reading, language, math, geography, history, stencilling, and modelling (Calam, 1984, p. 38). There was also practice teaching, since the Normal School was now co-located with a Model school; as well, physical drill, overseen by personnel of the Canadian Army, was included in the curriculum (ibid.).

Good teachers knew their facts. To their pupils they could put productive, connected, logically consecutive questions. They were clear. They knew how to enliven a lesson. Good teachers avoided colloquial speech. They could spell. They could write legibly on a blackboard. They avoided digressions. They encouraged children to answer. Above all, they prepared their lessons, made their pupils work and kept good order. (Calam, 1984, p. 41)

This curriculum seemed like a reasonable and comprehensive one and the instructors were vetted just as rigorously. Instructors at the Vancouver Normal School were mainly men with a commendable record within the school system, and who “were to be general practitioners, not specialists, practical rather than theoretical, able to show how, eager to supervise practice teaching” (ibid.). In addition, the Normal school students were prescribed textbooks, some of which were lengthy tomes on teaching practice and classroom management (ibid., p. 34) for teacher preparation still placed importance on discipline, order, and control.

In 1914, Schools Inspector, Donald MacLaurin wrote that,

the quintessential teacher... would be diligent, yet lively, alert to inattention, quick to question... would demand neat, concise writing, clear thinking and careful recapitulation, pacing the work steadily throughout the year and keeping accurate records of student progress. Under her encouragement, children would develop their imaginations, growing at length to enjoy their compositions, and appreciate—even love—the literary selections to be read. She would help children speak and draw well. But the key attribute of this teacher would be her ability and desire to see to... the development of character. (Calam, 1984, 42-43)

The curriculum was becoming robust and a definite undertaking, hence the need for the standardization of the Normal schools’ method of teacher education. Donald MacLaurin would be appointed principal of the Victoria Normal School which opened in 1915 (Storey, 2003, p. 82).

The Victoria Normal School echoed the Vancouver one in many ways. The two schools, though populated by students from different areas of the province, “met common admission,

examination, diploma and certification requirements” (Calam, 1984, p. 44). Although the Normal schools would have undoubtedly displayed regional tastes and attitudes developing from the settlers in the West; overall, the means in BC to prepare a teacher, by the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was well on its way to becoming an institution.

### *The Putman-Weir Survey, 1925*

In 1924 the BC government was a Liberal one and the Premier was John Oliver. As the population was recovering from the tumult of a Great War—the first of its kind—and just before the world was plunged into the effects of the Depression, Oliver ordered a commission to conduct a comprehensive survey of the BC education system. He appointed G. M. Weir and J. H. Putman to head the project. Weir was a professor of education at the University of British Columbia in 1923, having come with an impressive list of credentials from McGill, University of Saskatchewan, Queen’s University, and the University of Chicago (Mann, 1980, p. 92). Putman was the senior inspector of Ottawa, Ontario schools (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. vii).

The report was extremely comprehensive, consisting of 435 pages of text, 118 pages of appendices, and 25 chapters. Nineteen questions on various subjects were put forth as comprising the scope of the survey. Putman and Weir wrote about the history of education in BC, philosophy of education, child development, programmes of study (at all levels of schooling), progressive education and the “project” method, rural and urban schools, teachers, Normal schools, administration and finance, school consolidation, text books, types of education (vocational and technical), assessment, and even had a chapter devoted to “The Vancouver School Problem.” Among the recommendations that resulted from the survey was the creation of

a junior high school comprised of grades 7-9 (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 530), suggestions that rural schools would require modifications to bring that schooling experience into line with the reality of existence in rural areas (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 533), and the insistence that a required Home Economics curriculum be included as part of the regular course of study and eligible for university matriculation (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 534).<sup>2</sup> Of the nineteen questions submitted for survey, one was specific to teacher preparation: “16. “How can the normal schools be made more efficient?” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 3).<sup>3</sup>

The authors begin the chapter on The Teaching Personnel (Putman & Weir, 1925) with a scathing summary of public opinion regarding teachers:

Too many unmarried teachers; the immaturity of the teachers especially in rural schools; lack of vision and professional pride; deficient academic and professional qualifications; unwillingness to take additional professional training beyond the legal minimum; lack of experience; inability adequately to profit from experience; tendency to change schools too frequently; lack of special preparation for teaching in ungraded schools; lack of sympathy with, and appreciation of, problems of rural life; dogmatism; lack of personality. (p. 174)

Using this list, we can reconstruct a new set of requirements for teachers that included maturity, wisdom, pride, intelligence coupled with academic rigour, a commitment to higher education, practical experience and the ability to reflect and change, loyalty and commitment, specialized

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<sup>2</sup> The commissioners also recommended that a Home Economics department be created at UBC (recommendation #5). In 2018, UBC is still the only institution in BC that confers a Home Economics Secondary teaching specialty on Teacher Education graduates.

<sup>3</sup> The use of the word *efficient* would have been a sign of the times of scientific thinking and a “waste-not-want-not” industrial attitude. In the actual text, the authors seek to make the Normal school better in all ways—including, both, allocation of resources (in all senses of the word) and content—in order to yield a high-quality end product: the teacher.

experience, sympathy and empathy, open-mindedness, and, personality. This was vastly different list of qualifications from what prevailed in the late 1800s: when a teacher must be proper, knowledgeable and qualified, have a measure of control as the school leader, and show up to work. As well, the Normal school curriculum in Vancouver and Victoria at the time did not include things such as future marital status, vision, loyalty, emotional intelligence, or personality. Although the initial summary of “weaknesses” in the Survey is damning, the commissioners concede that they “are capable of being remedied, at least in part, and are therefore deserving of serious consideration by the educational authorities and the teachers themselves” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 174). They go on to state that the teacher is a person, and therefore possessing a personality that resists, it was hoped, mechanization or teaching in “artificial, stilted, and interest-killing” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 174) ways. This concept of a personality included enthusiasm, idealism, and self-awareness to the point of self-correction. The commissioners also stress an anti-formalist way of teaching and the teacher’s possession of an educational philosophy is mentioned more than once:

It has already been stated that the young teacher must possess at least an elementary educational philosophy and mastery of technique if he is to avoid becoming a mere formalist in the work of the classroom. This philosophy, always subject to modification and development as a result of study and experience, is an indispensable guide to rational practice. Furthermore, the aims of the teacher, in so far as these aims are rational, should be discernible from an analysis of the methods used in teaching. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 175)

There was coherence, especially, in the call for philosophy and study that sought to define the BC teacher as one committed to learning and a reflective, ever-evolving, practice. Since the western world was becoming increasingly scientific, the commissioners placed a great emphasis on “the mastery of the principles of educational psychology, including the use of the more common tests and measurements, efficiently taught and applied during the course of professional training” and felt that, this, above all, would “develop real power and skill on the part of the young teacher” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 175). It was believed the teacher’s personality would only benefit from practice aimed at mastery, and that mastery would allow the teacher to become innovative with teaching methods:

When the principles of educational psychology, including the laws of learning, are thoroughly mastered—and in this process of mastery there should be numerous examples of teaching drawn from many fields—the young teacher of average ability should be able to make his own methods in conformity with these principles. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 175)

In line with the burgeoning scientism of the era, what Putman and Weir propose, therefore, is almost ultra-rational in its simplicity:

Skill and technique in teaching can be developed only through adequate practice based upon the rational application of the principles of educational psychology. Subject to these general qualifications, the question of method is largely individual. The personal equation enters at every turn. The normal school should aim "to make" the teacher, to assist in the development of power and skills. When this is reasonably accomplished the

young teacher may safely be entrusted to make his own specific methods. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 175)

The commissioners believed that, if followed to the letter, this process would *make* a teacher of which BC could be proud. To achieve this, however, would require an overhaul of the Normal school curriculum and methods.

Chapter XII in the Survey of the School System by Putman and Weir begins with an introduction to the history of the normal schools in BC” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 196). The authors then go on to discuss the "History, Aims and Purposes” of the normal schools from a North American perspective, mentioning Horace Mann in the US and Egerton Ryerson in Ontario (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 198). Comparison is made between the British and US models of teacher preparation and the commissioners mention Ryerson’s connection with Europe and his use of the pedagogical theories of figures such as Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Herbart (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 198). Once again the authors stress the importance of education as having evolved into a science and the need for the Normal school to reflect this evolution. The sections in this chapter go on to discuss at length: general organization and administration, curriculum and textbooks, the lecture method, length of courses, practice teaching, certification, and health education. In the section on curriculum comes a succinct passage which sums up the entirety of the chapter:

The ratepayers of the Province complain of inefficient, immature, incapable teachers.

The normal school staffs readily concur in this indictment and lay the blame on a system of professional training which is attempting the impossible. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p.

210)

However, Putman and Weir, being the visionaries that they were, refused to believe that anything was impossible if approached rationally and systematically. To this end, they conclude the chapter with their list of fifteen recommendations (some with subsections) of changes to the Normal school system.

Of the fifteen recommendations, most point to changes that would significantly affect the means by which the teacher was prepared. The commissioners propose increasing the age of entrance to the school to 18 years after having had three years of high school (see Recommendation 2, Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 227). The course of study is suggested to extend to 40 weeks, of which 50 hours will be observation and 50 hours practice teaching (see Recommendations 3, 10 (a.), Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 227), in addition to coursework:

(c.) That great emphasis should be placed on requiring a student-teacher to teach a class for a half-day or a full day; to plan and supervise seat-work; to teach a connected series of lessons in one subject; to use standardized tests in the "tool" subjects; to prepare maps, charts, sketches, and diagrams to illustrate lessons; to conduct organized games on the playground; to conduct a nature-study lesson out of doors; and to teach a series of lessons based on the "project" method. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 228)

This focus on progressive education and the project method would be pivotal for teacher education in the era (as well as teacher re-education) as curricular reform took hold in BC. In regards to the teachers of the teachers, Recommendation 6 deals with the enhancement of instructor education by suggesting that they take time to observe teaching in various public schools, as well as other teacher-training schools in Canada and the US. And Recommendations

7-9 speak to the perceived abilities of teachers awarded first-class or second-class certificates (see Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 227).<sup>4</sup>

Recommendation 11 deals specifically with curriculum revision and states: “That the whole curriculum of the normal schools should be revised in the light of modern developments in education” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 228). The commissioners propose a course of study for the pre-service teachers that includes mastery of 6-8 prescribed textbooks, a change in scope and focus for the course in the History of Education<sup>5</sup>, and an end to the lecture method (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 228) of teaching. They also advise to cap the cohort at 250—most likely to avoid over-crowding. The authors advocate for the hiring of specialists to be part of the faculty in the Normal schools. These would include a teacher in educational psychology, a teacher in science and nature study, a nurse to aid in the teaching of health and hygiene, and a Physical Education instructor (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 228-9). The PE instructor was to be equivalent in qualifications to the academic instructors and, ideally, to possess two-year special courses in “physical education and culture,” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 229) and not be a member of the Canadian militia as had been the drill instructors previously. This latter recommendation is introduced with the following:

The content of the present course in physical training at the normal schools, while not without value, is too formal. It should be humanized through the introduction of more group games and organized activities. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 229)

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<sup>4</sup> “7. That students-in-training who are candidates for first-class certificates be segregated as far as possible for normal school instruction. 8. That second-class certificates granted to normal school graduates be “interim certificates,” valid for two years only, in any elementary school, grades one to six inclusive, or in ungraded rural schools having eight grades, but not valid for the position of principal of a school having more than one classroom. 9. That first-class certificates in the same way be “interim certificates,” but valid also as an assistant’s licence [sic] in a middle school.”

<sup>5</sup> The commissioners recommended focusing on History from 1800 forward with an emphasis on Canadian education. See p. 228.

The language in Recommendation 15 reflects the rejection of formalism mentioned earlier and the embracing of humanist progressive ideals typical of John Dewey, who is referred to earlier, as well (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 199). In addition to Dewey, they also mention G. Stanley Hall and, as such, educational psychology is given prominence in the recommendations.

Recommendation 11. (c.) stipulates a method of applied educational psychology in the model school classes and calls this a “laboratory” for “experiments in education” (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 228). It is recommended that educational psychology comprise two 45-minute blocks of each week of the entire 40 week session. This language of quantification is also present in Recommendation 11. (g.):

At least three-fourths of the total time throughout the session should be given to professional work, including observation assignments and practice-teaching. Review of the subjects of the elementary school should be reduced to a minimum and in no case exceed twenty-five per cent. [sic] of the total number of class periods except perhaps in the content studies such as history and geography. (Putman & Weir, 1925, p. 229)

The use of units of measure and fractions mirrors the attitudes of the time towards the promise of science and demonstrates how the idea of a formula for teacher preparation was believed to be possible to write, if done so systematically and scientifically, and using accurate portions.

### **Additions and Modifications: 1926 to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

After Putman and Weir submitted their Survey, many world and local events occurred to alter and modify the formula the commissioners presented to the Province of BC. Each of these events brought with them a new requirement for the preparation of a BC teacher.

In 1926, the introduction of Home Economics<sup>6</sup> would necessitate that certain teachers were homemakers, and the creation of a Junior High school curriculum and the new course of Social Studies would ask them to be innovative, tolerant, and politically and socially aware. In 1938, the issuing of standardized report cards in the language of progressivism would reinforce the requirement of teachers to follow rules, communicate with the public (parents), and be proponents of standardization. In fact, standardization would be a recurring theme in 1977 with the introduction of a core-curriculum, and again in 1987 with the creation of the BC College of Teachers (now the Teacher Regulation Branch) that publishes the Standards for Educators in BC.

Following the effects of the Depression and the horrors of World War II, in 1944 BC teachers were mandated to open the school day with a Bible passage and to recite the Lord's prayer. This would require a teacher, in this time, to be faithful or silent—depending on their denomination or beliefs. In 1947, membership in the BC Teacher's Federation would become compulsory and teachers would be required to consider themselves as part of a collective. In 1951, with the threat of the Cold War, they now had to be prepared for when nuclear disaster struck in the school day.

In 1956 the Normal schools were closed and teacher training was moved to the University of BC and Victoria College (later to become the University of Victoria). Teachers at this time would now have to consider themselves and their profession as an academic one and embrace the changes in attitude and responsibility this conferred upon them. As the baby-boom soon made it apparent that once again there would be a teacher shortage, there was another Royal Commission on Education in BC, chaired by Sperrin N. F. Chant.

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<sup>6</sup> This and all subsequent references to the "timeline" of BC educational history are referenced from Patrick Dunae's website, The Homeroom, accessed 13 April 2018, <https://www2.viu.ca/homeroom/content/timeline/>.

The recommendations of the 1960 Royal Commission on Education (known as the Chant Report) only sought to alter teacher preparation a bit. In the same vein as the Putman and Weir Survey, it imagined that an increase in teacher *quality* could be achieved with alterations to the *quantity* of certain constituents. Chant wanted to raise the standards even higher; given the time in which the report was commissioned, this is not surprising. Sputnik had been successfully launched into space by the Russians in October of 1957. This era marked a booming competition between nations, underscored by the deep existential uncertainty that can only come when the idea of leaving the planet becomes a reality.<sup>7</sup> Raised standards came in the form of Chant's recommendation that "admission to the College of Education be completion of first year university or senior matriculation with a standing of at least 60% in English" (Chant, 1960, p. 215) and that the amount of time spent in practice teaching should be increased (Chant, 1960, p. 220-221). In addition, the Report recommended that practice teaching may occur *before* a student entered a teacher training program in order to determine whether the candidate was "suitable teaching material" or, if she even really wanted to teach after all (Chant Report, 1960, p. 215).

Over the next 30 years, leading to the Sullivan Commission in 1988 and the next round of recommendations on the length of University teacher education programmes and candidate practica (Sullivan, 1999, p. 130), the most significant events in BC education history would occur with the abolishment of corporal punishment in 1973, the institution of French language programs in elementary schools in 1979, and strike action by teachers in 1983. Collectively these events now required teachers to be a different kind of disciplinarian, possibly bilingual, and willing to suffer uncertainty in a job that had historically been ensured by demand. As the

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<sup>7</sup> Hannah Arendt writes beautifully and poetically about the consequences of the launching in her Prologue to *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1998, p.1).

province crept toward the new millennium and curriculum reform was begun and then aborted, teachers in BC—now firmly woven into the fabric of society—became provisioners of the future, standing on the forefront of an entrenched system of public education, prepared and preparing “to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (School Act, 1996, Ch. 412).

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Anyone who is a graduate of a teacher education program in BC since 1925 can tell you that many of the recommendations from the Putman and Weir report still survive to this day, in one iteration or another. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, teacher education courses are taught by specialists of varying qualifications—though rarely anyone is less than a PhD candidate—and many have been teachers themselves, though this is by no means a requirement. Educational Psychology still comprises a significant portion of mandatory coursework at UBC. Added to this are courses on Social Emotional Learning and Exceptionalities in the Classroom. After having successfully completed a four-year undergraduate degree, a prospective teacher must meet minimum requirements for entrance to all Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degrees in BC, and graduation requires passing a full year of teacher education, including a long practicum. Classroom management is still a major concern of teacher education and no one is qualified to teach unless they pass their practicum. Perhaps most importantly, teaching has evolved to be a profession in which the teacher is expected to continue learning for her lifetime. To this end, professional development days are mandated into the school calendar and teachers are remunerated for

graduate coursework and degrees completed. In addition, many institutions offer professional graduate degrees (Master of Education), which qualify teachers for this pay increase. A teacher may even complete the necessary work online or in-person while she is still employed full-time.

As of 2018, a teacher can be qualified to teach in BC by one of eight approved programs. In addition to the University of British Columbia (UBC), The University of Victoria (UVIC), and Simon Fraser University (SFU); a teacher candidate can also receive a B. Ed from the University of Northern BC (UNBC), Vancouver Island University (VIU), Thompson Rivers University (TRU), Trinity Western University (TWU), and the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV). UBC has two campuses—one in the Okanagan and one on the original site in Point Grey—and has offered an Indigenous Teacher Education Program for over 40 years.<sup>8</sup> The program at UBC confers a B. Ed on successful graduates of the one-year post-degree program. UVIC offers a few different means to obtain a certification to teach in BC<sup>9</sup>, however, the minimum is still a four-year degree for elementary school and a degree, plus a one-year Post Degree Professional Program or subsequent B. Ed, for secondary teachers. SFU also offers a Professional Development Program (PDP) in different iterations and a B. Ed. As of September 2018, SFU has increased the length of their program to 16 months to include a new initial full semester course (30 hours per week) on “Foundations of Education & Schooling”<sup>10</sup>—the first move of its kind by the universities and, possibly, the signal of a new cycle of change.

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<sup>8</sup> University of British Columbia NITEP Indigenous Teacher Education Program, accessed 13 April 2018, <http://teach.educ.ubc.ca/bachelor-of-education-program/nitep/>.

<sup>9</sup> University of Victoria Calendar 2018/19 Faculty of Education, accessed 13 April 2018, <https://web.uvic.ca/calendar2018-05/undergrad/education/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Fraser University Faculty of Education Professional Development Program, accessed 13 April 2018, <https://www.sfu.ca/education/teachersed/programs/pdp/structure.html>. According to the Program website, “In EDUC 400, student teachers will start their learning journey by exploring the historical, philosophical, social and cultural foundations of education and schooling. Working as part of a Professional Learning Community (PLC), student teachers will explore foundational themes, begin their guided inquiry, and participate in focused learning experiences in schools and educational communities.” Beyond this description, little else is said about the course on the website. In Feb 2018, I sent an email to the Director of Professional Programs in the Faculty of Education at SFU but never received a response.

Over the past 150 years, numerous changes have been made to teacher education in BC. Historically, these included shifts in curricula, teaching methods, modes of delivery, and length of time spent in various components of a program. Even the language and discourse surrounding the program—preparation, training, education—changed depending on the ways in which the institution sought to be regarded. But can there really be a formula for the preparation of a teacher? Or is this simply an impossible task? By all accounts, historical and contemporary, there seems to exist the unflinching belief that—given the right components and method—a teacher can be “made” into an instrument of the system. This can be seen in the myriad ways in which the curricula for teacher education have been written and rewritten over the decades—where requirements in teacher preparation programs for *who* a teacher must *be* were, in all cases, conflated with *what* a teacher must know and be *able to do*.

As a teacher, I have to believe that schooling can have a profound effect on people, otherwise, why do this at all? But, by what means are people made or changed? Is it a matter of the content of curriculum and the methods by which it is imparted? Or, as Osborne (1999) suggests, is education something intrinsic to human being that is deeply embedded in the relational? Moreover, how do we ensure that any changes we seek do not compromise something profoundly integral to human being? When we use a set of determinants to try to *make* a teacher, we always run the risk of losing something in the process. The building of the teaching profession in BC as absolutely functional to the aims of education and schooling is both unsurprising and understandable as part of the provenance of an institution charged with the task of building a nation. But it by no means needs to continue. And yet, it does continue.

Before I started my own teacher education in 2013, I had no understanding of the history of the institution (of both teacher education and teaching) I was entering beyond those I had experienced as a student and which had formed my mental image of what learning to teach and teaching might be all about (Britzman, 1991). Moreover, after I had completed the teacher education program at UBC, those “particular worldviews, orientations, dispositions, and cultural myths that dominate our thinking and...select the practices that are available in educational life” (Britzman, 1991, p. 3), persisted in me through those first years in the classroom. I am loathe to say that I perpetuated the mythical image of teacher as controller even while I ached to do things differently...to *be* different. In truth, I had no conception of what this difference might look like, nor did I feel I had the power to change myself or my practice, save for adopting controversial (read: not widely accepted but accepted nonetheless) pedagogical strategies. Indeed, even while *what I did* in the classroom changed, the distinct feeling of discomfort that accompanies desperate disingenuous change persisted. However, I did recognize that my position in society as a teacher was changing due to public opinion and political policy. Increasingly I felt less and less in control of my situation or how I was perceived and more beholden to a set of ideals that were not mine.

In *Part 2*, I describe these ideals as formational of neoliberalism and explain how neoliberal policy is affecting education in BC and changing the role of the teacher. The importance of teachers within the public education scheme cannot be over-stated. Or can it? In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with our tendency toward human-centred design, client service, and the supremacy of the self-centred “needs” of the individual, education is changing in radical ways. Students can now “access” instruction on a diversity of topics through means that no longer

require a human teacher *per se*—including remote learning, Internet mediated courses, and digital media. In addition, the (re)adoption in BC of progressive, child-centred learning (as opposed to teaching (see Biesta, 2017)) has repositioned the teacher—sometimes right out of the classroom and school. Teachers, it seems, are no longer integral to the system in its current (and future) conception and, where they are still welcome, their function is exactly that: a function of the (educational) machine and its intended product. If how an education is imparted and received changes as the world changes (for example, moves from the responsibility of the family unit to that of institutionalized schooling), who decides what that change looks like in the future context of schooling? How and to what extent will teachers like me respond to this change if it negatively affects who I am and who I want to become? Moreover, how might teachers shape change, rather than react to its imposition from without? In the ensuing *Parts* of this thesis, I consider all of these questions.

## ***Poetic Interlude #2***

*When I was a child it was understood  
as if it were of my own making  
a scientist's mind,  
was my destiny*

*patterns everywhere  
every moment of every day  
an opportunity to  
learn something  
seeking something else.*

*Enlightenment*

*determinedly  
I abruptly changed course and decided  
I was turning away  
to compare this answer with  
aspects of existence and  
the workings of the world.*

*never believing in conclusions  
The inscription read, "To my future*

*I accepted this*

## **Part 2: Present**

In *Part 1*, I outlined the history of teacher education in BC in an effort to paint a picture of the ways in which the concept of the teacher has changed over the century and half since schooling became compulsory. After reading the survey of the history of teacher education in BC, we can accurately say that the drivers of change in that system were the political powers who, fueled by an unwavering belief in a technological rationalism (Pinar, 2004, p. 150), altered the system to attempt to realize their own image of the ideal teacher and education system. We saw how the government, reflecting the ideals of the society they served, defined and redefined the teacher in terms of her abilities, tasks, function and station. In the present day the same still holds true: Schooling is still seen through a pragmatic epistemology that believes that a certain kind of human being can be made or produced. And still, those with the will and power attempt to realize this imagined product in the (unknowable) future by making policy that alters the system and affects both the way schooling is done and who does it. On its face, there is nothing sinister about this very human action. However, the danger lies deeper. For when we peel back the layers to expose what those with will and power to generate change in educational policy in BC have grown, we find a tender middle infected with a neoliberal ideology that threatens who we are as teachers and as a society.

### **A Working Definition of Neoliberalism**

Boas and Gans-Morse (2009) observe that “the term neoliberalism is most frequently employed by those who are critical of the free market phenomena to which it refers” (p. 140). They also claim that scholars in the social sciences often employ the term but fail to define it. For my

purposes, I use the term neoliberalism to refer to an economic ideology distinguished by “a specific economic discourse or philosophy which has become dominant and effective in world economic relations” (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p. 314) and in the social institution of education and schooling. To be clear, I am highly critical of the underpinnings of neoliberal economic ideology and the views presented in this section assume that their effects on sociopolitical institutions are largely detrimental.

Neoliberalism, as used in this thesis, is understood as an economic ideology which celebrates both minimal government intervention in free market trade and competitive capitalism. In a neoliberal economy, deals regarding the trading of goods and services for currency are allowed to occur without government interference. In an ideal neoliberal economy, *all* goods and services—including healthcare and education—would be part of the free market, thus making it so that the increased competition bears a better product as providers attempt to outdo one another. From different angle, increased competition and a totally free market of trade would make it harder for the disenfranchised poor to gain ground in their society. Since trade would occur without check, so too could wages be manipulated without government say. The concept of a minimum wage or a living wage, then, would cease to be relevant for employers and business owners unless it was in their best interest to provide them (read: would increase their market viability and profit). Given the rampant competition for jobs and commodities that an economy like this would create, it is likely a certain segment of the population would, out of desperation, be willing to compete for work (read: accept lower and lower wages just to get a job) while prices of goods would skyrocket with demand from the more monied sectors of society. Such an economy eventually leads to an even wider gap between socioeconomic classes

and allows for unchecked accumulation of wealth, largely without repercussions or tax penalties fed back into a system of social welfare. Even worse, since the underlying values communicated by such an economy are largely anti-social, the welfare state would cease to exist altogether. In a neoliberal world, more is always better, and ‘more for me is always better for me’. As such, individualism and competition reign to the detriment of community, benevolent humanity, and compassion.

As a way of being, neoliberalism places at the centre the individual and her power to effect the free market, where the free market is an uncontrolled domain of competitive trade—in which the biggest and best only get bigger and better, while the rest perish as a result of their insufficiency. It is the economic equivalent of Darwinian survival of the fittest that pits everyone against everyone. In the free market, the control of wealth is unrestricted and is falsely linked to skills and ability, and, thusly, survival. It is this uncontested association between survival and wealth that now serves to determine what society deems valuable and, in turn, how schools prepare children to enter adulthood. Jean Bethke Elshtain has observed that “education always reflects a society’s views of what is excellent, worthy, necessary.” (in Coulter and Wiens, 2008, p. 15). In a neoliberal ontology, excellence is defined by material success and worthiness by buying power. What a neoliberal society deems necessary is competition, for “increased competition represents improved quality” (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p. 326) and the ability for something to become better and worth more in a never-ending spiral upward. This scheme can also be applied to human beings—and an education system built on a foundation of neoliberal ideals is the way to produce them.

In the United States, neoliberal educational policies have turned schools into battlegrounds for test scores, where high performance means high ranking and increased enrollment as the public vies for their choice of where to send their progeny. This “faith in market-like competition as an engine of advancement” (Sahlberg, 2016, p. 133) not only affects the way an education is understood, but also works insidiously on the existential understanding of the public it serves. Sahlberg writes that “the most harmful consequences of such unhealthy competition in education are increased suspicion, distrust, anxiety, and fear in schools and classrooms” (p. 134). And, I would argue, outside of classrooms as well. The loss of cooperation and collaboration (Sahlberg, 2016) that inevitably results from learning a self-centred way of being during the most formative years of a child’s life will change who that child becomes as an adult. This anti-social ontology is the real threat of the neoliberal agenda on human existence and what I am concerned with in this thesis in regards to education.

### **The Purpose of Education, the Knowledge Economy, and Human Capital**

Although neoliberal economic policy has yet to invade Canadian public policy as much as it has elsewhere in the world, we are still not immune. Economic decisions made by the Federal and Provincial governments directly and indirectly impact education and schooling in each province because education in Canada is a public affair, sanctioned by the governments of each Province, the Federal School Act, and the Canadian Constitution. Writing about the BC Education Plan (the precursor to the new curriculum) Sen (2016) states, "Neoliberal ideology, discourse, and practice have spread and been embraced by the general public in almost every aspect of life around prioritizing and making choices on a day-to-day basis largely for the sake of personal good" (p.

163). Specifically, what we are beginning to see in BC in educational policy, discourse, and rhetoric is evidence of the ontological underpinnings of neoliberal ideology: a way of being in the world where competition, individualism, and accumulation are valued above all. This way of being thus shapes students' actions, behaviour, and expectations; as well as the teacher's practice in consideration of her students.

I stated above that schooling is about control, knowledge, and readiness for work; and that, historically, a teacher's proficiency at her job is based in her ability *to do* what needs to be done in order to achieve predetermined goals and outcomes. Put another way, if education truly reflects a society's ideals, then schooling is the place in which the work is done to bring those ideals to fruition, where curricula are the blueprint, and teachers are the project managers. As distasteful as this metaphor is, it is apt given the neoliberal state we now inhabit where the purpose of education is to feed a particular desire of the nation's economy to "build" adults who (tacitly) promote a certain set of capitalist values in order to feed the market machine and grow their own and their nation's wealth and power.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century can be described as post-industrial, in which the production of machinery, steel, and agricultural goods no longer form the basis of the economy. While we still require the products of industry and agriculture, they are not what is most valuable in a global context of competition, wealth, and potential. What is of most value, however, is knowledge and information. In a post-industrial, neoliberal knowledge economy (Stiglitz, 1999), knowledge is a "good" in the way that anything bought and sold in the market place is either a good or a service. In comparison to the industrial or agricultural economy where commodities (or goods) are products of industry or agriculture, information is the commodity in a knowledge economy.

However, this information is not understood as the sole possession of a single human being, but rather a person's "worth" is only realized after plugging oneself into a knowledge production machine.

In a neoliberal knowledge economy, the emphasis is on a person's cognitive and practical skills—what one is able to think and to do creatively (read: maximizing output with minimal input), flexibly (read: able to change easily and often to adjust to fluctuating market tastes), and superbly (read: better than anyone else). Historical wisdom, sustained study, deep understanding—once thought to be the profound benefits of an education—are not even considered in a knowledge economy. Education is not even about getting a "good job" anymore: one with security, (limited) upward mobility, and personal satisfaction. Rather, learning, in a knowledge economy, defines the flourishing life (Coulter and Wiens, 2008) as one in which material accumulation and the choices and notoriety that wealth bring are the ultimate reward. The job is just the means to this end; it is as temporary and (inter)changeable as the skill set of its human resources. It is something to be endured for the greater promise of being able to buy more stuff and post it on Instagram so that all of our followers can like it. In this paradigm, education and schooling become client-service delivery systems designed to add to a student's "toolbox" or "arsenal" in order to make her competitive in all of the job market, the money market, the social media market, and the super market.

As the blueprint of a neoliberal vision for education and society, the current iteration of the BC curriculum serves as an example. The language of the main page regarding graduation information stresses choice, flexibility, variation, innovation, potential, and success. It states,

“The new curriculum will arm [students] with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.”<sup>11</sup>

The use of the military metaphor suggests that adulthood and the world of work is a battle ground and that this curriculum can only help a child’s chances at survival. The curriculum is focused on “enabling capable young people to thrive in a rapidly changing world... conceptualized largely in terms of individual young people’s employment outcomes and their contribution to economic growth” (Sen, 2016, p. 151). While success in the documents is not explicitly defined as material wealth, it is implied as being intimately tied to the career or careers a student chooses and, thus, the wages they earn.

Sen (2016) traces what he calls the “genealogy” (p. 141) of the BC curriculum and finds that the current iteration informing what teachers in BC do is heavily influenced by “dominant actors from mostly technology and edu-business corporations known for promoting market-oriented models of schooling and technology-based and digital education programs and services” (p. 146). The “Path to Graduation” webpage<sup>12</sup>, is decidedly futuristic—images are pixelated and include a rocket, charts, cogs, a pencil and ruler, a microscope and lightbulb, books, an email icon, and a computer keyboard. The neoliberal belief that “the driving force behind economic growth is technological change” (Olssen and Peters, p. 332) is reflected in the choice of graphic design. The webpage subtly conveys that science and technology are the available or desirable career choices of the future while nowhere is there any indication that a life immersed in the arts may be an option.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/graduation> accessed Sept 22, 2018.

<sup>12</sup> <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/graduation> accessed Sept 22, 2018.

On the New Curriculum page<sup>13</sup>, in a white box in the centre of the page is the following sentence: “Personalized learning is at the heart of the new curriculum” (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). When John Dewey published *Democracy and Education* in 1916 and advocated for the centrality of the child in schooling, “personalized learning” was born (Hansman, 2016). Since then, education in BC has included iterations of student-centred curriculum and philosophy to this day. However, in the current climate, the attention on student choice and personalized learning in schooling means that “education is primarily about achieving individual prosperity,” (Sen, 2016, p. 153), and that individual prosperity is made more possible when schooling is tailored to the individual in various ways. In an effort to streamline the way personalized learning is carried out, technology is used “because it can be structured to meet the developmental needs of individual learners in terms of the pace, the level of difficulty, the content, and the environment of their learning” (Sen, 2016, p. 137). Technology-based personalized learning, therefore, effectively marginalizes the teacher and her educative role. In this paradigm, as will be discussed below, the relational is efficiently removed from an education which now only serves to perpetuate individualism, competition, and the growing of human capital.

Gary Becker (1999) states, “Education and training are the most important investments in human capital” (p. 17) where human capital is understood as, perhaps, the most valuable commodity that a business, business sector, and nation possesses. While the neoliberal values of competition, individualism, and accumulation may be directed at each and every person within a society, the over-riding ontology of the knowledge economy does not actually recognize the

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<sup>13</sup> <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum-updates> Accessed Sept 22, 2018.

individual as such. Instead, the citizens of a country simply comprise potential human capital. Becker (1999) goes on to say that “human capital analysis assumes that schooling raises earnings and productivity mainly by providing knowledge, skills, and a way of analyzing problems (p. 19). The use of the term “competencies” (as opposed to solely skills or knowledge) in the BC Curriculum also echoes this assumption. For to be competent denotes all of capability, skill, knowledge, efficiency, effectiveness, and success. A boon for human capital, indeed.

In all the grade and subject specific curricular documents, the bulk of each document is the section called “Curricular Competencies” which takes up the central part of each webpage. “Content” is included but is relegated to the far right of each page. It is widely understood by teachers in BC that the curricular competencies are to be the focus of instruction; no longer is pedagogical content the sun around which the curriculum orbits. Now that content can easily be accessed with the touch of a screen, the emphasis is not so much on what one knows, but what one is able *to do* with what one knows. Verbs such as assessing, comparing, recognizing, analyzing, formulating, making, seeking, describing, thinking, synthesizing, applying, responding, constructing, and developing dominate the competencies. While the content is still somewhat indispensable and used to assess student performance, the competencies are considered the major armaments of future success. These competencies above all determine that the student who graduates from this course of study will be able to compete in the world of work that deals with information processing and idea creation/refining.

In addition to curricular competencies, the BC curriculum also promotes a (not so) hidden curriculum of Core Competencies: Communication, Creative and Critical Thinking, Personal and

Cultural Identity, Personal Responsibility and Awareness, and Social Responsibility.<sup>14</sup> This extra-curriculum is obviously also geared toward the individual: “Core competencies are sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning” (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). The rhetorical insistence that each student (and teacher) in the BC education system must be a life-long learner in order to survive in the fast-changing world we now live in has become internalized as a way of being over the last decade. This way of being all but ensures that once a student graduates, she will then seek (and purchase) other learning opportunities in order to increase her worth as demonstrated in her performance in the knowledge economy. Thus, the highly-skilled BC graduate *becomes* part of Canadian human capital and, as the wealth of the country increases commensurate with her graduation and each new learning opportunity she purchases, the money poured into her compulsory education is justified again and again as a high rate of return on the investment.

### **Neoliberalism and Teachers**

I began the last section stating that neoliberalism has yet to make great inroads into Canadian educational policy and yet, it seems that, perhaps it has, after all. Where once education might have been seen as part of the natural course of a human life, or even “an end in itself” (Hudson & Klees, 2012), it appears that from the beginning of compulsory schooling in BC to the present day, it has never been anything more or less than a means to an end. Depending on what this end looks like, this is not necessarily a negative feature of the institution of education. Currently,

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<sup>14</sup> <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies> accessed Nov 25, 2018.

however, neoliberal ideology is determining what the ends look like and how education, schooling, and curriculum can change to best serve these ends. As a teacher, the thought of a society solely motivated by self-centred material gains, that values competition, individuality, and the accumulation of wealth saddens me. I am disheartened that the values of community, benevolent humanity, and compassion seem absent in both my students and fellow teachers who wonder aloud what's in it for them. For the neoliberal machine does not begin and end with students. As integral (for now) parts of the schooling enterprise, teachers are also affected by neoliberal educational policy. Above I use the metaphor of curriculum as blueprint and teacher as project manager. In a neoliberal ontology, this is exactly what we are. Our competencies, like those of our students, are also determined by the values of competition, individualism, and accumulation of wealth. Again, while this is not happening in Canada to the extent it is in the United States in regards to performance, merit pay, outputs, and accountability (Klees, 2008; Roberston, 2012), it is happening and it shows no sign of stopping.

Neoliberalism and the knowledge economy are truly global phenomena of a “shared paradigm, one that has far-reaching consequences for how teaching and teacher education are defined” (Paine and Zeichner, 2012, p. 577). In the ontology of neoliberalism, a teacher is a doer, a performer, a competitor, and an individual who remains solely accountable for the changes she elicits in her students as manager of the educational skill-building project. Earlier I defined teachers as those who manage their students such that skills and competencies (as we have seen) can be accumulated by the child. I went on to say that teachers *do this* so that, when graduating into society, their students are ready to face the challenges of becoming a part of the economy necessary to their survival and the survival of the country. In this neoliberal world of education,

teachers are *facilitators* of learning where the focus is on the *learner* and *her learning*. Gert Biesta (2017) argues that "learning as an outcome...is problematic because it puts the entire responsibility for the achievements of students on the shoulders of the teacher" (p. 23) even while it can only remain the sole responsibility of the student. As any teacher can tell you, you cannot make someone learn something. And yet, in the neoliberal epistemology, since learning is key to the accumulation of what is required to be able to participate in the knowledge economy, the teacher is implicated as instrumental to this impossible task by the actions she performs.

Just a cursory survey of the competencies required by a pre-service teacher to pass her teaching practicum at UBC reveals a similar use of verbs as in the BC Curriculum. According to the Faculty of Education Performance Checklist (see: Appendix), a teacher proves her instrumental worth in the schooling project when she demonstrates, assumes, communicates, contributes, uses, engages, links, plans, designs, integrates, adapts, locates, maintains, provides, shows, models, adjusts, emphasizes, develops, organizes, establishes, and reinforces. The overall language of the document places learning at the centre of the teacher's abilities (rather than teaching), where the actions of the teacher make or break the development (read: success) of the learner. In fact, there are only three of the thirty-eight expectations of a teacher candidate that speak to *who* the teacher is. However, even these performances are specific to her functioning well in the workplace. When she proves herself to be dependable and punctual (Section 1, #4), she implicitly seals her membership in the world for work and her belief in that world by adhering to the factory model of time. When she demonstrates that she can be all of proactive, responsible, respectful, and cooperative (Section 1, #4, #5), she fulfills the social expectations of both a leader and follower depending on the circumstances she encounters. In a school, teachers

know this back and forth well, being proactive and responsible, for example, when amongst children and peers, and respect and cooperation when amongst administration or parents. Some teachers even find themselves fluctuating between all four states when in the presence of fragile egos or narcissism. At such times, the teacher who is, above all, flexible enough to be what the situation demands will be most successful. Moreover, when the teacher candidate is put in a position where she disagrees with those faculty determining her fate, #5 actually curtails any desire she may have to verbalize her objections—no matter how warranted they may be. Additionally, when the teacher “is open to and acts on advice to improve professional practice” (Section 2, #1), she also demonstrates that she is able to subordinate herself to a hierarchy of experience. In fact, this last quality actually places our newly minted professional in a perpetually subordinate position that has additional detrimental effects on her conception of herself as a teaching professional, even while it simultaneously creates her as the same life-long learner that is so highly privileged by the educational marketplace and where her individual worth is dependent on her ability to consume, compete, repeat.

An education driven by neoliberal capitalist ideology, then, instrumentalizes the teacher as a propagator of the ideals of competition, individualism, and wealth. The supreme irony of all of what I have written is that instrumental means both useful *and* indispensable. And yet, as our jobs become increasingly similar to those of automata (technology) programmed to perform series of *learner-service* functions, we are actually becoming disposable commodities in this system—human capital of much less worth than the students we teach: *If we even teach them anymore*. In the learner-service model, schools and curricula are tailored to the individual tastes of students’ demands, which means that teaching has truly changed. As stated above, an

education can now be obtained by means other than direct instruction from one human being to another. Face to face interaction and physical attendance in a school or classroom are becoming less and less practical and preferable for some students. If the rampant individuality of neoliberal ideology prevails, schools as we know them—a place in which face to face interaction and the physical presence of student and teachers is required—will cease to exist. And, it seems to me, once we remove the physical relationships from schooling, the loss of community, benevolent humanity, and compassion cannot be far behind.

Neoliberal rhetoric is (re)casting schooling as a business enterprise where teachers perform the functions of managers and client service agents, rather than act as human beings in the world with others. Above I quoted Maxine Greene and her image of the schooling machine and my place as a cog within it. There have been many times I have felt like this in the minds of others: parents who beseech me to change their child's grades, regardless of the (lack of) evidence of understanding, just so they can increase their grade point average and chances at post-secondary acceptance; administrators who drill-down directives from District staff so far removed from the minute human interactions of the class that they cannot even see how damaging their so-called data-collection techniques are to the environment of trust I have created with my students. Who am I when I, in one breath, explain to my students the values I have for community and collaboration and, then, in the other, administer individualized exams designed to rank and sort them? I am a hypocrite. If we are not to be hypocrites and accomplices in the damaging structural change occurring in our world and our profession, I contend that teachers resist the forces working to reduce human interaction to an exchange of commodities locked in a

battle in which there can be only one winner and far too many losers. But how do we resist such an insidious force?

In order for teachers even to begin to conceive of the changes necessary to oppose the increasing instrumentalization of our profession, we must first commit to an exposition of our deeply held assumptions about what it means to be a part of this profession. The next step, then, is to examine and trouble these assumptions, as we trace their origins and applicability to our present state—and more specifically, as we scrutinize how our assumptions might tacitly promote the very neoliberal values working to our detriment.

In my own worldview, education is a natural inclination of human existence in which we learn from our environment composed of relationships between things and beings. Schooling, moreover, as an institutionalization of this inclination, is no less rooted in relations between environment and beings, although the dominant beings in schooling are the teacher and the student. For me, this profound and intimate relationship between human beings forms the basis of education and schooling, and indeed, all of human existence. As such, I am vehemently opposed to any practice or policy that seeks to sully or remove this relationship and the qualities it engenders: kinship, care, ethics, cooperation. *But what can I do?* As I ponder this question, the contingency of my situation suddenly becomes apparent. For, only in asking what one can do does one even conceive of one's agency to respond to the situation. Herein lies the gap in which we might find a moment of truth.

In *Part 3*, I consider what the possibilities might be for teachers and teaching. Possibilities are uncertainties with probability imagined for “matters that never were, that are not yet, and that may well never be” (Arendt, 1978, Book 2, p. 14)—both because circumstances

may/will change or because the *might*-ness of the possible may only be impossible due to the current constraints of existence. Consider the possibility of going to the Moon as conceived in Newton's time as opposed to 1953. Or the possibility of a child of the '80s having a \$1000 computer the size of a calculator in her possession at all times. These imagined possibilities of what might be came to fruition. But they just as easily might never have been actualized were it not for those who put together seeming disparate or impossible ideas. The goal is to think and to think deeply— to reimagine what was and is in order to imagine what might be. Maxine Greene writes,

Teaching as possibility in dark and constraining times...is a matter of awakening and empowering today's young people to name, to reflect, to imagine, and to act with more and more concrete responsibility in an increasingly multifarious world. At once, it is a matter of enabling them to remain in touch with dread and desire, with the smell of lilacs and the taste of a peach. The light may be uncertain and flickering; but teachers in their lives and works have the remarkable capacity to make it shine in all sorts of corners and, perhaps, to move newcomers to join with others and transform. (Greene, 1997, p. 18)

Greene's philosophy is inspiring and seeks to affect teachers to perpetuate a cycle of constant renewal in their students, motivated by love and imagination. But what of the motivation, love, and imagination required to perpetuate a cycle of constant renewal in teachers and teaching? From our survey of history to the current vision of the future for BC, it seems *the concept of teacher* has undergone many iterations and, yet, very little has changed. In *Part 3*, then, in an effort to quell my hypocrisy and discomfort with the seeming fact of my future, I begin my thinking in the gap by exploring the idea of teacher as concept.

### **Poetic Interlude #3**

*I think my father  
adhered to a paradigm that values organization, methods,  
ideals and traditions of  
irreproachable knowledge*

*I realized that  
a life project seeking  
the absolute rationality of the world  
and way of being  
was wrong*

*I no longer wanted  
the answer this way.*

*possibilities  
are only discoverable by  
always wondering  
if I just put my mind to it*

*On December 20, 2000,  
my stable structure of pragmatism  
and  
my knowledgeable and highly educated father  
died.*

*I was 25 years old*

## Part 3: Thinking in the Gap

Maxine Greene (1973) states that “whatever the teacher’s concern, it is directed at the future, at what is not yet” (p. 287). Here, Greene is pointing to the fact that, as a profession, teaching is a forward-looking endeavour, where we work toward an unknown future that has not yet happened but is *expected* to occur, and sometimes in very specific ways. Because of this expectation, the school’s and the teacher’s job is to prepare the child/student to inhabit a predicted (predictable?) future according to the parameters set out by the society in which the school operates. The irony of the whole situation being that we really have no idea what the future will hold, even while we make our predictions and work toward their fruition. We truly have no idea how things might/will change. And, yet, change they do and will and, where possible, as a result of human agency. If I have an intention in creating this thesis, it is that teachers will read it and glean from it the ability to realize their own agency to be the change they desire—to move from object to subject—to make the(ir) world and future.

The idea that teachers might be the ones to effect change in education *and* schooling (a distinction I made in Part 1) in BC is simultaneously obvious and, to some, a fantasy. It is obvious given the essential part that teachers play within the institutionalized educational setting of school: teachers’ jobs, after all, are to affect and change hundreds, even thousands of young lives in the course of a career. However, to many, it is only fantasy (or horror) to imagine straying from the script, so to speak, in order to effect structural change in the institution of education and schooling itself. Sartre (2015) writes,

Insofar as man is immersed in the historical situation, he does not even succeed in conceiving of the failures and lacks in a political organization or determined economy;

this is not, as is stupidly said, because he 'is accustomed to it,' but because he apprehends it in its plenitude of being and because he does not even imagine that things can be otherwise. (p. 456-7)

Teachers' plenitude of being is something tacitly shaped and understood from when we are first in school ourselves: "The mass experience of public education has made teaching one of the most familiar professions" (Britzman, 1991, p. 3) and the one about which most people claim understanding. Britzman (1991) goes on to explain that "schooling fashions the meanings, realities, and experiences of students; thus, those learning to teach draw from their subjective experiences constructed from actually being there" (p. 3), which, in turn, "shapes what [people] come to understand about the work of teachers" (p. 4). For many teachers, our concept of our position and job within society is set early, during our own schooling, and, as such, resists deep critical reconsideration. However, to say that teachers exist without imagining a different way to do things would be both incorrect and unfair. Certainly there are those who work proactively to make change. But these changes are often piecemeal, adjusting this or that aspect of the system in a way that does little to change the system itself. Rarely are we able to reimagine the structure as something wholly different because, as Sartre points out, this would also require a *re-*imagination of one's entire existence—their ontology or way of being. And yet, for ontological change to occur—rather than piecemeal structural alteration of an already reified existence—imagination is exactly what we need.

Imagination is the process of conjuring images or ideas not immediately in our presence, or "the possibility of positing an hypothesis of unreality" (Sartre, 1948, p. 265). If change is defined as the making real of the (as yet) unreal, then imagination must be the first step. Indeed,

many of us don't actually believe this and, instead relegate imagination to a powerless place of fancy far removed from reality. However, the crux of social change is the point at which what was once only imagined becomes real through the actions of human beings. Generally it is accepted that only those with both will and power are able to drive change (Patterson, 2018). In terms of the system of education and schooling, depending on the ways teachers understand will and power, this state of agency can either be attainable or remain elusive. I believe that the will and power to drive change exists in each of us equally—as a fact of our birth—but that a person's denial of this or inability to see it becomes clouded as worldly existence interferes. The rest of this section thinks toward a clearing where new and different ways of being teacher might emerge as the precursor to the change we seek.

### **Teacher as Traditional Concept**

What is a teacher? *A teacher is \_\_\_\_\_*. Fill in the blank. You may use a noun or an adjective. *A teacher is helpful. A teacher is attentive. A teacher is loving.* Now, what if I ask, Who is a teacher? The answer there might be "*A teacher is me.*" or that "*I am a teacher.*" But how does this help anyone to define what or who a teacher is? Given the prevalent social institution that is school, and as we have seen in *Part I* of this thesis, the definition or determination of *teacher-ness* or *teacher-hood* has preoccupied governments and institutions since the beginning. Meanwhile, of all the teachers I know and have known, I am different from each and every one in the same way that they are different from me and everyone else. But how can this be possible? Moreover, what does this fact do to the idea of teacher? According to historiography, BC Royal Commission reports, certification boards, and current neoliberal

curriculum documents, a teacher has been and is a very particularly defined “thing” with a definition that has only varied to a limited extent over the past 150 years, and often only in terms of functions. Presented with this past and present, a teacher, then, is likely just a job title. But, unlike other jobs, this title does not entirely represent the intensely relational and even natural aspect of the pedagogical relationship between human beings, teacher and student. In the end of the previous section, I wrote,

In my own worldview, education is a natural inclination of human existence in which we learn from our environment composed of relationships between things and beings. Schooling, moreover, as an institutionalization of this inclination, is no less rooted in relations between environment and beings, although the dominant beings in the case of schooling are the teacher and the student. For me, this profound and intimate relationship between human beings forms the basis of education and schooling, and indeed, all of human existence. (p. 56)

In keeping with this worldview, I have to concede that a teacher/teaching is more than just a job title and/or a job. It is less concrete and more nuanced. But *what* is it? A concept is defined as an abstract or general idea: Could teacher be a concept? And, if we accept that teacher is a concept, then what might be lost in this conceptualization? Or, more interestingly, what might be possible?

If we reject the notion that teacher is a job title and accept, instead, that it is a concept, we may then ask the following, “What might it mean for my profession to be considered a concept and for me to inhabit or embody this concept?” My first thought is that it would be detrimental to me if teacher were a concept since it would relegate my choices to rules implicit within the

conceptualization itself. Derrida defines the “traditional understanding of concepts as universal descriptions of an object or class of objects” (Cook, 1998, p. 23), as a “general rule or definition” (p. 25). If we view “teacher” as a concept in this traditional sense, the rule of the concept becomes part of the universal definition of teachers. But aren’t most jobs already like this: governed by general rules (traditions, standards, ethics) that define and delimit the conduct and actions performed when doing that specific job? For example, a driver must work safely so as not to run people over. Similarly, a teacher must also work safely (read: be ethical) so as not to harm students when teaching a lesson. Seems simple enough. However, the stark difference between the two positions in this example (aside from the fact that a driver is rarely considered a concept) is that the kinds of actions teachers perform on the job, overwhelmingly, have to do with relationships with others—human to human interaction. Looked at in this way, any distinctions which attempt to govern conduct or limit actions to a generalizable or universal set of rules true for the concept of teacher will also have to be able to determine the actions of *all* teachers at *all* times *always*. However, as stated above, even though variance has been minimal, the concept of teacher *has changed* over the past 150 years. Thus, the traditional understanding of concept cannot apply to the concept of teacher. So we look once again to Derrida for another option.

### **Teacher as Iterative Concept and Who-ness**

Iterability is a concept created by Derrida (1972) that describes a quality of so-called universal concepts and is understood as that “which renders possible both the “normal” rule or convention and its transgression, transformation, simulation, or imitation” (p. 98, emphasis in original). In

this way, a concept such as teacher can undergo change (alteration) and still remain a part of the universal concept for it “entails the necessity of thinking *at once* both the rule and the event, concept and singularity” (p. 119, emphasis in original). Take, for example, my assertion above that I am a teacher who is very much unlike many of the teachers I know. According to Derrida’s concept of iterability, this works for the concept of teacher as it is enacted within each moment, or as my colleagues and I act as teachers “in the singularity of the event” (p. 119). Each of us is a teacher, despite and because of the ways in which we embody the concept in the unique, unpremeditated events of our being a teacher. However, it is extremely important to recall that the differences that have occurred in the concept of teacher over time have not only been determined by teachers in their singular actions with students in school.

As outlined in *Part 1* much of the provenance of the iterability of the concept of teacher occurred as a result of transformation at the level of government in response to socioeconomic conditions. In addition, as explained in *Part 2*, neoliberal policy is now seeking to *re-iterate* the concept of teacher in a move that can only be described as transgression to suit its own economic agenda. This is an iteration that could potentially remove the relational from the concept altogether, thereby completely eliminating the teacher’s ability to effect change in the concept herself. Ironically, if this succeeds, then the concept would likely resist further iteration and become solidified. Teacher would, in short, cease to be a concept in the worst way possible, for it would become simply a job, like the driver described above. But I am getting ahead of myself. This is not where we are yet and we are thinking in the gap, looking for a moment of truth. Let us return to the concept of teacher and its iterability in the hands of those who inhabit the concept: the teachers *per se*.

Above I stated that teachers have traditionally and are currently defined by what they are able *to do* as a host of functions or actions. If we accept the proposition of teacher as iterable concept, then this means that one of the ways in which I can effect the iterations of the concept teacher is seated in the *what-ness* of my teacher being.

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1998) discusses the difference between the *what-ness* and the *who-ness* of a person (p. 178). In the Arendtian sense, the *what-ness* of one is the “sum of the factual characteristics of one’s identity” (Hermsen, 1999, p. 68), and comprises “memberships” in socio-historic collectivities (ibid.). These aspects of my character, according to Arendt (1998), are “qualities” (p. 181) that I share with other “living beings” (ibid.) and so do not differentiate me from others. As a teacher, the qualities of trustworthiness, courage, honour, or dedication might point to my *what-ness*. Regardless though, a list of these characteristics—however exhaustive and lengthy—still gives no sense of *who I am* as a teacher which is formed in moments of my being with others—the singularity of each event. *Who-ness* is implicit in my “words and deeds” (Arendt, 1998, p. 178). As opposed to *what-ness*, these words and deeds are inextricably attached to me and form who I am. *Who-ness* is not part of the socio-historic categorization of teacher, but, rather, remains an integral part of the singular human entity from whom it springs. The singular events of my teaching in the world with others, and the words and deeds which occur in those events, actually constitute both my unique *who-ness* *and* *what-ness*:

Who we are is as much a matter of how we appear to others as it is a matter of our own self-perception. Indeed, our self-perception is bound up in and is largely formed in response to the ways we are named and positioned by others. In this sense, the ways in which we are positioned by others—at the level of institutions, systems, social

structures, and by individuals—are constitutive of what we are. They condition, although they do not determine, who we become. (Levinson, 2001, p. 21)

In this quotation, Levinson makes clear that because words and deeds must occur in the world with others, who-ness, too, relies on interactions with others. While I can absolutely understand how my what-ness is majorly constitutive of the concept of teacher, as well as its iterations, what of my unique who-ness? If all teachers are just different people who are different as a result of our words and deeds, can my unique who-ness be constitutive of iterations of the concept of teacher as well? The answer must be yes. We cannot simply allow some actions to count and not others. If I embody the concept of teacher and this concept is determined by others who name and position me but is also determined by me in my words and deeds, then *what and who I am* must profoundly affect the concept I inhabit. If we accept this then I am not determined by the conception that calls me teacher; rather I determine it. Furthermore, my colleagues also determine it but in completely different ways, and infinitely and concurrently to my own iterative actions. In this way we can imagine the concept as never still, static, concrete, or complete. Teacher, as an iterable concept, is only ever dynamic and shooting off in multiple directions at once. The implications of this dynamism are staggering to the heretofore narrow conceptualization of the teacher and actually collapses the structure wherein I proposed that we consider teacher as concept in the first place.

Derrida (1972) writes, “when a concept is to be treated as a concept I believe that one has to accept the logic of all or nothing” (p. 117). In this dichotomy, Derrida is referring to the ways in which a concept is iterable—either in nature or degree (p. 117)—and that if a concept is a concept then we must allow *all* differences in nature or degree to occur, or none. The ideas,

ideals, and machinations of governments and policy documents to iterate the concept of teacher have been differences in nature and degree—understood as what-ness or the defining rules of my movements. If we limited the iterability of the concept of teacher to these differences then perhaps the conceptualization might hold. But Derrida says that it is an all or nothing situation. This means, as stated above, we cannot allow some iterations to count and not others. So, we must concede that teacher is not a conceptualizable thing (Derrida, 1972) after all. The being of a teacher is a *real* event in which my words and deeds unfold in the moment of my who-ness. When we acknowledge the reality of teacher-being, we deny the possibility of teacher as concept. However, our rejection of teacher as concept, in no way diminishes the realization of the power of my who-ness to constitute reality. In fact, it is only by working through the thought process that ultimately rejects teacher as concept that I am able to appreciate my who-ness as constitutive of reality. The next question, then, asks, “In what ways might I use the power of my who-ness to reimagine *the project* of my being?”

### **The Project of Natality: Sartre and Arendt**

In two of his major works, *Being and Nothingness* and *The Psychology of Imagination*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes life or existence as a fundamental project: “the original project which is expressed in each of our empirically observable tendencies is then the *project of being*” (Sartre, 2015, p. 586, emphasis in original). Sartre’s concept of the original or fundamental project is the constitution of being, where the project is the existence in the world of an actor who continually creates/projects her self into the nothingness of the future, and where the fact of this future nothingness allows and welcomes such continued acts of creation:

When I constitute myself as the comprehension of a possible as my possible, I must recognize its existence at the end of my project and apprehend it as myself, awaiting me down there in the future and separated from me by a nothingness. In this sense I apprehend myself as the original source of my possibility, and it is this which ordinarily we call the consciousness of freedom. (Sartre, 2015, p. 65)

In his philosophy, while the project of being does not specifically contain a moral imperative, Sartre (2015) refers to the concept of “bad faith” (p. 70) as a quality of deception caused by believing my future self to be already constituted from the facticity of my past self. Put another way, bad faith occurs when I allow my past what-ness (what I have said and done and how others have identified me, including the collectivities to which I belong) to restrict my who-ness—my words and deeds in the moment of being. This self-imposed restriction is termed bad faith because my actions are therefore not a true projection of my being, rather, they are a playing at being. Because, even though the creation and projection of my words and deeds into the future are real, what I project is a fraudulent representation of my being based in my *essence* (Sartre, 2015) or what I have been, in the past. I believe that it is exactly this state of affairs that causes a new teacher, especially, to struggle with her choice to enter the profession. However, in the case of teachers, the essence of the teacher is not so much an essence determined by the facticity of her singular past, but rather, an essence determined only by the socio-historic conceptualization of teacher what-ness. This is what I experienced in the beginning of my own career.

From the moment I began my first contract in a Delta high school in 2014, I was troubled by philosophical questions surrounding my choice to become a teacher: *What are my responsibilities as a teacher to my students, to my job, and to myself? And can I reconcile them if*

*they conflict? Do I have to teach the curriculum as stated? What if I don't believe in what I am supposed to teach? What does professional autonomy mean in my daily life as a teacher? What is the point of schooling and are we accomplishing this?* In an attempt to answer these and other questions, I reflected on my own experience as a student in various capacities and asked my colleagues if they had any insight. However, most of them seemed uninterested in probing the depths of the philosophies informing our profession and my discomfort only grew. And the more I encountered other teachers unwilling to engage my questions, the more I doubted the source of my discomfort and, instead, simply accepted that this was the life I had chosen. I subsumed my self uncritically to the normative conceptualization of what a teacher says and does, and, not surprisingly, things only got worse. As the dissatisfaction inside of me grew, head in my hands every Sunday night, I wondered often and aloud, *What was I thinking? What was I thinking when I decided to become a teacher? Was I even thinking? And if so, about what?* In pondering this series of questions I realized suddenly that I hadn't been thinking or, rather, that I hadn't been thinking deeply enough to understand my situation and what it meant now that I was in it.

I have often stood in front of a class and wondered why I am teaching what I am. I have subconsciously attended to Hannah Arendt when she insists in *The Human Condition* (1998) that we must “think what we are doing” (p. 5). Arendt goes on to chastise “thoughtlessness” as “the heedless recklessness or hopeful confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty” (p. 5). To think what I am doing means that I question these *truths* and anything purported to be truth in order to determine for myself what is. This has always been how I lived my life. However, as a teacher, this was not *the sanctioned way of being*. The thinking/questioning part of my who-ness did not fit with the socio-historic concept of teacher

propagandized in the cultural myths (Britzman, 1991) of schooling. Moreover, I found in my colleagues a similar, limited way of being. When we allow an institutionalized conceptualization of teacher and bad faith to determine the course of our futures, we risk something profound. If I accept that my who-ness as a teacher is constitutive of reality—my being in the world with others—then when I allow my original project to be determined by bad faith, I risk wasting my supreme capacity to effect change in the world by the very fact of my who-ness. I risk my natality.

Hannah Arendt's concept of *natality* (both primary and political) is a philosophy of action that sees each human life as possessing infinite potential for newness. The first instance of this potential—primary natality—occurs when a child is born, is new in the world, as in someone who has never been before. With birth as the beginning, life becomes a series of moments of newness, where “‘natality’ describes not only the birth of the child but also the force of unpredictability unleashed into the world by this event (Bowen-Moore, 1989, p. 22). Just by being born, each human is a natal and possesses the capability to change everything simply because their words and deeds will never have been said and done before. For Arendt, education is a deeply social project in which we protect and nurture the primary natality of the new until the time that they may be led out (the word education comes from L. *educere*, meaning to lead out) into the political (of the *polis*, *public*) world. Once in the political world, natals then possess the potential to start something new “which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before” (Arendt, 1998, p. 177-8) with thought, speech, and action: in short, with who-ness. These acts occurring in the political realm (in public with others) are “not the beginning of

something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself” (p. 177) and are “the miracle that saves the world” (p. 247).

In Arendt’s (1998) philosophy, education especially consists of action “rooted in natality” (p. 247) where concern for others and the future of the world is not optional. According to Arendt (1993), when we undertake the project of education, we “decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it” (p. 196). This responsibility is embodied in our choice both to nurture primary natality in children *and* to enact our own natality in the political arena. In Arendt’s (1993) ontology, when teachers commit to the educational project out of a genuine love for the world, this commitment confers upon them an authority bound to this responsibility:

The teacher’s qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world.  
(p. 189)

What is interesting about Arendt’s choice of words (qualification and authority) is the way in which they very simply detail the *what-ness* of a teacher without the need for Royal Commission reports or university curricula. Moreover, Arendt’s conceptualization is neither restrictive nor formulaic. Rather, it allows me to consider my fundamental project and the open situation of the nothingness of the future without fear or bad faith. As a teacher, I have authority not because the socio-historical definition of the teacher says it is so, or because I control my students with punitive measures that in no way reflect who I am; I have authority because I choose to love the world and I allow this and nothing else to underpin *all of my words and deeds*. I know the world to be older than I am and I respect this provenance. But I also know that the world will/must outlive me and so I ensure its survival as much as I am able to by thinking what I am doing and

by undertaking as my *original project*, my own who-ness and natality: my supreme capacity to effect change in the world with my unprecedented words and deeds.

A teacher consists of difference(s) born from speaking and acting, where my who-ness is a *project* of my political natality and my imagination of the possibilities for an unknowable future:

The moment we turn our mind to the future, we are no longer concerned with “objects” but with projects, and it is not decisive whether they are formed spontaneously or as anticipated reactions to future circumstances. And just as the past always presents itself to the mind in the guise of certainty, the future’s main characteristic is its basic uncertainty, no matter how high a degree of probability prediction may attain. (Arendt, 1978, p. 13)

The taking up of this project does not take the form of merely thinking; it is a project of thinking, speech, and action. The verb “to project” means “to throw forward” and this requires that the thrower both has something to throw (speech, language, words) and is engaged in throwing it (acting and speaking) in front of oneself (to the future). But before I project myself into the world, I must think about what I am about to do. Sartre (2015) sees this project as a *fundamental* project of being that bears on a person’s choice of her way of being and is expressed by action in the light of a future end” (p. 654). For Arendt and Sartre, both, these ends are indistinguishable from existence—from being, and the world that allows my being to be. Therefore, as a teacher especially, if I love and take responsibility for the world, then my fundamental project in which I unleash unprecedented speech and action into the world is carried out only in an effort to renew that world in the ways I feel best serve it.

It is important here to distinguish that the world, as understood in the concept of natality, is not the earth upon which humans stand—although I would extend Arendt’s definition of the world to include the earth as well—but humanity or humankind where “to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time” (Arendt, 1998, p. 52). According to Arendt (1998), action can only properly appear in the “public realm” (p. 50) or the *polis*, where we gather as equals “neither to rule nor to be ruled” (p. 32). Rather, we gather to commune with separate or distinct interpretations of the ways we intend to renew our common world. Although we are different, our difference results from human plurality, which “has the two-fold character of equality and distinction” (p. 175). We are all alike in that we are all human but, in our humanness we remain distinct from all others: past, present, and future. Birmingham (2006) states, “Arendt argues that the affection that is properly political must have two essential political characteristics—openness to others and plurality” (p. 130). As such, within the plurality, it is this openness to others which places limits on human action.

Above, I wrote that natality comes into being in the presence of others, is manifested as an effort to renew the world, and is underpinned by love and responsibility for the world. In the sense that the world is understood as both humanity and the earth, to exercise my supreme capacity for unprecedented action (natality) does not mean, then, that I have unlimited freedom to do as I wish. For, when we gather together as equals and manifest our natality as our original project of being—as words and deeds in the presence of others—we do so with a *common*

purpose to renew the world by ensuring that our unprecedented actions are always informed by love and responsibility for the future of humanity and the world that will necessarily outlive us.

### **Thinking Who We Are Becoming**

My who-ness is determined by how others take up my speech and actions. When I choose to act as a unique individual in the world, that is, in public with others, my natality is manifested. As a teacher, when I choose natality as my project—my supreme capacity for new and unprecedented action—I become part of the creation of the multiplicity of teacher where my words and deeds constitute the realization of that multiplicity. When I choose to undertake the project of education with the same love for the world that underpins my natality, authority is written into my being and I become able to author my *self* in the world as teacher, as one who points to and says “this is our world” (Arendt, 1993, p. 189). And when I choose to take responsibility for the world as-it-is *and* imagine what is possible in a future that is not yet—when I refuse to accept status quo, taken-for-granted truths, and normative values and beliefs, especially when they threaten my who-ness *and* the future of the world, I become able to change the world for all.

The creative and generative act of being a teacher means to be concerned with the building of a common world. The adjectival usage of “common” to modify world is almost tautological as it means belonging to all and “changed together.” In this sense, the world is, always has been, and always will be common, regardless of claims to power or agency, because we change it by the simple (f)act of our being in/on it together. My authority is inscribed in my actions when I consciously work to challenge the policies, epistemologies, and ontologies that threaten the common world I profess to love. Common means impersonal: it transgresses the

personal private and looks out from oneself to the impersonal public. This disposition is the antithesis of neoliberal values for it is deeply rooted in love, community, and the power each one of us has *equally* to effect remarkable change for the sake of humanity and the earth.

As people who have chosen to be in the world with children, the onus is on teachers to think what we are doing, to be critical of truths handed down from on high, to tease out the values underpinning the policies given to us, and to examine them in light of our own thoughtful values and philosophies. We must work to reimagine the educational structure as something wholly different and new because our lives depend on it. To me, the goal of neoliberalism to eradicate the relational from education and schooling is not just a matter of maybe losing my job one day. I am diametrically opposed to everything that neoliberalism stands for: rampant individualism, cut-throat competition, unfettered capitalism, and material accumulation. From all angles, neoliberal ideology flies in the face of education as a humanistic institution with its anti-social values and view of earth as a resource for production. If education is meant to teach—to lead a child out into the world—when we (thoughtlessly) adopt neoliberal ways of being in education, what we are teaching is ultimately detrimental to the wellbeing of all and the planet.

One goal of education is to foster both a sense of self and an acute awareness of the other (human and non-human), which is why the educational project is often conceived of as an emancipatory project—one in which we are freed from normative ways of thinking of and being with others. As teachers, though, emancipation must *begin* with us: we must *set ourselves free* from the ontological restraints that work to subsume our original projects to those of the prevailing powers. We must set free our imagination of different ways of being in the world so that anything becomes possible. In short, we must think who we are becoming.

**Poetic Interlude #4**

*I got from my father  
systems, linear thinking, and rationality—*

*dangerous  
this paradigm  
there is but one ultimate truth,*

*I do not want  
normative situations.*

*in my way of being  
the pleasures of  
language*

*always*

*language*

*opened my eyes  
and with this  
new possibilities*

## Part 4: Future

I began this thesis with a section outlining the history of teacher education in BC and the ways in which that institution sought and seeks to determine the actions and abilities of teachers. In the second section of the thesis, I went on to show how, in the present day, capitalist neoliberal rhetoric and thought is influencing educational policy in order to make schooling and teaching serve the global competition for economic power. And in the third section, I proposed a way in which teachers might respond to all of this determination from without with action. Given all I have written thus far, to address the question of how to teach teachers to resist neoliberalism by becoming authors of a project of natality based in love for the world seems slightly hypocritical. For if we have learned anything in the previous seventy or so pages, it is that the future is unknowable, that who-ness and natality is unprecedented, and that a teacher *can* be made—though not necessarily well. To imagine, then, teaching teachers how to choose a fundamental project of natality and who-ness or, worse, reducing it all to a method, seems absurd, on the one hand because one cannot ensure anything will be acted upon and, on the other, because, if it is acted upon, then it risks falling under the rubric of bad faith. However, despite these issues, the past seventy or so pages also make it clear that the institution does need to change. But in which ways? In an interview with Roger Errera in 1973, Hannah Arendt (2018) says this about freedom:

It rests on the conviction that every human being is a thinking being and can reflect just as I do, and therefore can judge for himself, if he wants to. How I can make this wish or need arise in him, this I don't know. The only thing that can help us, I think is to *réfléchir*, to remember and think back. To think in this sense means to subject whatever

is thought to a critical examination. Thinking actually undermines whatever there is of rigid rules, general opinions, and so forth. That is, there are no dangerous thoughts for the simple reason that thinking itself is such a dangerous enterprise. But I believe nonthinking is even more dangerous (p. 498, emphasis in original).

If freedom is thinking, then perhaps the question is how to cultivate a desire to think in teacher education programs that, traditionally, have relied on the transmission of content knowledge, pedagogical technique, and educational psychology—in short, rigid rules and general opinions—to qualify someone to teach in a school. The question is also how to cultivate a desire to think in someone who comes from a system of schooling that does not value thinking as an act of freedom and who has not been taught to think. The project seems untenable viewed from this angle: an impossible situation, in many ways, except that we do not believe in impossible situations. If the future is indeed an open situation, then there must be a way in. I believe that if we are to break the cycle anywhere, then teacher education is one place to begin.

Teacher education is unique in that it, too, consists of a gap between past and future: between the past that brings me here and the future I can only imagine. Teacher education has the potential to present a “moment of truth” of our-*selves*—the moment of nothingness in which we are confronted with all the possibilities of our who-ness in the not yet. It has the potential to nurture the birth of unprecedented new beginnings and the opportunity to change everything. What if teacher education was about creating this opportunity for thought, rather than outlining endorsed theories of behavioural psychology and classroom management strategies? What if what we learned was steeped in a history or genealogy of teaching but not one restrained by a temporal notion of progress, development, or evolution? How, then, might the understanding of

the provenance of teaching promote unique ways of conceiving the work of a teacher? And how might unique ways of conceiving the work of a teacher manifest in changing the notion of *work* to one of *being*? How can teacher education simultaneously promote a societally determined set of concepts *and* challenge teachers to reimagine those concepts in the singular moments of their being with students? What if a teacher education program was dedicated to disrupting normative onto-epistemologies and nurturing alternative ways of being and knowing?

Systemic change in teacher education programs is not going to happen overnight. Indeed, it will likely take generations to change. Teacher education programs in BC are vetted, accredited, and overseen by the BC Teachers Council (BCTC) which is comprised of sixteen members<sup>15</sup>. Of these sixteen members, approximately twelve of the current spots are held by teachers or former teachers. Imagine what could happen if teacher educators took the preceding questions seriously and enacted their own fundamental project of natality by teaching teachers in new and unprecedented ways. Imagine what those freshly graduated teachers could then do, themselves, in public schools across BC, thinking and promoting thinking in all corners of the province. And now imagine those students growing up and becoming teachers themselves, and their teachers becoming teacher educators and members of the BCTC. Yes, change takes time, but what an exciting time it would be.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bcteacherregulation.ca/aboutus/council.aspx>

*Poetic Interlude #5*

*pondering*

*a different future*

*requires imagination*

*to appreciate*

*what is not yet*

*situations like this*

*overcome*

*the narrative(s)*

*of truth.*

*Unlike my father, I want*

*unpredictability*

*the incompleteness of*

*everything*

## Epilogue

*When I first began teaching, I despaired. Head in my hands often, I wailed aloud these words, “I don’t know what I am doing.” and “I don’t know how to DO this.” My partner, a seasoned teacher for the past two decades, became impatient with me because, in her mind, she felt I did know how to do this and that I was simply making it more difficult for myself than it needed to be. I couldn’t explain to her what I was feeling though. Only now in recalling that time am I able to articulate what I meant by “not knowing” and it was not so much about not being prepared adequately but, rather, that I was having an acute awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new. And in this sense I wasn’t prepared because nowhere in teacher education was this change described.*

*But what was I leaving behind, exactly? So many things about the world and myself and my place in it that I had thought were solid and fixed to certain names were disintegrating around me. I had thought I knew who a teacher is and what she does. I had based my definitions on my own experiences (as one does) as a student in grade school as well as in various post-secondary sites of teaching and learning. And so, my head was in my hands because, even though I had earned my certificate to be a teacher, I slowly began to realize that the being of a teacher was nowhere near what I thought it was or who I thought I was. In fact, it was actually nothing (literally, no thing) because it was just beginning in me. I was in process (and still am) and was not even close to being not yet.*

*In my return to high school as a teacher, I was figuratively returning to an adolescence, where I was undergoing (along with my teenage counterparts) a period of growth and nourishment. This nourishment came in all forms, some more palatable than others. But who I*

*was and would be as a teacher began, first, with a shedding of everything I thought I knew. This was perhaps the most uncomfortable: the conscious demolition and discarding of the mores of teaching and education that had been built in my mind as a student. The reality of being a teacher in those first few months and years were disappointing. I felt the solidity of the attitudes of teachers around me and I was discouraged and disappointed. But my situation eventually shifted. Not surprisingly, the shift came in the form of graduate teacher education and encounters with educators and thinkers who illuminated a different way of seeing the world and showed me that my despair was real and that being a teacher demanded that I think and act. I was beginning to realize the discomfort I felt was actually a suppression of my natality and my desire to do things differently—to be(come) different—and to think freely.*

*When I decided to become a teacher, freedom was not part of what informed my decision—or, at least, I didn't think it was. The reasons I gave had more to do with that thing my father had instilled in me decades ago: that I could do anything I put my mind to. Five years ago, I decided to put my mind to being a teacher because I wanted to shape and influence children in ways I had been shaped and influenced. I wanted to teach them that they, too, could do anything they put their minds to. Moreover, I wanted to help them do it. What I did not realize was that I actually wanted to help them to be free: free from people telling them what to do and free to believe that all their dreams are possible, if they can only just imagine them. Now, after experiencing the same curtailing of my own freedom by a way of thinking and being that goes largely unexamined by the majority of people, I want the same for teachers. This is my fundamental project.*

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# Appendix



a place of mind

## Faculty of Education - Teacher Education Office Performance Checklist (revised, September 2016)

Teacher Candidate \_\_\_\_\_  EDUC 315  EDUC 321/323  10 Week Extended  
 School \_\_\_\_\_  Interim  Midpoint  Final

Upon completion of the extended practicum, teacher candidates are required to meet expectations **(M)** for the items on this checklist at the level of a **beginning teacher**.

N – Not yet meeting expectations	A = Approaching expectations	M = Meeting expectations	Comments	
<b>Section 1: Professional Qualities</b>				
1. Demonstrates enthusiasm and positive attitude for teaching and learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Assumes the role and responsibilities of the teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Demonstrates a commitment to high professional and ethical standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Is dependable, punctual, proactive and responsible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Is respectful and cooperative with advisors and other professionals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Communicates effectively and appropriately with students' families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Contributes to the classroom and school community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Section 2: Inquiry &amp; Reflective Practice</b>				
1. Is open to and acts on advice to improve professional practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Uses effective cycle of questioning, reflection and action	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Engages in constructive conversations with advisors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Links educational research to classroom practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Section 3: Curriculum, Pedagogy &amp; Assessment</b>				
1. Plans according to appropriate goals/objectives/core competencies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Plans detailed units/lessons/learning experiences in advance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Designs logically organized units/lessons/experiences linked to identified goals/objectives/cc's	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Designs units/lessons/experiences that engage students in meaningful learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Demonstrates understanding of subject content	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Integrates multi-modal (including digital) delivery options into classroom practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Adapts and modifies units/lessons to meet the learning needs of all students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8. Lessons/experiences demonstrate overall coherence (introduction, content, conclusion)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9. Uses diverse and pedagogically-sound teaching strategies to engage learners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10. Locates and uses appropriate resources to enhance instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11. Maintains appropriate records for assessment and evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12. Uses formative assessment data to set goals, inform students and guide teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13. Uses appropriate summative assessment, evaluation and reporting strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14. Provides timely and effective feedback to students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Section 4: Diversity &amp; Social Justice</b>				
1. Shows an understanding and addresses the needs of all learners through inclusive language and practices (e.g., sensitivity to ability, language, culture, religion, gender and sexual orientation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Plans learning experiences that incorporate the resources and address the needs of multilingual students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Section 5: Language, Literacies &amp; Culture</b>				
1. Communicates curriculum content clearly and accessibly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Models appropriate written and oral language at all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Adjusts language (e.g., tone/formality/vocabulary) according to audience and/or context	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Uses a variety of verbal and nonverbal modes to communicate (e.g., linguistic, audio-visual, digital, gestural)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Emphasizes language development in all curriculum areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Section 6: Classroom Climate</b>				
1. Develops rapport with students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Organizes the physical environment for learning and safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Establishes appropriate/safe classroom procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Demonstrates an awareness of each student's level of involvement and engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Reinforces classroom expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Maintains an engaged and participatory environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Teacher Candidate's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Observer's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Faculty Advisor  School Advisor  Other

*The Faculty reserves the right to require candidates to withdraw from the Faculty if they are considered to be unsuited to proceed with the practice of teaching.*