BEGINNING TEACHERS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF DOUBT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND EXISTENTIAL INQUIRY

By

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ABSTRACT

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Teaching is a complex and challenging craft. Because of this, the endeavor of learning to teach is filled with experiences of doubt. Beginning teachers search for answers to dilemmatic questions: How do I engage and motivate my students? How do I effectively assess my students' learning? How do I create an equitable classroom? Questions of this nature have no failsafe solutions, and, thus, beginning teachers tend to question their pedagogical habits continually as they adjust and grow as educators.

This dissertation is an exploration into the doubt that beginning teachers experience. Adopting a phenomenological methodology and using conversations with beginning teachers as my data, I explore what it is like for beginning teachers to live through moods of doubt. Throughout this dissertation, I will construct two central arguments: First, the mood of doubt is not an exclusively cognitive exercise; rather, the mood of doubt infuses a beginning teacher's entire lifeworld and affects how the beginning teacher experiences body, space, relation, and time. Second, the mood of doubt is not only instrumental but also existential; that is, as they experience doubt, beginning teachers attempt to solve problems (e.g., How do I motivate my students?), and, at the same time, the mood of doubt can illuminate existential quandaries: What is my future? Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? My dissertation has been

designed to evoke, in my readers, a sense of what it might feel like to ask oneself these existential questions.

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I want to be?), Dr. Alonzo encouraged me to continue to engage in the process of crafting my own subjective truth.

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CHAPTER 1

Gaps Within the Endeavor of Learning to Teach

In this chapter, I frame my purpose for my dissertation inquiry. The overarching question that motivates me is as follows: *What is it like to be a beginning teacher?* This motivation stems from the fact that I have spent the majority of my professional life thinking about teaching: I have been a student teacher, a beginning teacher of secondary mathematics, and, now, a teacher educator and an educational researcher. In all of these roles, I have wondered about what it means to be a beginning teacher: What do beginning teachers presume the meaning of their work to be? What are their rewards and their challenges? Why do they choose (and continue to choose) to engage in the work of teaching? These questions are pertinent to my own life as well as to the lives of the beginning teachers with whom I directly engage in my role as a teacher educator.

To begin this inquiry, I will explore how *the endeavor of learning to teach* has been conceptualized. While much has been studied and discussed in relation this endeavor, I believe that much remains concealed. Specifically, I am interested in how the *existence* of beginning teachers (i.e., their status as beings-in-the-world) informs and interacts with *the endeavor of learning to teach.* I begin by tracing some normative principles of teacher education as established by educational research. I follow this section by describing some existential realities – being and meaning, individual choice, and irrationality – and I apply these realities to my opening question: *What is it like to be a beginning teacher?*

The Endeavor of Learning to Teach

There are three components of *the endeavor of learning to teach* that I will outline in this section: beliefs, knowledge, and apprenticeship.

Beliefs

Understanding the nature of *the endeavor of learning to teach* begins by considering that prospective teachers enter the profession with certain presumptions about the work of teaching. Prospective teachers were once themselves students in schools, and these experiences of schooling tend to shape what these individuals believe about knowledge, learning, teaching, and schooling (Britzman, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Norman & Spencer, 2005). These beliefs may, in turn, influence the way that beginning teachers engage in the work of learning about teaching (Bird, Anderson, Sullivan, & Swidler, 1993; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Gallego, 2001). For example, prospective teachers who relished their own experiences in classrooms may presume that all students share this enthusiasm. Additionally, prospective teachers who themselves succeeded in school by assiduously taking notes and completing homework may presume that all students can learn successfully via this method (Holt-Reynolds, 1992). Relatedly, prospective teachers may have experienced, as students, exclusively teacher-centered instruction, leaving prospective teachers to believe that teaching is, in essence, a matter of "showing" and "telling" (Murray, 2008). For all of these reasons, prospective teachers may enter into the profession with a reductive and problematic set of presumptions (e.g., all students like school; teacher-centered instruction is effective for all students). Thus, prospective teachers begin *the endeavor of learning to teach* by becoming aware of and

potentially reconsidering the beliefs that they bring to their work (Barlow & Reddish, 2006; Deemer, 2004; Pajares, 1993; Yerrick, Parke, & Nugent, 1997).

Knowledge

In addition to engaging beginning teachers' beliefs, *the endeavor of learning to teach* also requires that beginning teachers acquire the requisite knowledge for teaching. Because teaching is sometimes assumed to be second nature (Labaree, 2000; Murray, 2008), and, because many prospective teachers have spent most of their lives observing teachers in schools (albeit only from the perspective of students), prospective teachers may enter into their professional preparation believing that they already know how to teach; additionally, beginning teachers may believe that their content knowledge is sufficient to ensure their pedagogical effectiveness. It is argued, however, that there is a significant amount of professional knowledge (which cannot be assumed to come naturally) that beginning teachers must master before they are able to teach proficiently and ambitiously (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman, 1987).

For example, professional teachers should be able to lead an effective classroom discussion (Boerst, Sleep, Ball, & Bass, 2011). Enacting this complex classroom practice requires not only pedagogical knowledge (Chapin, O'Connor, & Anderson, 2009) but also knowledge about how to anticipate, interpret, and build upon what students are thinking (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Lampert, 2001; Stein, Engle, Smith, & Hughes, 2008). Specifically, teachers must not only possess content knowledge but also pedagogical content knowledge. That is, a mathematics teacher must not only know

mathematics; the math teacher must also know how to represent mathematical ideas in ways that make these ideas comprehensible to others (Ball, et al., 2008; Shulman, 1986a)

Therefore, the fundamental yet complex practice of leading a classroom discussion is not an instructional practice that can be assumed to come naturally, nor can it be assumed to be a simple function of possessing content knowledge alone; rather, learning to teach in an ambitious way (i.e., in a way that is responsive to students) requires a particular set of knowledge unique to teaching. Similarly, it is argued that teachers require professional knowledge in order to engage successfully in other dimensions of their practice: e.g., the knowledge required to read and interpret curriculum (Remillard & Bryans, 2004), the knowledge required to craft productive formative assessments (Bell & Cowie, 2001), and the knowledge required to manage behavior in the classroom (Emmer & Stough, 2000).

Apprenticeship

When framed in terms of entering into a profession (Grossman et al., 2009; Shulman, 1998), *the endeavor of learning to teach* cannot be accomplished independent from clinical practice. If beginning teachers are left on their own to invent their own practices and approaches to the work of teaching, not only might beginning teachers find themselves to be in a vulnerable (and potentially overwhelming) position (Cochran-Smith, 2012; Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Lortie, 1975), but the concept of teaching as a profession might be undermined as well. For a professional teacher, "[d]ecisions about what to do are not appropriately rooted in personal preferences or experiences but are instead based on professional justified knowledge and on the moral imperatives of the role" (Ball & Forzani, 2009, p. 500). *The endeavor of learning to teach,* therefore,

implies being socialized into a role where the work of teaching is not idiosyncratic but is, instead, governed by core practices and well-defined professional orientations (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Dottin, 2009; Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). Beginning teachers are apprenticed into a profession with clear guidelines for the knowledge, practices, and ethics for which all practitioners are responsible (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Green, 2014). This apprenticeship takes place within teacher education classrooms and school-based communities of practice (Lampert, 2010; Lave, 1996; McDonald et al., 2014). Within these communities of practice, beginning teachers learn a shared way of thinking and behaving as a teacher.

Summary

The endeavor of learning to teach includes at least three important elements: First, beginning teachers should be given the opportunity to problematize their reductive beliefs about teaching and learning and replace these beliefs with more robust conceptions. Second, beginning teachers should be given the opportunity to acquire new knowledge (e.g., pedagogical content knowledge). Third, beginning teachers should be given the opportunity to experience an apprenticeship through which they are integrated into a professional community of practice. I do not argue that such features of *the endeavor of learning to teach* are misguided or misplaced. Indeed, these three features may be necessarily in order for teaching to be considered as a "profession" (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, Compton, et al., 2009; Shulman, 1998). I do argue, however, that these three features of *the endeavor of learning to teach,* alone, fail to account for some essential elements of what it is like to become a teacher.

In the remainder of this chapter, drawing on the philosophy of existentialism, I will explore three of these essential elements, each rooted in the fact that beginning teachers *exist* – i.e., beginning teachers are existing individuals. If we consider beginning teachers to be existing individuals, we must be concerned with realities of human existence. First, beginning teachers possess being and, as such, are concerned with meaning. Second, beginning teachers are free, as individuals, to choose the meanings they want to use to define their existence. Third, the decisions that beginning teachers make concerning the meaning of their existence may be irrational.

Being and Meaning

Above, I presented a conception of *the endeavor of learning to teach.* What is missing from this conception is any mention of "being." The fact that beginning teachers exist – the very fact that beginning teachers are "beings" – is significant. As Heidegger (1962) argues, for human beings, the issue of being always implies the issue of meaning, i.e., to exist is to be concerned with meaning. If we accept Heidegger's fundamental ontological premise as true, then, we must accept the fact that beginning teachers, because they exist, are concerned with meaning (including the meaning of teaching and the meaning of their own existence).

The endeavor of learning to teach, is assigned particular meanings (Hostetler, Macintyre Latta, & Sarroub, 2007). For example, prospective teachers are told by their teacher educators that pedagogical content knowledge is meaningful for the sake of advancing student learning; prospective teachers are told by their teacher educators that the principles of educational psychology are meaningful for the sake of fostering student motivation. When meaning in teaching is assigned in this way, teachers and teacher

educators are operating in a mode of thought Heidegger refers to as "machination" (*Machenschaft*). Rather than taking time to reflect on how the world presents itself to us and how the world matters to us, machination is a mode of thought is consumed with planning, prediction, calculation, and results. The danger of machination is that it may occlude our awareness of other structures of meaning.

When we engage in our daily tasks in a manner that is solely technical and calculative, our "be-ing is forgotten" (Quay, 2013, p. 103). Rich, alternative structures of meaning, however, can reveal themselves to us when we become attentive to the way in which we are seeing things; that is to say, meaning is revealed as we pause to consider how the world and our engagement in it matters to us. If machination is a forgetting of be-ing, then moments in which we see that we see the world in a particular way is a "remembering of be-ing." (Quay, 2013, p. 103). We remember that we are beings who exist; we remember that we are beings in the world that care about both the world and our being in it.

The endeavor of learning to teach may be considered machination – a calculative way of engaging in the world that assigns meaning in particular ways. Beginning teachers, however, may encounter moments within which they remember their be-ing, and, within these moments, beginning teachers may become mindfully aware of the particular ways in which teaching – and their own existence – matters to them. Furthermore, the meaning that is revealed to beginning teachers may not be the meanings formally assigned to teaching by the profession of teaching. In short, because they are existing beings-in-the-world, beginning teachers, within *the endeavor of learning to*

teach, may find themselves considering questions on the order of, "What does the world mean to me?" and "What does my own existence mean to me?"

Individual Choice

Certain meanings related to teaching are assigned by the profession, such as when the profession prescribes particular ways of "being" a teacher. As Ball and Forzani (2009) write, in everyday life, "[b]eing oneself is a virtue, held up in contrast to someone who is 'fake' or 'putting on.' Teaching, however, is not about being oneself…[Rather, teaching involves] suspending some aspects of one's self" (p. 499). For example, in everyday life, people usually do not ask questions to which they already know the answers; teachers, however, must ask questions to which they know (at least part of) the answer. Additionally, in everyday life, we may like or dislike particular people; teachers, however, must force themselves to see people in less judgmental and more descriptive terms (p. 500). In sum, there are specific – and, perhaps, unnatural – ways of being in the profession of teaching:

> *[B]eing a teacher* is to be a member of a practice community within which teaching does not mean the ordinary, common sense of teaching as showing or helping. The work of a teacher is instead specialized and professional in form and nature. (Ball & Forzani, 2009, p. 500)

Despite the fact that "the practice community" to which Ball and Forzani refer assigns a particular set of meanings to the role of "being a teacher," every beginning teacher possesses the power (and responsibility) to make an individual choice about how he or she wants to relate to the world (and to the profession of teaching). Specifically, as beginning teachers become mindful of the ways in which teaching matters to them, they

must make individualized choices about how they want to relate to teaching. Regardless of what the professional norms of teaching are, it is the individual beginning teacher who must choose whether or not he or she wants to define his or her existence according to these norms.

Following the philosophical principles of existentialism, it can be argued that ethical norms and universal principles can never fully mediate an individual's relationship to his or her own existence. Jean-Paul Sartre (2007), for example, insisted that individuals are responsible for what they make of their lives because an individual's *existence* precedes the individual's *essence*. In other words, individuals *exist* before they take on the task of defining themselves in the world (i.e., adopting a particular *essence*). This freedom occurs within the boundaries of two existential conditions: facticity and transcendence (Sartre, 1998). "Facticity refers to the ways in which human existence always has some measure of objective determination and accumulated history, and transcendence registers the ways in which human existence is always not fully determined" (Cerbone, 2006, pp. 89-90). According to existentialism, humans can never be fully defined in factual terms because human can always choose the way in which they relate to these factual terms. The facticity of the world, in part, determines who we are by providing us with a limited set of "projects" (e.g., the project of being a husband; the project of being a teacher). An individual, however, is responsible for choosing his or her own project, and in this way, an individual is always free. While the project of "being a teacher" may be defined in particular ways by the profession of teaching, beginning teachers are always free to choose whether or not they want to adopt this project (i.e., the project of becoming a "professional" teacher) as their own. If *the endeavor of learning to*

teach is conceptualized only in terms of a path towards professionalism, then it fails to account for the fact beginning teachers, as existing individuals, always have the capacity to exercise existential freedom: the freedom to choose who to be and who to become.

Irrationality

The endeavor of learning to teach, when structured around beliefs, knowledge, and apprenticeship, implies that there are beliefs that must be revised; there is knowledge that must be learned; there are practices that must be mastered. In other words, within this conception of *the endeavor of learning to teach,* it is possible to delineate what beginning teachers must know and what they must be able to do (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Even as the practice and profession of teaching evolves, it is presumed that the knowledge generated for the field – by educational researchers and practicing teachers alike – will have rational justification (Cochran-Smith, 2005a, 2005b; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lampert, 2012). This is integral for the professionalization of teaching, for, if teaching is, indeed, to be considered as a profession, then a teacher's professional judgment must not be based on idiosyncrasy or personal preference (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Lortie, 1975), but must, instead, be based in a shared, collective understanding based objective, rational agreement.

Complicating this framework, however, is the philosophy of existentialism, which would suggest that, because beginning teachers are existing individuals, a beginning teacher's existence is governed, in part, by irrationality. Rationality plays a role in existence, to be sure; however, following one of Kierkegaard's primary philosophical contentions, existing individuals are governed both by objectivity and subjectivity. Kierkegaard (1946a) bemoans humanity's "objective tendency, which proposes to make

everyone an observer, and in its maximum [seeks] to transform him into so objective an observer that he becomes almost a ghost" (p. 210). Said differently, Kierkegaard exhorts individuals to begin to listen to themselves and to their own "subjective truths," rather than allowing "objectivity" to be their sole arbiter of meaning. A "subjective truth," however, is irrational, since its merits cannot be validated through "universal" or "objective" criteria.

In *Fear and Trembling,* Kierkegaard (1946b) uses the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac to illustrate how irrationality plays a critical role in human existence. Kierkegaard underscores how Abraham's attempted murder of his son is an irrational act, motivated by the irrational assumption that murder might be a God-pleasing act. Abraham's actions were not inspired by an ethical system but instead by an irrational faith. Yet, precisely because Abraham's decision was rooted in faith, Kierkegaard neither applauds nor condemns Abraham's choice, for, as Kierkegaard argues, there is no rational way to evaluate Abraham's choice. The existential decision that Abraham faced (e.g., whether or not to obey the voice of God) stood above and beyond "ethical" or "universal" principles (e.g., do not murder). Kierkegaard (1946b) argues that a paradox "cannot be mediated, for all mediation comes about precisely by virtue of the universal; [the situation] is and remains…a paradox, inaccessible to thought" (p. 130). There is no way to "think through" what Abraham "should" have done; rather, the resolution of the paradox he faced was possible only when he transcended universal mediation (and rational thinking).

When we are confronted with the paradox of questioning the system upon which we are basing our decisions, we can decide what to do only by turning to our own

subjectivity. Beginning teachers tend to be confronted with paradoxical moments such as these (Beach & Pearson, 1998; Pillen, den Brok, & Beijaard, 2013; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). Bullough and colleagues (1992), for example, chronicle the challenges of beginning teachers, including becoming chronically ill, suffering marital distress, and experiencing significant depression. In many cases, the tensions these teachers experienced stemmed from realizing the personal sacrifices that would be required of them in order for them to become the teachers they wanted to be. For example, for one teacher,

> nurturing was at the center of her self-understanding and was the source of her greatest pleasures…as a teacher…[Yet,] the personal costs of maintaining this understanding of teaching were beginning to be too high…there were limits to how far she could or should sacrifice for the students. There was simply no end to the needs of the young people and no possible way for one person to respond to them all. (Bullough, et al., 1992, p. 109)

Should teachers sacrifice their personal wellbeing (health, happiness, relationships) for the wellbeing of their students? What (and how much) should teachers sacrifice in order to fulfill their personal ambitions and professional obligations? In reasoning through these dilemmas, the ethics of professional teaching is, itself, insufficient. Resolving this particular paradox of teaching begins when (rational and objective) thinking stops, for, within this paradox, the method by which teachers are expected to make decisions (i.e., the "universally" shared professional code of conduct) is itself being called into question.

There are, of course, many routine problems of practice that beginning teachers must learn to think through (Berliner, 2001; Kennedy, 2005; Leinhardt, 1990), and many

of these routine problems – though complex – do not involve existential paradoxes. If, however, we to Ball and Forzani's (2009) admonition – "Teaching…[involves] suspending some aspects of one's self" (p. 499) – we might begin to wonder, in light of Kierkegaard's insights, if there is any *rational* or *objective* way to determine whether or not one should suspend (or sacrifice) aspects of one's own self. *The endeavor of learning to teach,* therefore, might include a dimension of irrationality..

Conclusion

I began this chapter by introducing the broad question: *What is it like to be a beginning teacher?* In this opening chapter, I have argued the philosophy of existentialism – with its emphasis on being, individual choice, and irrationality – may help to illuminate particular essential elements of *the endeavor of learning to teach.* Specifically, beginning teachers are beings-in-the-world. Beginning teachers are concerned with the meaning of the world and the meaning of their own existence. Beginning teachers choose for themselves what they want their relationship to the world to be. Beginning teachers appeal to both objective and subjective (rational and irrational) truths as they engage with the world and with their own lives. Thus, part of a beginning teacher's experience, I argue, is to ask existential questions: What does teaching mean to me? What does my own existence as a teacher mean to be? Who do I want to be? How do I make this decision? This dissertation will explore how beginning teachers ask and answer such questions.

CHAPTER 2

The Lived Experience of Becoming a Teacher

In the last chapter, I introduced the question, "What is it like to be a beginning teacher?" and I argued that a beginning teacher's *existence* is a central dimension in *the endeavor of learning to teach*. Although there are, indeed, a number of things that beginning teachers must know and be able to do if they are to be considered teaching professionals (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), it cannot be ignored that beginning teachers are beings-in-the-world and that, as such, beginning teachers experience existential realities (i.e., body, space, relation, and time). These existential realities, in turn, inescapably shape the subjective meanings that beginning teachers make of their experience.

In this chapter, I present four anecdotes from my own lived experience. I wish to highlight how each of these anecdotes manifests the lifeworld existentials of body, space, relation, and time. Significantly, the lifeworld existentials in my anecdotes not only describe the reality of the situation but also manifest subjective, existential meaning. I will refer to the existential meaning manifest through lived experience as *mood*, and I will argue that *mood* is a critical object of study in exploring the question, "What is it like to be a beginning teacher?"

I will continue to narrow my focus to one particular mood: the mood of doubt. I focus on the mood of doubt for two reasons: First, drawing from the four anecdotes that I will present, I attempt to show the reader that the mood of doubt has been a salient element in my own experience as a beginning teacher. As manifest in these four anecdotes (and throughout my years as a beginning teacher), I experienced doubt in very

pointed and memorable ways. These experiences formatively shaped the meaning of my years as a beginning teacher, and this is one reason why I believe that the mood of doubt is critical to *the endeavor of learning to teach.* Second, drawing from educational research, I argue that the mood of doubt may be an essential feature in the experience of all beginning teachers. Because they have grown up in schools, there is reason to believe that beginning teachers enter the teaching profession with preexisting beliefs about teaching, learning, schools, and their students; thus, it may be primarily through the mood of doubt (e.g., the encountering of difficulty and the questioning of their assumptions) that beginning teachers reshape their pedagogical practice and teacher identity. This chapter will establish the narrowed focus of this dissertation: to explore what it is like for beginning teachers to live through the mood of doubt.

My Anecdotes

Anecdote #1: Feeling sick

I had been observing my mentor teacher for a couple of weeks as a student teacher. My mentor and I had determined a particular date when I would take over and step in front of the class for the first time, which was a prospect that both excited and frightened me. This was, after all, the moment I had been working towards for the past few years, and stepping in front of a classroom full of students was to be the most significant step in my development as a teacher to date. I had, however, experienced some substantial nerves just trying to reorient myself to the hustle and bustle of the crowded life of a high school. As I thought about the monumental moment when I would have to stand in front of the class and assume responsibility, I was not sure whether or not I would be ready or able.

The day finally came, and, on that particular morning, I was quite anxious, which I anticipated; yet, nothing could have prepared me for what I felt when my time came and the first bell rang, signaling one minute before class would begin: I experienced an overwhelming physical sensation, feeling as if I were literally going to pass out. This was occurring as the students were shuffling in and I was gathering my papers. I remember overhearing one student ask my mentor, "Is Mr. Zimmerman going to take over today?"

The final bell rang, my mentor briefly invited me to step up front, and I remember starting to talk. I remember repeating to myself in my head, "Just keep going. No matter what happens, just keep going." After these unforgettable opening moments, the rest of the lesson is a blur. I was able to make my introductions and teach the lesson without anything eventful (or catastrophic) happening. When it was over, I remember feeling elated that I had taken such a significant step towards realizing my dream of becoming a teacher.

Anecdote #2: Feeling trapped

As I began my second year of teaching high school mathematics, I was aware that a significant part of my work involved managing the trade-offs between all of the different things I wanted to accomplish: I wanted to keep my own workload manageable; I wanted to have some way of assessing my students' understanding; I wanted to keep students on-task during class; I wanted students to be motivated to do their homework; and I wanted students to perceive me as fair.

In an attempt to balance all of these goals, I developed a classroom system in which I would give students a short, two-problem quiz at the beginning of each lesson. I

hoped that this system would motivate students to come to class on time and to keep up with their homework. These assessments would also be short enough for me to grade easily and would allow me to give students some sort of consistent written feedback. This seemed like a winning approach.

Indeed, things progressed successfully until one student became ill and was absent for over a week. I had told students that they were responsible for any material they missed and that they were responsible for taking the short quiz each day they were present; however, in this case, the student had been absent for so long that we were no longer working on anything that would have been intelligible to him. On the day he returned, I walked up and down the narrow rows of students, and, hurriedly, I passed out the quizzes, trying to get everyone organized and settled. When I arrived at the desk of this particular student, I told him that he was not responsible for taking the quiz, given that we had since moved on to an entirely different topic. He was quite grateful, but an obstreperous student behind him said, "Gee, I wish that *I* didn't have to take the quiz if I was absent." The implication she was publically making was that I was being unfair.

At this moment, I felt that I had lost. I felt trapped. My tactics had failed; in my effort to achieve some sort of balance between my goals, I had set a trap for myself, and, through my own misstep, students were able to turn my own devices against me and expose me as being inconsistent and unfair. I would have to go back to the drawing board and devise a new set of stratagems. I remember feeling incredibly frustrated by the fact that I had to play this game of strategy in the first place.

Anecdote #3: Feeling broken

During one particular lesson in my second year of teaching, I felt incredibly frustrated; the students did not do what I told them to do. I had designed learning activities, but the class did not go smoothly; the students were off-task, accomplishing very little productive learning. When the final bell rang, I immediately recognized that the lesson had been a failure, and I felt a lingering feeling of hopelessness.

After the students left the classroom, I stayed behind. I was physically and spiritually enervated. My next period was free and the classroom was empty, so I took the time to assess my state of mind: I felt paralyzed. I remember sitting in that empty classroom aimlessly, feeling broken, simply sitting and ruminating upon what felt like my failure as a teacher. I do not know how long I sat there – it could have been anywhere between 10 and 20 minutes – but it seemed like an eternity. My mind was blank, and, while I usually analyzed my own teaching furiously, I was, at this moment, shell-shocked. I had more lessons to teach that day – and many more lessons to teach that year – but I saw no prospects of getting better or improving my performance.

Anecdote #4: Experiencing courage

I was on the very precipice of quitting, as I felt as if I could not take anymore. On one particular Sunday, I came into the school and spent the day cleaning out my desk in the math department office. I was organizing things with the wholehearted intention of leaving.

After the sun had already gone down and the sky had become dark, I realized that, to complete my organizational efforts, I had to bring something up to one of the classrooms in which I taught. I walked through the empty school hallways and unlocked

the classroom door. I stood in front of the dimly lit, empty classroom where I had taught so many lessons. In that moment, I came in contact with a newfound confidence. I do not know where it came from or what prompted it, but, instantaneously, I felt as if I was ready to face anything that my life in the classroom might bring. Standing in front of the empty, unlit classroom, I suddenly felt empowered, courageous, and confident in my ability to accept what I would encounter in my future classroom experiences. I made the decision in that moment to remain in teaching until the end of the year. Something had changed.

Four Lifeworld Existentials

When reflecting on lived experience – i.e., experience as it is lived through (rather than experience as it is theorized or conceptualized) – it is valuable to consider experience across four lifeworld existentials: lived body, lived space, lived relation, and lived time (van Manen, 2014). I will now discuss the meaningful ways in which these four lifeworld existentials manifest themselves in my four anecdotes.

Lived Body

Lived body refers to perhaps the most obvious – and, as such, perhaps, also the most transparent – feature of our lived experience: i.e., the fact that our experience is always experienced in and through a physical body. It is a phenomenological reality that we are physical beings, and our contact with the world occurs in and through our bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). One could say that our bodily knowledge is our primary method of interacting with the world; in other words, our coping with the world is both figuratively and literally a matter of "getting a grip" (Cerbone, 2006).

In my anecdotes, I experienced *becoming a teacher* not only in my mind but also through my body. "Getting a grip" on teaching involved not only thinking of which instructional method to employ but how to embody each instructional method: for example, as in the first anecdote, trying to get a grip on not only when and why but *how to physically cope* with standing in front of a classroom full of students. Salient details like feeling physically sick (as in the first anecdote) and feeling both emotionally and physically exhausted (as in the third anecdote) are important illustrations of how it is problematic to separate the mind from the body when considering the lived experience of a beginning teacher.

Lived Space

Lived space refers to the way in which a particular space is subjectively "felt." That is, in addition to the descriptive, physical, or objective dimensions of a space, when analyzing the nature of lived experience, one must also attend to the way in which an individual experiences and interacts with a particular space in a given moment in time. The concept of lived space relates to our inescapable corporeality (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), since our attempts to "get a grip" on the world are fundamentally interactions with the physical spaces we inhabit. Thus, the concept of lived space underscores the important phenomenological principle that our experience in the world (including our consciousness) is always embedded in some physical context (Lewis & Staehler, 2010).

Although all four of my anecdotes occur in a classroom, the classroom space is "felt" differently within each experience. In the first anecdote, the classroom is felt to be an overwhelming deluge of sensation; in the second, the classroom is felt to be a constricting, entrapping space; in the third, the classroom is felt to be a bleak wasteland

or empty void; in the fourth, the classroom is felt to be an open, boundless horizon. Of course, my own physical positioning in these spaces is critical in shaping the meaning of the experience as well: in the first anecdote, I am standing in front of a mass of people; in the second, I am trying to maneuver through narrow rows of desks; in the third, I sit, alone, in a student's desk; in the fourth, I stand before an empty classroom. All of these anecdotes are illustrations of how lived body and lived space are critical to the interpretation of lived experience.

Lived Relation

Lived relation refers to the way in which we engage with other people. The world that we inhabit and interact with is always relational. Heidegger (1962) describes this as "being-alongside" others. As a being-in-the-world, our projects always derive part of their meaning from the relational quality of our world. Part of the meaning of the project of being a carpenter, for example, involves building things *for* other people. Likewise, being a teacher is a project that loses its meaning unless we consider how teaching always involves someone else (i.e., as a student, we are being taught by someone else; as a teacher, we are teaching someone else). "Being-alongside" need not denote physical, interpersonal interaction; the concept of lived relation is intended to capture how all that we do – all of our tasks and projects – are performed in the context of a relational world. In every lived experience, we "feel" the presence of others, in one way or another.

My first anecdote is explicitly about the pressure of "being-alongside" an unfamiliar mass of students in the classroom; likewise, the second anecdote revolves around the nature of my engagement with students, as I perceive them actively testing and impugning my fairness. Interestingly, my third and fourth anecdotes both occur in

empty classrooms; yet, these are both instances of "being-alongside" students. I was not "alone" in those classrooms in the sense that I was (privately) trying to make sense of my public, relational work as a teacher. All of my anecdotes, in this way, were relational in nature.

Lived Time

Time is another – perhaps self-evident, though often transparent – existential reality. The importance of this existential reality cannot be overstated, however, for, according to Heidegger (1962), we *are* time – i.e., the nature (and meaning) of our being-in-the-world is inextricably linked to our temporality. The concept of lived time focuses our attention on how time is "felt" within particular moment. A description of lived time relies not on objective measures of time (e.g., I taught a class period that lasted for 50 minutes) but, instead, relies on the ways in which an individual experiences time subjectively while engaging in a particular activity. For example, as Bergson (1911) writes,

> If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must...wait until the sugar melts…[The] time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally to the entire history of the material world...[Rather, here, time] coincides with my impatience...It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*. (pp. 9-10)

Following Bergson's example, not all time is equal; that is, while all measures and descriptions of time may be interchangeable when measuring the material world, time, when experienced by an existing individual, takes on important subjective qualities.

Hence, to say that I taught a class period lasted 50 minutes says very little about how I experienced that time (i.e., what it felt like to "live through" those 50 minutes).

Variation in the nature of lived time is a salient feature of my four anecdotes: In the first anecdote, I stood in front of a full classroom of students for the first time; here, time was experienced as intense, slowed-down, and almost overwhelming. In the second anecdote, I tried to pass out papers and organize the classroom activity as quickly and as efficiently as possible; here, time was experienced as a constricting pressure, as I had to quickly make decisions that would have relational consequences for my students and me. In the third anecdote, I sat motionless in a student's desk; here, time was felt to have stood still. In the fourth anecdote, I stood in front of an empty classroom filled with a new sense of possibility; here, time was experienced as expansive and boundless.

In sum, while trying to interpret the meaning of a lived experience, the objective length of the experience (measured in minutes and seconds) is not as significant as the subjective feeling of "living through" this time. Furthermore, no interpretation of lived experience can ignore this existential, for, following Heidegger, being-in-the-world *is* time.

Mood as the Disclosure of Meaning

According to Heidegger (1962), being-in-the-world means being in a state of "having-been-thrown" (*Geworfenheit*). That is, as a being-in-the-world, we are enfolded into an already existing world, society, culture, history, etc. Of course, there is no way to escape this enfolding, i.e., there is no way *not* to be born into a particular world. Furthermore, the world into which we are thrown always-already has meaning attached to it, and, often, this meaning is transparent, taken for granted. For example, when we see a

cup, we already know what it "means" (e.g., what task it is used for). This has nothing to do with the intrinsic, transcendent, or ontological nature of the cup itself; rather, this meaning is transparently given to us because the cup has a particular meaning (i.e., the cup is a particular tool used for a particular purpose). Hence, as beings-in-the-world, we cannot escape or transcend our "thrown" state.

What can be revealed to us, however, is the unique way in which we "find ourselves" in our "thrown" state. According to Heidegger, moments of lived experience that stand out in resonant ways disclose *Befindlichkeit* (i.e., the way in which we "find ourselves" in the world). Within meaningful moments of lived experience, we may find ourselves to be in a particular mood; we experience a particular "turning" (*Stimmung*) to the world. In these moments, we become aware of the ways in which we relate to our world. What is disclosed through mood is not a particular meaning, per se (e.g., we are not suddenly given insight into the "true" nature or "intrinsic" qualities of the cup), but, rather, what is disclosed to us is meaningfulness itself: We see the way we see things, and we realize that things matter to us in a particular way.

As I discussed in the last chapter, for Heidegger, being and meaning are inextricably linked. Thus, in order to perceive meaning in our lives, we must attend to our being (i.e., our lived experience). This is why Heidegger (1962) describes his philosophical project as a phenomenological inquiry (i.e., the researching of lived experience). Questions of existential meaning (e.g., What does the world mean to me?), cannot be grasped in abstract, theoretical ways; instead, answers to existential questions are disclosed as we let things present themselves so that we see that we see things as we see them: In other words, we see, through lived experience, how the world matters to us.

Meaning is disclosed not through conceptual understanding, but through mood (Inwood, 1997; Lewis & Staehler, 2010).

I can apply Heidegger's philosophy of mood to my four anecdotes. Specifically, in each of my anecdotes, I "find myself" in the classroom in a particular way (i.e., with a particular "tuning"). I felt overwhelmed; I felt trapped; I felt hopeless; I felt courageous. In each of these anecdotes, I experienced a mood of doubt: Would I be able to continue? Would I be able to project myself into my own future? In each of these anecdotes I encountered existential questions and meanings – disclosed through a particular mood – which illuminated how I found myself relating to my teaching world.

Becoming a Teacher and the Mood of Doubt

This dissertation will explore the experience of beginning teachers by investigating the disclosure of the mood of *doubt*. Building on the four anecdotes presented above, I will begin this section by characterizing the mood of doubt, and I will continue by arguing that this mood was not only characteristic of my four anecdotes but may be characteristic of the experience of all beginning teachers.

The definition of doubt

Doubt is defined as an "uncertainty of belief or opinion that often interferes with decision-making…a deliberate suspension of judgment" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In this way, doubt represents not decision-making itself, but an uncertainty or suspension of a particular decision-making process. We often engage with the world in habitual, intuitive ways; however, when we perceive that we cannot achieve our ends with our habitual mode of engagement or judgment, we may momentarily suspend our decision-making. For this reason, Dewey (1933) argued that doubt was the necessary starting

point of all genuine inquiry. When we are unable to a solve problem in a habitual way, we may enter into a mood of doubt; by entering into the mood of doubt, we may suspend our judgment to consider our judgment itself.

If the mood of doubt is characterized by moments in which we question our judgment, then the mood of doubt is related to Kierkegaard's insistence that predetermined rational systems can never fully account for human existence. There are, Kierkegaard argued, moments when that which is individual (the subjective; the irrational) must supersede that which is universal (the objective; the rational). That is to say, if I, in a given moment, suspend my exercise of a particular system of judgment, then, in that moment, I can no longer refer to that system of judgment to reason through the situation. According to Kierkegaard, within such moments of doubt, individuals must turn to themselves in order to determine how to proceed.

This existential dimension to doubt links to another important component of doubt's definition: Doubt can imply "a lack of confidence…an inclination not to believe or accept" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). This is suggestive of the arguments put forth by Kierkegaard and Sartre: Existing individuals always possesses the prerogative to choose whether or not to believe or to accept. If all things could be determined by rationality and objectivity, there would be no need for doubt; however, because existing individual possess existential freedom, doubt is a critical feature of human existence.

Doubt and beginning teachers

Research has demonstrated that student teaching and the beginning years of one's teaching practice are often turbulent and challenging times (Brown, 2006; Bullough, et al., 1992; Cooper & He, 2012; Meijer, de Graaf, & Meirink, 2011; Poulou, 2007). Of

course, in part, these years are challenging because the work of teaching is incredibly demanding; furthermore, some schools are not structured in ways that support beginning teachers' growth (Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Kardos & Moore-Johnson, 2007; Kennedy, 2005). In part, however, the turbulence of a beginning teacher's journey may be the result of the perpetual experiencing of the mood of doubt.

All teachers must be able to tolerate uncertainty as a part of their daily work (Floden & Clark, 1988; Helsing, 2007; Schuck & Buchanan, 2012). Indeed, every decision a teacher makes is speculative, since the teacher can never be entirely sure what the outcome will be. Indeed, Lortie (1975) found that teachers, even those with substantial experience, were preoccupied with the simple question, "Am I effective?" Indeed, these teachers were "unsatisfied as ambiguity, uncertainty and little apparent change [in the classroom] impede[d] [their] flow of reassurance. (p. 144). Furthermore, teachers do not have the option of undoing and redoing their decisions (Lampert, 2001). For this reason, teachers may routinely need to "suspend" their judgment in an effort to inquire into what is going on and to revise their judgment accordingly. Thus, I argue that all teachers experience the mood of doubt as they engage in and reflect on their work as a teacher.

The mood of doubt, however, may be amplified for a beginning teacher for at least four reasons. First, beginning teachers have not yet established a habitual way of engaging in the classroom (Berliner, 1986; Leinhardt & Greeno, 1986), and, may, therefore, feel an increased need to enter into mood of doubt within which they can revise their judgment. Until beginning teachers craft reliable ways of managing their routine

problems of practice (Kennedy, 2005, 2006), they may continually find themselves within the mood of doubt.

Second, and relatedly, beginning teachers may fail to grasp what the work of teaching entails. For prospective teacher, teaching is a difficult practice that looks easy (Labaree, 2000), in large part because most people spend at least 12 years observing teachers for 8 hours a day (Lortie, 1975), forming (what feels like) a robust image of what teachers do (an image formed entirely from the limited perspective of the student). For example, a student might gather that teaching is simply a matter of "show and tell" (Murray, 2008), but the student is not privy to all of the complex, instantaneous, multidimensional decisions that his or her teacher is making while teaching (Doyle, 1977; Lampert, 2001; Wasserman, 1999). It is, therefore, reasonable to believe that once they enter classrooms of their own, beginning teachers must begin to reevaluate their reductive images of teaching in order to account for and manage the (previously unanticipated) complexity of classroom life (Kennedy, 1997, 2005).

Third, beginning teachers may experience tensions as they attempt to find balance in their pedagogical work (Pillen, et al., 2013). Lortie (1975) describes teachers as "entrepreneurs of psychic profits" (p. 195) who try to "strike the best personal balance [they] can get" (p. 203). Balancing all of the competing demands of teaching is incredibly difficult, especially if teachers are attempting to teach in an ambitious, student-centered way (D. K. Cohen, 2011). As a result, beginning teachers must strike a balance between their ideals and (what they sense to be) their pragmatic limitations (Hammerness, 2003; Martin, 2004; Smagorinsky, Gibson, Bickmore, Moore, & Cook, 2004; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998).

Fourth, beginning teachers may doubt whether or not teaching is a profession they want to pursue. Returning to the definition of doubt presented earlier, beginning teachers may discover their "inclination not to accept" the premises and realities of being a professional teacher. Prospective teachers may enter into the profession believing that they will be able to satisfy their own personal desires (e.g., to nurture children, to engage in meaningful discussions about intellectual content), but beginning teachers may come to the conclusion that their ambitions cannot be fulfilled in the teaching profession (Bullough, et al., 1992; Friedman, 2006; Pines, 2002). For example, one former teacher shares the following:

> I could keep [the students] busy…I was playing at teacher and they played at being a certain kind of kid. I learned what to do on the course but what I had to do wasn't me…I didn't like the bullying. They bullied each other. Teachers bullied them. Some teachers bullied me—well, nagged me to do things in their way...It was all this unnecessary stuff. (Brown, 2006, p. 684)

This early-career teacher decided to leave the profession as he came to the unexpected conclusion that teaching (as he experienced it) was not an endeavor that he wanted to pursue.

Conclusion

In this chapter, introduced my object of study within this dissertation: beginning teachers' mood of doubt. I have attempted to argue that the mood of doubt may be an essential feature in the experience of beginning teachers, and, furthermore, that the mood of doubt may illuminate existential meaning (e.g., Can I be a teacher? Do I want to be a teacher? What does being a teacher mean to me?). Within this dissertation, I investigate

beginning teachers' lived experience (specifically, moments in which beginning teachers "live through" the mood of doubt), because I am interested in exploring how the existential realities – body, space, relation, and time – that characterize beginning teachers' being-in-the-world shape their experience of becoming a teacher. In an effort to explore how beginning teachers confront these existential issues, the specific research questions for my dissertation are as follows: What might it be like for beginning teachers to live through the mood of doubt, and what existential meaning might the mood of doubt disclose to beginning teachers?

CHAPTER 3

The Researching of Lived Experience

In the previous two chapters, I have argued that the experience of becoming a teacher is existential in nature. I have also argued how, according to Heidegger, existential meaning is disclosed through mood, rather than through conceptual understanding. Therefore, I narrowed the focus of my inquiry to the mood of doubt that beginning teachers may experience.

In this chapter, I present the methodology of hermeneutical phenomenology: the researching of lived experience. My starting point is this: the *experience of becoming a teacher* is an existential project, and the mood of doubt is an essential feature of this experience. Through this inquiry, I hope to add to educational research that highlights teaching's phenomenological qualities (Garcia & Lewis, 2014) and to educational research that emphasizes the turbulence of beginning to teach (Brown, 2006).

Additionally, however, I also wish to trace the link between lived experience and existential meaning as it pertains to the project of becoming a teacher. Existential frameworks that emphasize the importance of meaning to existing individuals have been applied to other fields including career counseling (B. N. Cohen, 2003) and occupational therapy (Hasselkus, 2011). In this dissertation, I intend to apply these frameworks towards illuminating the experience of becoming a teacher. In this chapter, I describe the methodology of hermeneutical phenomenology and argue for why it is appropriate for this project.

The Methodology of Hermeneutical Phenomenology

The methodology of *hermeneutical phenomenology* (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014) is *phenomenological* in the sense that it aims to research lived experience, meaning that this research inquires into "what it is like" to "live through" a given phenomenon. Phenomenology, as a philosophy, assumes that our consciousness is always intentional – i.e., our consciousness is always directed towards something (Cerbone, 2006). Consequently, phenomenological inquiry is not interested in studying decontextualized consciousness (e.g., an abstract mental process; a set of beliefs). Instead, phenomenological inquiry is interested in how individuals experience and interpret their interactions with the world (i.e., how they experience and interpret the existential dimensions of body, space, relation, and time). The data of phenomenological inquiry, therefore, is rooted in richly described experiences: concrete, specific moments through which an individual lived.

For example, a phenomenologist might study the structure of experience by which individuals listen to and perceive a melody, or the structure of experience by which individuals see and perceive a rock (Cerbone, 2006). The phenomenologist does not study or describe the properties of the melody or of the rock; the phenomenologist is interested in how human consciousness experiences a melody or a rock. In other words, how do these things of the world present themselves to human consciousness? While such phenomenon may, at first, seem to be ordinary and self-evident, they deserve closer scrutiny precisely because they seem to be ordinary and self-evident. Indeed, our belief in the self-evidence of the world has been termed the "natural attitude." (Cerbone, 2006;

Dowling, 2007; Lewis & Staehler, 2010). We are constantly making meaning of the world, but, in our unreflective "natural attitude," much of this meaning-making is tacit and transparent. The goal of phenomenological inquiry, then, is to "look *at* what [we] normally look *through*" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 50; Inwood, 1997), which requires suspending our "natural attitude" and mindfully studying our own experience. That is, while the "natural attitude" affirms our implicit beliefs about the existence and nature of world, a phenomenological attitude enables us to highlight the presence of these beliefs without affirming them. Barritt and colleagues (1983) elaborate as follows:

> A major theme of phenomenology is "to the things themselves." That means laying aside preconceived notions about even the most ordinary event in order to see it in a new way. In other words looking naively, with a sense of wonder, at the events and asking questions that usually aren't asked because of their simplicity. (p. 142)

In other words, in suspending our "natural attitude," we do not take "the things" of the world for granted; specifically, we do not presume that the world's existence or nature is independent from our intentional consciousness of it. By suspending the "natural attitude" and by engaging in phenomenological mindfulness, we are able to look "naively" at what our engagement in the world is like.

This assumed naivety, however, does not enable us to adopt a "view from nowhere," which is, of course, impossible. Thus, when a researcher inquires into the nature of a human being's experience of the world, the researcher necessary un-conceals his or her own hidden interpretations, perspectives, and experiences (J. A. Smith, et al.,

2009). In this way, the methodology of *hermeneutical phenomenology* is *hermeneutical* in that it relies on interpretation.

Gadamer (1996) further developed this argument: When we approach a text (or phenomenon), we inevitably bring to it our own prejudices. As a result, the questions that we ask and the interpretations that we offer reflect our own individual pre-understandings. As individuals engage in a dialogue in an effort to understand a particular text (or phenomenon), the dialogue produces a unique fusion of understandings. In other words, according to Gadamer, there is no method by which one may arrive at an interpretation that is "final," "correct," or "true." Instead, Gadamer (like Heidegger) argued that hermeneutics is not a *method* so much as it is an *ontology*: i.e., hermeneutics is not a tool; it is our way of being. Human beings are always already interpreting their world, and the project of *hermeneutic phenomenology* is to explore the ways in which we make these interpretations. These interpretations (made by individuals with certain perspectives, experiences, and prejudices) can always be reinterpreted (by individuals with different perspectives, experiences, and prejudices). In sum, while the method of *hermeneutic phenomenology* does involve the bracketing out of the "natural attitude," this method does not involve the bracketing out of prejudices; instead, an important feature of hermeneutic inquiry is to illuminate prejudices and to place these prejudices in direct dialogue with the text – or phenomenon – under investigation.

When and How is Hermeneutical Phenomenology Successful?

It would be misplaced to say that the results of a hermeneutical phenomenological study add to our "understanding" of the world, since humans beings always already "understand" the world. To refer, again, to Heidegger's philosophy, we are always

interpreting the world and navigating it through a tacit, transparent understanding. In this way, our understanding is never wholly incomplete; however, our understanding can always be refined, expanded, and illuminated in new ways. I would, then, say that, rather than reveal "truth," the results of a successful hermeneutical phenomenological study "enrich" the reader. Specifically, readers may be enriched as they consider how others (and how they) engage in and relate to the world.

Do there exist criteria by which we can measure this enrichment? Just as the hermeneutical process itself depends upon the subjectivity of the researcher, the success of the findings of a hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry depends on the subjectivity of the reader. Said differently, that which is presented in a phenomenological study:

> must be tested by the reader for its accuracy. There are no methodological safeguards in this research, no control groups, no assumptions about randomness…The value of phenomenological research is not assured by methodological orthodoxy but rather by the researchers' ability to express shared experience in an understandable way. (Barritt, et al., 1983, p. 141)

If the study has "shared experienced in an understandable way," then the study can be considered to have been successful. The product of a hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry should, ideally, be able to "reawaken" or "reanimate" (van Manen, 1990, p. 10) lived experience within the reader. The descriptions presented should feel, to the reader, to be faithful accounts of the phenomenon in question. Furthermore, these descriptions should resonate with the reader in such a way as to "reawaken" the reader to the fact that individuals make meaning within their lived experiences. Readers might be "reanimated" to reconsider their own interpretations and prejudices related to the phenomena in

question (i.e., What is it like to experience doubt? What is it like to be a beginning teacher?). For these reasons, van Manen (1990) describes phenomenological inquiry as having the potential (and aim) to stir us towards "a more deeply understood worldly engagement" (p. 129). Hence, the subjective response of each reader is the only way to evaluate the effectiveness of the research.

Methods

I will now elaborate the specific methods that I employed in this dissertation study. Adopting the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, I had three goals for my inquiry:

1. To explore how beginning teachers lived through the mood of doubt and to present the reader with a rich and evocative description of this phenomenon. This addresses the research question, "What might it be like for beginning teachers to live through the mood of doubt?"
2. To interpret how beginning teachers interpreted the meanings disclosed to them within their moments of doubt. This addresses the research question, "What existential meaning might the mood of doubt disclose to beginning teachers?"
3. To reinterpret, in light of my inquiry, my own understandings and prejudices related to beginning teachers' experience of the mood of doubt and to present the reader with this new fusion of understanding. This completes the hermeneutic process.

Data sources

In this dissertation, I am interested in exploring *the phenomenon of experiencing the mood of doubt as a beginning teacher*. Data for phenomenological inquiry consists of

rich descriptions of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). I began this inquiry by presenting some of my own written anecdotes around *the phenomenon of experiencing the mood of doubt as a beginning teacher* as a helpful way of bounding the phenomenon of interest and introducing my pre-understandings of the phenomenon. The hermeneutic project, however, according to Gadamer, is to place different experiences and interpretations into dialogue with one another, thus allowing the researcher to illuminate further his or her own preexisting prejudices as well as to expand the researcher's (and the reader's) horizon of understanding (Dahlberg, et al., 2008). Thus, for this inquiry, I sought to collect the majority of my data (i.e., rich descriptions of lived experience) from multiple participants.

Participants

The goal of this inquiry was to explore the phenomenon of interest and to present the data to the reader in a resonant, "reanimating" manner (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). I was, thus, interested in talking to individuals who had experienced the phenomenon in question: i.e., the experience of the mood of doubt as a beginning teacher. I invited secondary teachers who had just completed their full year of student teaching or their first or second full year of teaching to be in this study (as I regarded teachers with this range of experience as being "beginning" teachers). For each of those teachers invited, I had served as one of their teacher educators during their professional formation at Michigan State University. I invited this group of people to participate in my study based on the assumption that my previous relationship with these students (serving as their teacher educator during their full-year teaching internship) would facilitate the interview process. Specifically, given that these beginning teachers and I were familiar with one another,

and, given that these beginning teachers were used to talking to me about their teaching (including their teaching dilemmas), I believed that teachers who volunteered to participate in the interview would speak unreservedly to me about the moments of doubt they had experienced as beginning teachers. Such unreserved talking is important for collecting rich phenomenological data.

I did not attempt to select the participants based on their gender, race, age, content area taught, or school context. I believed that all of these potential participants would have something valuable to say (i.e., have some rich lived experiences to share), because, as argued in the previous chapter, I believe that all teachers (and especially those early in their teaching careers) will have, at some point, experienced the mood of doubt. While it is quite possible that male and female teachers, for example, experience their doubt differently, such was not the focus of this study.

The participants in this inquiry included eight beginning teachers.

Data collection

I interviewed each of the eight teachers once over the summer. These interviews were conducted either in a private, reserved conference room on the university campus or in a local coffee shop. These interviews (each of which lasted between 1 and 2 hours) were audio-recorded.

During these conversational, unstructured interviews (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990), I asked my participants to describe (rather than explain) their lived experiences of doubt as richly as possible. I began each interview with the following question: "Can you tell me about a particularly meaningful or memorable time when you experienced doubt as a teacher?"

As van Manen (2014) writes, phenomenological "inquiry needs to start down to earth…by letting speak the things of our everyday world, just as we experience and encounter them: see, feel, hear, touch, and sense them" (p. 52). I did not want my participants to fall back into conventional, impersonal, or theoretical ways of describing their experiences (e.g., "Student teaching is important because…"). As Dahlberg and colleagues (2008) write, in an interview intended to research lived experience, any:

> sort of conventional conversation about expected subjects in expected ways is to be avoided…This means facilitating the interviewee's attention toward the phenomenon of interest and directing the interaction toward deeply anchored meanings, rather than superficial attitudes or commonly held beliefs. (p. 186)

I attempted to accomplish this by asking my participants to elaborate on their responses and descriptions (e.g., "Can you tell me more about that?", "What do you mean by…?") and to anchor their narratives in rich details (e.g., "Where were you when this happened?", "What were you thinking and feeling in that moment?"). When participants had finished elaborating on one particular narrative, I asked this question again and asked them to describe another narrative.

Sometimes participants did stray from the research question of interest and began expounding on more general dilemmas they had encountered in their practice (e.g., feeling constrained by or uninterested in their school's mandated curriculum; being frustrated by the lack of support they received). When participants began to expound on such issues, I tried to refocus their responses by asking them to think of a specific moment that captured the doubts and dilemmas that they were describing.

If I found that by prompting the participant he or she was unable to identify or describe a specific "moments of doubt," I asked one of the following two questions as a way to prompt with participant with more specificity:

- Can you tell me about a particularly meaningful or memorable moment when you reevaluated what it meant to be a teacher?
- Can you tell me about a particularly meaningful or memorable moment when you reevaluated if you wanted to be a teacher?

These questions are derived from my bounding of the phenomenon of the mood of doubt as experienced by a beginning teacher (see Chapter 2). I believed that these questions would help to orient my participants towards the moments of doubt, uncertainty, and earnest questioning in which I was interested.

It was important that my participants felt comfortable in openly describing their lived experiences (especially in the context of potentially vulnerable moments in which they experienced doubt). As mentioned above, efforts to achieve this openness during the interview were supported by the fact that my participants and I already knew each other from their experience in my teacher education course. Furthermore, during the interview, I allowed myself to be free to volunteer my own stories and interpretations of doubt as related to teaching. I did not volunteer these stories in an effort to shape what the participant said; rather, this was done both to facilitate openness towards describing the phenomenon of doubt as well as to communicate to the participant that I was personally invested in the participant's thoughts, feelings, and reflections. For example, when a participant told a story that was similar to one of my own anecdotes from my memory, I would narrate that anecdote for the participant, and I would note some of the

similar feelings and interpretations (e.g., having to stay up late into the night grading papers; feeling the frustrations that arise from classroom management challenges). This sharing was done in order to shape the interview into a genuine conversation (as opposed to a structured interview).

Data analysis

If the subjective meanings inherent within the manifestation of lived experience were obvious and unambiguously given to us, then the phenomenological project would not be necessary; however, given that the subjective meaning of lived experience is often concealed beneath our tacit, transparent ways of approaching the world, it is unlikely that an individual will be able to articulate the precise subjective meaning of his or her experience directly (e.g., "The meaning of my lived experience as a teacher is…"). Indeed, it is assumed that "a certain invisibility or hiddenness is actually an inherent part of the phenomenon" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 71), and, thus, my analysis of the data was comprised of attempts to "see" the inexact and indeterminate structures of meaning within the anecdotes that I had been told. At the same time, I do not claim that I am able to discern the "true" subjective meaning of the experiences that participants describe. Within the project of hermeneutical phenomenological, such finality is impossible, for hermeneutical phenomenology involves continuous interpretation by diverse and differing interpreters. We are always in the process of discovering how we see the world and how the world matters to us, and, thus, everything always "holds in reserve other ways of being given…[The] thing can always be given again, perhaps in ways we ourselves cannot anticipate" (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 30-31). The "final" result of this inquiry will be my interpretation of my participants' experiences, and my interpretation

of my own interpretation. This is intended as one wholehearted attempt to illuminate what it is like to live through the mood of doubt as a beginning teacher; however, given that this project is hermeneutical, it will not be the final word on this subject, and, indeed, the results of this study are themselves fodder for further interpretation.

I listened to and transcribed the audio-recording of each interview. These transcripts served as the main source of data to be analyzed. I divided the transcript of each interview into a set of main anecdotes. I then interpreted and grouped those anecdotes based on emerging themes across all of my participants. This process of interpretation and grouping was conducted by means of cycles of re-reading and re-writing (J. A. Smith, et al., 2009; van Manen, 2014), moving continuously between the parts and the whole of the text (Dahlberg, et al., 2008). With each cycle of re-reading and re-writing, I made new interpretations; and these new interpretations forced me to reevaluate my initial pre-understandings. In reading the transcripts, I revisited the philosophy that inspired me (e.g., Heidegger, Kierkegaard), which I then began to read differently. I returned to the set of anecdotes in the transcripts and rearranged them into meaningful themes, through which new ideas emerged. This process continued as a cyclical (rather than linear or technical) process.

This iterative, cyclical process of re-reading and re-writing was fundamental to the process of my hermeneutic inquiry. The process brought me closer to "grasp[ing] what is singular, subtle, or what can only be grasped with inventive and vocative means of reflective writing" (van Manen, 2014, p. 30). My insights came as the product of perpetual "musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed" (van Manen, 2014, p. 27) with the phenomenon and with the stories that I had been told by my participants. As van

Manen (1990) writes, hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry is less a procedural, technical, or rational endeavor and "more accurately [described as] a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure…a free act of 'seeing' meaning" (p. 79). My presentation of my analysis in this dissertation is intended to reflect my attempts to see meaning in my data.

Presentation of findings

In the following chapters, I will present the themes that emerged via my reflective process of re-reading and re-writing, and my presentation of findings will offer stories that most strongly resonate with what I saw in the data. My method of data presentation is intended to be as resonant as possible. I aim to present participants' stories in such a way that they are able to reawaken and re-enliven the reader's relation to the world (just as these stories reawakened and re-enlivened my own relation to the world). In this way, my "phenomenological text does not just communicate information, it also aims to address or evoke forms of meaning," specifically, meanings that escape objective description and that, instead, are "poetic, elusive, or ambiguous" (van Manen, 2014, p. 45). I will, therefore, rely on not only my participant's words, but also on other "poetic" forms of expression, including philosophy (Chapter 4-6) and music (Chapter 7). The goal of this data presentation is share what I learned from dialoguing with my participants and to present the reader with a potentially enriching illumination of the phenomenon of the mood of doubt as it occurs in the lived experience of a beginning teacher.

In the next three chapters, I will draw on a select set of my participants' anecdotes to explore the questions, "What might it be like for beginning teachers to live through the mood of doubt?" and "What existential meanings might the mood of doubt disclose to

beginning teachers?" I will allow for my participants to describe, in their own words, their experiences and their interpretations of their experiences, and I will engage the hermeneutic process by presenting my interpretation of their interpretations. Each chapter will present the reader with a different manifestation of the mood of doubt: a broken future; despair of the self; and, the unhomeliness of teaching. Each of these unique manifestations, I will argue, reveals dimensions of existential meaning that were significant to my participants' professional (and personal) life.

CHAPTER 4

Disclosure of a Broken Future

When I asked some of my participants to describe meaningful or memorable moments of doubt, they shared stories that seemed to be characterized by their anticipation of the future – in particular, a future now bereft of the idealized images of teaching that they held. Educational research has found that as preservice teachers begin their professional preparation, they inevitably look ahead towards their future life as a teacher (Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010; Whitney, Olan, & Fredricksen, 2013). Often, beginning teachers are optimistic that their professional life will be unproblematic and that they will become the teachers that they imagine themselves to be (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Conway, 2001; Weinstein, 1988). Of course, as beginning teachers acquire professional experience, it is common for this optimism to falter and for teachers to reevaluate who they are and who they want to be as teachers (Flores & Day, 2006; Meijer, et al., 2011).

While such reevaluation of the future is a longitudinal process (Hammerness, 2006), revelation can also occur within singular moments of lived experience. In this chapter, I will present three anecdotes as told to me by my participants (all represented by pseudonyms). I will argue that each moment was imbued with existential significance. These three teachers wrestled not only with problems that were immediately at hand – e.g., How do I grade all of these assignments? How do I get this student to pay attention? These teachers also wrestled with doubts over the teachers they could – or wanted to – become.

Shannon and the Science Binders

When I interviewed Shannon, she had recently completed her full-year teaching internship, in which she taught 8th grade science under the supervision of her mentor teacher. When I asked her to recount a moment in which she experienced doubt as a teacher, she mentioned an instructional practice she had inherited from her mentor: the grading of students' science binders. Shannon appreciated the rationale for the science binders: by asking students to put all of their worksheets in one place, Shannon was able to minimize the chances that students might misplace an important set of instructions or a finished assignment; furthermore, by keeping a science binder, her students effectively created their own study guide, thus encouraging her 8th grade students to develop the essential study skills they would need in high school.

Shannon went on, however, to describe the particularly challenging experience of taking responsibility for grading all of her students' science binders. This process took multiple days and left Shannon "totally exhausted…I spent hours after school grading, and I went home and I spent hours at home grading because I had a deadline to get them in by." Shannon shared a story of staying in her classroom one night to grade the binders:

> I remember it was one night at school, I was just sitting there working on them, because I didn't want to take them home because I'd have to take home crates full of binders…my trunk was just full at one point, because they're one-inch binders and I've got like 90 of them, and I was just sitting at school and it was 7 pm and my colleague came in and said "You're supposed to go home" and I just had a mini-meltdown and was like, "No, I can't go home yet, I've got to finish

> these!"…I was so frustrated and I was like, I see the value in it, but I can't do this to myself, I can't do this year after year spending a whole week grading these binders, …by the end of [the night], I was frustrated, I was tired, I was cross-eyed …I remember being like, I'm not going to teach this way, I can't do it… This is year one and I'm already like, I can't do this.

I am struck by how prominently Shannon's description manifests the existential realities of her life.

Consider, first, the nature of lived space: Shannon is confined to the classroom because of the physical properties of the binders; specifically, because the binders are so cumbersome, she must remain in the classroom, and, hence, she experiences the classroom as a space where she is trapped. Consider, second, the nature of lived time: although 7 pm is not, objectively, unreasonably late in the day, this moment of the day is lived through as an hour in which Shannon should not be working (in her colleagues words, "You're supposed to be home"). Hence, Shannon's experience of her time in the classroom is especially excruciating and frustrating given that she feels, with each passing moment, that she should not be there. Consider, third, the nature of lived body: Shannon is clear that by the end of the night she was "tired" and "cross-eyed," as she describes grading student work as an activity that creates emotional and physical fatigue. Finally, consider the nature of lived relation: within this anecdote, Shannon is consumed by her responsibility to be alongside her students by serving them responsibly. Shannon is clear that she "see[s] the value" in using the science binders as an instructional tool, and, thus, she feels obligated to grade and return these binders to her students in a timely fashion. Additionally, Shannon lives through this experience "alongside" her mentor

(who expects her to adopt this instructional practice and complete this grading) as well as perhaps the rest of her colleagues, who she may perceive as expecting her, by herself, to complete this full load grading.

Shannon's doubt continued as she was forced to continue grading her students' science binders over the weekend:

> My deadline was Monday…and I'm sitting [at home], Saturday night, I've got a stack as high as my dinner table…Three binders took me about an hour to go through, and I was like there is no way unless I don't sleep tonight that I am going to get all of these done…I was very lucky in the fact that I live with my boyfriend…He was like, "How can I help? What do I need to do?" and it was just as simple as, "Can you check the first five pages? There's nothing to be graded. [The students] just have to have the first five pages there." So [I asked him if] he would go through and he'd mark the first five pages, and I could take it from there…I knew…if I have to enlist someone else's help just to get this done, this isn't right, I'm not doing this the right way. And I ended up having to go back into my mentor and tell her [that] there's no way I can do this.

Again, Shannon's description of the situation manifests the lifeworld existentials of her life as a beginning teacher.

The space in her room is taken over by the binders ("I've got a stack as high as my dinner table"). Time is experienced in relation to how many binders can be graded within that time ("Three binders took me about an hour to go through"). Shannon is aware of the physical toll that her grading responsibilities might take ("There is no way [to finish] unless I don't sleep tonight"). Shannon experiences lived relationship in terms

of obligation to her students (as well as to her mentor). This obligation also colors the way she experiences her relationship with her boyfriend; in the story, she experiences help from her boyfriend not in terms of emotional support but in terms of his undertaking of the trivial task of counting pages in the binder.

When asked to describe an anecdote of doubt, Shannon narrated a moment in which she felt physically and emotionally exhausted, frustrated, and, in some ways, quite sure that she would be unable to finish the task that she was expected to complete. In this way, when Shannon was asked to describe a moment of doubt, she described a feeling of certainty that her future was broken: "I can't do this year after year spending a whole week grading these binders…I remember being like…I can't do it." As Shannon encountered difficulty with this method of assessment, Shannon immediately considered the ramifications for her relationship to her future (e.g., "I can't do this year after year…There's no way I can do this"). Within this anecdote, Shannon experienced a certain sense of a broken future, marked by existential questions: Can I be a teacher? What type of teacher can I be?

Ingrid and the Second-to-Last Day

I spoke to Ingrid the summer after she had completed her first year of full-time teaching. When asked to narrate a moment of doubt, Ingrid told me a story that revolved around her preparation for the first days of school. As she prepared for her new position, she immediately found herself without the tools she needed:

> I like to plan things. I like to be prepared. It makes me feel comfortable when I feel in control…It might have been two days before [the school year started]…[It wasn't until then that the administration] gave me my classes, three preps which I

had never done before…I did get books…[but] the books and the pacing guide did not match.

This upset Ingrid greatly, because she felt that she could not conscientiously prepare for the beginning of the year: "I should be planning a semester. I should be planning units. I don't have assessments. I don't have a seating chart."

Left without adequate tools, she began to panic:

I remember [that] I had this panic moment when I was sitting in my classroom, and it was so hot, 95 degrees and it didn't have air conditioning, and I was sweating through my clothes and I just sat there and I thought, "Oh my god…I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. I don't know what I'm going to say. I don't know who's going to be in here. I don't know how to set up these desks…I could never imagine being left in this situation…This is overwhelming…I was so sure that I was about to fail…I was 100% sure that this was going to be a disaster, and that was just the worst, most upsetting feeling…I remember looking in the mirror at the end of the day, and I was sweating off my face, my hair was wet, I was so hot, and I looked like I was beaten down…with time sort of ticking away…at one point I remember thinking, I've got to go home…I was there until 7 o'clock…in empty building, doing nothing that matters.

I interpret lived body and lived time as being the most salient features of Ingrid's story. Not only was Ingrid faced with a formidable intellectual challenge (i.e., to plan a curriculum without adequate resources), but she also was victim to physical exhaustion. Further exacerbating this challenge was the felt pressure that time was "ticking away."

Together, the pressures of time and heat transformed the classroom into a space difficult to endure – a space in which Ingrid felt compelled to stay but from which she ultimately felt she needed to escape ("I've got to go home"). Ingrid experienced the empty classroom and the empty school as manifestations of her own inadequacy and unpreparedness. Yet, Ingrid felt compelled to endure that space for as long as possible, until she could no longer endure the physical and psychic "beat down."

Ingrid interpreted her experience as an unfavorable verdict on her teaching professionalism. Ingrid describes her self-assessment:

> We've got two days before school, and I am a disaster, and if I'm a parent in this district, I'm offended that this is how my kid's teacher, two days before school starts, doesn't know her butt from a hole in the ground. This is stupid. I can't believe I'm screwing it up so badly… I remember thinking, trying to think of a logical way to pull myself out of it without making myself look like an idiot, without exposing myself as the fraud.

Ingrid describes herself as a "disaster," an "idiot," and a "fraud." She interprets herself to be an incompetent professional who knows nothing and is overcome by a sense of guilt. Hence, Ingrid's lack of tools (preventing her from planning the beginning of the year as conscientiously as she would have liked) precipitated an existential crisis. Ingrid was, in that moment, convinced that she could not be a teacher: "I was so sure that I was about to fail…I was 100% sure that this was going to be a disaster." Ingrid is offended by herself and by her attempts to be a teacher in the first place:

> I think what felt so jarring is that I've always been really sure of myself. I like to be a confident person…I felt that I did really well in my [full-year teaching]

> internship year, and I learned so much…I thought, "I'm ready. I'm going to hit the ground running." And in that moment [of crisis], it wasn't even that I was reevaluating teaching, it was more of reevaluating myself…just thinking like…I'm blowing it. I'm blowing it!...I thought, "And you thought you were a big shot…Now you found out this is really hard and you're not really as good as you thought you were, and you certainly have no room to feel comfortable, at the very least, you have no room to feel comfortable. If you think you were coming in as some kind of young phenom, trust me, you're not. You're coming in as an idiot….It was such an earth-shattering moment because, "Here I am! Ready to go! Here's the first day of the rest of my life!" and then realizing that this is not what I thought it was.

Ingrid very distinctly casts her crisis in terms of its ramifications for her relationship to her own future ("Here's the first day of the rest of my life!"). Ingrid reevaluates herself from being a "phenom" to being an "idiot." In this way, Ingrid's mood, precipitated by this moment of crisis, seems less characteristic of "doubt" and more characteristic of a certainty that she cannot become the person that wanted to be. Ingrid felt certain that she would fail; that her imagined future was no longer a possibility.

Robyn and the Reading Assignments

When I had a conversation with Robyn, she had just finished her first full year of teaching. She described herself as someone who is very passionate about literature, and she explained that many of her moments of doubt stemmed from the initial belief that her students would be passionate about literature as well: "I had this image…I'm going to come in [to the classroom] and be like, 'Oh, let's talk about *Catcher in the Rye*' and

everyone's going to want to talk about it because I want to talk about it." Robyn went on to describe moments of student apathy that compelled her to reevaluate her role and her ambitions as a teacher:

> For my seniors this year...the last thing we read was *The Kite Runner*, which is a really interesting book…I would specifically assign a really interesting part and then I would come in ready to talk about it…and I would be like, "Okay, who seriously didn't read?" and so many of them didn't even read and didn't even Sparknote…and I told them, "At least Sparknote. Come on! Talking not as a teacher, at least come in here knowing what happened." And they're like, "Did you just tell us to Sparknote?" And I'm like, "No, but honestly if you're not going to do anything, then, yeah."

In these words, we can hear Robyn trying to reevaluate what her relationship with her students should be after she found that her students were unwilling to engage with her in the way that she had anticipated.

In turn, this compelled Robyn to reevaluate what it meant to be a teacher:

> I had a lot of kids bomb almost every quiz and they were not that hard, I was not trying to trick them, it was just, "Who died?"... Just these basic questions, and a bunch of them, I would look at their answers, and they were ludicrous answers, and I would be like, it's not just that you're just confused where you mixed up two things, you didn't even look at the book, you didn't even look at Sparknotes. I don't understand this…I don't like the way I sound…I'm not happy that I'm like, "I'm going to quiz you guys!"…I was like, "Guys, if you read, you are not going to get a question wrong, it's very easy." And kids were like, "What if I

didn't read?" And I was like, "I don't know! Honestly, you're probably screwed!"

Robyn has difficulty understanding her students' apathy ("I don't understand this"), and this lack of understanding strains her relationship with her students, as manifest in her snarky response, "You're probably screwed!"

Robyn now serves as an adversary to her students, rather than as an ally. This was not the future into which Robyn had wanted to project herself ("I don't like the way I sound"). Robyn described to me one moment in which her incredulous attitude towards her students and her own internal doubt erupted in her 12th grade literature class:

> There was this moment where [my students] were doing quote analysis [from *The Kite Runner*]. They just had to say who said the quote. This one girl was like, "Oh, is this one the dad?" And the dad had died like 17 chapters ago. So I was like, "No. He's dead!" I was so frustrated, and the people around her laughed and I was just like, "UGHH, you don't even know that he's dead! I talked about [his death] in class...It was like a big moment halfway through the book, and now we're at the end, and you think that he said that? He's not even in the book anymore! What have you been doing every day when we talk about it?"…In that moment I was just like, "Ugh!"…I was like, not only to not be reading, but to be that grossly unaware of the entire plot…So when she was like, "It's the dad," I was like…someone random walked into my class. And I told her that. I was like, "I can't believe you just said that. Are you serious?!" And I was kind of laughing, but I was like, "I don't even have an answer for you. I'm going to leave

now."…And the people around her laughed…and I knew that she didn't care, but at the same time [to myself] I was like, "Is this my life?"

In this anecdote, Robyn lives through the experience of time as lost time. She confronts the student and asks, "What have you been doing every day?" This is a question that Robyn might also be implicitly asking herself, given that Robyn's teaching methods have apparently been ineffective (at least with this particular student). In fact, the student is not seen as a student at all, "[It's like] someone random walked into my class." In this singular moment (i.e., in the student's question, "Is this one the dad?"), all heretofore-assumed-to-be productive instructional time spent with this student was erased. The definitive disrepair of the teacher-student relationship is also underscored by Robyn's final words to the student: "I'm going to leave now."

It is clear that Robyn's interactions with her students in relation to their failure to complete reading assignments have shattered her previous, idealized image of teaching. Indeed, Robyn is unable to make sense of why or how her students openly display such apathetic dispositions to her assignments ("I don't understand this"). In the anecdote that Robyn narrates in this chapter, Robyn finds herself asking herself the pointed existential question, "Is this my life?" Robyn's problematic interactions with her students prompt her to reevaluate not only her students' (lack of) understanding but also her own existence: Is this what it means to be a teacher? Do I want to be a teacher? Is this my life? Is this what I want my life to be?

Interpretations

In light of my participants' stories, I will reconsider my own prejudices as it relates to the doubts that beginning teachers might experience. Specifically, while the

three participants in this chapter each described a meaningful and memorable anecdote in response to my prompt, these beginning teachers did not seem to experience "doubt," per se, as much as they experienced a certainty that they would fail or a fear that their imagined, idealized futures would be impossible to realize. In this way, these teachers "skipped over" the mood of doubt (i.e., doubt as genuine inquiry) and instead leaped directly into a felt sense of a broken future.

Within each anecdote, the teacher extrapolated beyond the anecdote itself to consider what the present moment implied for the future. Specifically, these teachers describe futures that they once felt to be possible and within reach as now being foreclosed. Ingrid, for example, used to think of herself as a phenom; her experience, however, disclosed to her that she is a fraud. She curses herself for ever believing that she could be a successful teacher. Why might these ostensibly extreme existential meanings – e.g., "I can't do this" (Shannon), "Is this my life?" (Robyn) – be disclosed to these beginning teachers within these moments?

Existing for-the-sake-of

The first dimension of my interpretation is derived from Heidegger's philosophy. Heidegger (1962) posits that care (*Sorge*) is fundamental to our being-in-the-world. We cannot be in the world in a detached or non-participatory way. We are always engaged in projects and, thus, are always engaged in future-directed activity--activity "for-the-sake-of" a way of being in the future. For example, right now, I am using my computer to write my dissertation "for-the-sake-of" projecting myself into a future in which I am a professor. We are always using the tools with which the world provides us to propel ourselves into the future (Cerbone, 2006; Inwood, 1997; Wheeler, 2015).

Because we always engaged in activity "for-the-sake-of" our futures, we always already perceive and interact with the things of the world as "ready-to-hand" (*zuhanden*) equipment that we can use to accomplish our tasks. For example, hammers, nails, screws, and lumber are equipment that enable individuals to engage in the long-term project of "being a carpenter." I see my computer, not as a discreet and complex object with unique mechanical and aesthetic properties but, rather, as a ready-to-hand tool (in a world of tools) that enables me to write my dissertation for the sake of "being a professor." Traditionally, classrooms, schools, desks, and red pens are equipment that are necessary for individuals to engage in the project of "being a teacher." Teachers engage in "teacherly" activities; so, if one wants to "be" a teacher, one must engage in "teacherly" activities, and these activities require employing the "tools" of teaching. In this way, our being-in-the-world is always "ahead-of-itself": we perceive the world as "ready-to-hand" equipment that can be used "for-the-sake-of" accomplishing a particular project in our "not yet" realized future.

This link between our "ready-to-hand" equipment and our future possibilities is critical, because it implies that meaningful moments may occur when tools break (or, said another way, when tools disclose themselves to us as "unready-to-hand"). Our tools and our engagement in the world are usually transparent (for example, I take for granted that I can open my laptop and continue to write my dissertation). However, when our tools break (for example, if my laptop crashes and fails to reboot, or if a particular key on the keyboard is malfunctioning), our tools and the nature of our engagement in the world appear to us as "something." Within such moments, we may take the attitude of looking at (rather than looking through) our tools and the possibilities into which we are

projecting ourselves. For example, if my laptop crashes and fails to reboot, I may, in the moment, become acutely aware of how having a computer (and, more essentially, how the activity of writing) is critical for my future project of being a professor.

Employing Heidegger's framework, it may be possible to gain some insight into why the beginning teachers in this chapter interpret their challenging experiences in terms of their future. For example, Shannon wonders whether or not she can successfully utilize the instructional tool of the science binders (i.e., can she successfully grade them all), and she wonders about what implications this moment might have for her future as a teacher. Specifically, if, indeed, she is unable to finish grading all of her students' binders – if she cannot engage successfully in this "teacherly" activity – will she be able to be a teacher in future? Likewise, as Ingrid feels unequipped and unprepared to set up her classroom for the beginning of the school year, she begins to worry not only about the first days of school but also about her entire future career as a teacher: "I was so sure that I was about to fail…I was 100% sure that this was going to be a disaster…And you thought you were a big shot." Because the tools (e.g., curriculum guides, seating charts) she sought to use "for-the-sake-of" being a teacher appeared to her as "unready-to-hand," Ingrid reconsiders whether being a teacher is a future into which she can project herself.

Therefore, it is not unreasonable that these beginning teachers worried about the future as they experienced these challenging moments; however, we might continue to wonder about why these teachers reacted as strongly as they did within the dilemmas they described. Specifically, the three teachers in this chapter derive fairly extreme and fatalistic interpretations: e.g., "I can't do this," "I am a fraud."

According to Heidegger, however, moments within which tools appear as "unready-to-hand" need not lead to extreme reactions; instead, when tools appear to us as broken, we may suddenly see the tools as "something," rather than as a transparent piece of equipment with which we engage in order to cope with our daily lives. The object becomes, in Heidegger's term, "present-at-hand," as the thing, rather than remaining invisible, is "presented to us" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 75) as its everyday, "equipmental" meaning is momentarily stripped away. For example, if a key on my laptop's keyboard malfunctions, I may suddenly become aware of my laptop's keyboard; once the everyday, equipmental meanings of the keyboard have been stripped away, I may begin to consider its ergonomic design or its aesthetic properties.

If a key on my keyboard where to malfunction, I would probably get frustrated, but I probably would not conclude, "I am a fraud." The three teachers in this chapter, however, do not seem to experience their "broken equipment" (e.g., science binders, curriculum guides, reading assignments) as "present-to-hand." Specifically, they do not inquire into the nature of their instructional tools, materials, and assignments; instead, these three participants seem to perceive their frustrations as threats to their future, and, furthermore, they interpret these threats in very fatalistic ways. For example, Shannon does not focus her inquiry onto the science binders; instead, Shannon worries and concludes that she is not capable of being a teacher. Likewise, Robyn does not question the nature of her reading assignments; instead, her mind quickly jumps to existential ramifications: "Is this my life?" Why do these three beginning teachers interpret their experiences in this way?

As I have argued earlier (see Chapter 2), the mood of doubt is probably inevitable for any beginning teacher, given that beginning teachers, while assuming the full responsibilities of teaching, are still learning to teach. Furthermore, the fact that the three teachers in the current chapter experience challenges (e.g., being uncertain about how to complete a mountain of grading; being uncertain about how to set up the classroom for the start of the year) is not altogether unexpected. What is most interesting, however, is how these three teachers interpret their challenges as existential crises, rather than as moments of "doubt" from which they might be able to learn about teaching in and from their teaching practice (cf. Ball & Cohen, 1999; Lampert, 1999). Why might these teachers, seemingly, "skip over" the mood of doubt and leap directly into the certitude of a broken future? I will continue my analysis by arguing that there may be a particular reason that these three beginning teachers fall into this pattern: i.e., the fact that beginning teachers possess a subjective warrant to teach.

The subjective warrant to teach

The second dimension of my interpretation draws on what is known about the endeavor of learning to teach. Lortie (1975) argues that preservice teachers possess a subjective warrant to teach based on their apprenticeship of observation. That is, because preservice teachers, as students, have spent years upon years observing teachers, it may be natural for preservice teachers to presume that they know how to teach (they need only reproduce what they have seen). Thereby, a beginning teacher may feel that his or her "warrant" to teach is justified less by professional knowledge and more so by his or her own personal dedication to the project of being a teacher. Even with little or no professional experience, beginning teachers, emboldened by their subjective warrant,

may begin their careers optimistic that they will be successful and that they will encounter few problems or complications in their teaching practice (Conway, 2001; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Weinstein, 1988). Compare with Ingrid's sentiments: "I thought, 'I'm ready. I'm going to hit the ground running.'"

Britzman (2007) elaborates on this hypothesis by pointing out that extensive experiences in schools may cultivate, within beginning teachers, not only a subjective warrant to teach, but also a hatred of professional development. Given that school is where we spend our childhood and adolescence, our experiences in schools contribute formatively to our sense of self. To ask beginning teachers to complicate, challenge, or abandon this well developed sense of self (however naïve it may be in relation to the realities of teaching) may be, for beginning teachers, a frightening prospect. Thus, Britzman insists that beginning teachers' development may be uneasy and uneven. In fact, beginning teachers may resist their own development, since it requires leaving their sense of who they are. As Britzman (2007) writes,

> "Growing up in education permeates our meanings of education and learning…[and] our sense of self and our sense of the world is profoundly affected by having to grow up in school…[As a result,] we cannot seem to leave our childhood of education" (p. 2)

Bird and colleagues (1993) provide some of evidence of how the subjective warrant to teach (and the related hatred of development) can complicate the process of learning to teach. Bird and colleagues attempted to challenge preservice teachers to grapple earnestly with the intellectual demands of thinking like a teacher (e.g., managing instructional trade-offs; anticipating student misconceptions) and, towards this aim,

designed course activities and assignments to challenge, puzzle, and even trouble the preservice teachers. The preservice teachers vehemently resisted.

The teacher educators hypothesize that perhaps this resistance stems from the fact that preservice teachers:

> think they are suited to teaching; some of them believe they have little to learn from teacher education. In the introductory course, they encountered unfamiliar procedures that challenged their competence…and unfamiliar cases [of teaching] and arguments that challenge their warrants as teachers…In terms of identity and self regard, the students had a good deal at stake. (p. 263)

The preservice teachers vociferously insisted that this course was not helping them learn to teach, which is an interesting claim for them to make, considering these preservice teachers had yet to have taught in classrooms of their own. Yet, such a claim may be evidence of their desire to protect what was "at stake," i.e., their own sense of self. Preservice teachers may want to preserve their identity as persons who were "born to teach" destined towards rewarding (and minimally problematic) careers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2010; Weinstein, 1988; Whitney, et al., 2013).

The subjective warrant to teach and the related hatred of development that beginning teachers may experience may help, in part, to explain the three anecdotes presented in this chapter. Perhaps the three teachers in this chapter interpreted their challenges in particularly existential ("Is this my life?") and fatalistic ("I can't do this") ways because these moments directly implicated (and threatened) beginning teachers' sense of self. Perhaps these beginning teachers were unable to use these moments as opportunities for doubt and genuine inquiry into the craft of teaching (e.g., the nature of

using science binders or reading assignments as methods of assessment) because these teachers interpreted these challenging moments as verdicts on the validity of their subjective warrant. Perhaps Ingrid was unable to externalize her problem (i.e., her school did not provide her with enough resources or support), because, as Lortie (1975) writes, "an individualistic conception of practice exacerbates the burden of failure" (p. 81). When beginning teachers believe that their professional success (or failure) lies solely within themselves, challenging moments may be passed over as opportunities for inquiry and instead interpreted as having definitive existential consequences.

We can now return to Heidegger's framework and the theory that "unready-to-hand" tools open up opportunities for perceiving "present-at-hand." According to Heidegger, in order to be able to "see" the things of the world with their equipmental meanings stripped away, we must be open to the world, and we must relate to our own experience with a phenomenological mindfulness (Quay, 2013). We must "open ourselves to [the] presence that is passively disclosed to us" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 75). Being open to this presence, however, may be something that beginning teachers resist, precisely because such openness threatens their subjective warrant to teach. If beginning teachers begin to doubt their teaching practice, they may feel that *they* have failed, and they may conclude that teaching is not a future into which they can (or want) to project themselves. Within challenging moments, beginning teachers may perceive their problems (including their "unready-to-hand" equipment) not as openings for genuine inquiry (cf. Dewey, 1933) but, rather, as existential threats.

CHAPTER 5

Despair over the Self

When I asked some of my participants to describe meaningful or memorable moments of doubt, they shared stories that seemed to be characterized by a self that was in conflict. Teaching is understood to be work that is inherently uncertain (Helsing, 2007), dilemmatic (Elbow, 1983), and paradoxical (Palmer, 1998). *The endeavor of learning to teach*, in particular, is filled with tensions (Beach & Pearson, 1998). For example, beginning teachers must negotiate a balance between their multiple intentions: How do I serve as the authority figure in the classroom while still being friendly towards my students (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998)? How do I maintain my role as a student of teaching while simultaneously acting as a teacher (Pillen, et al., 2013)?

A beginning teacher's idealized future may appear to her as "broken" or "shattered" (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Friedman, 2000) as a result of the beginning teacher's recognition that uncertainties, dilemmas, and paradoxes are endemic to teaching. In the previous chapter, Shannon, Ingrid, and Robyn expressed disillusionment towards the projects into which they were projecting themselves. Within these moments, the teachers recognized that the work of being a teacher was other than how they had imagined it. *The endeavor of learning to teach* requires teachers to learn how to appraise teaching in new ways (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Kennedy, 1997), and this process of reappraisal may involve disillusionment. What is significant to note, however, is that while "disillusionment certainly feels disheartening, and can be demoralizing…[it] bespeaks the possibility of a 'reasonable' readjustment to a difficult situation. Despair does not. Despair entails a sense of doomed foreclosure" (Liston, 2000, p. 83)

This chapter builds on the previous chapter by exploring how challenges encountered by a beginning teacher can implicate not only the work of teaching but the teacher's self as well. The three anecdotes told by teachers in this chapter reflect a sense of "doomed disclosure," for, each anecdote, as narrated by the teacher, illuminates, to the teacher, something the conflicted and rent nature of her own self. In these anecdotes, the self is revealed to be weak, flawed, or paradoxical; and, because the teacher can never be rid of her self, in this chapter I will argue that when a teacher's self emerges as the object of doubt, uncertainty, or vulnerability, the teacher's mood may shift to a mood of despair.

Robyn Losing the Power

During our conversation about experiences of doubt, Robyn told me about a moment from her year of student teaching that led her to feel devastated and seriously doubting as to whether she could continue teaching:

> [My mentor teacher] was [watching me teach] one day, and [she] noticed these two kids talking…The next day during my prep hour…my mentor teacher was talking to me about those kids and…she said, "It's a power battle, and you've lost the power," and hearing her say that I just like, I, like, started crying…I started crying pretty hard…Hearing it said that way, I was just…I don't know…I took it to the most extreme: I have no classroom management skills. I have no authority in my own classroom. No one believes what I say. No one cares what I think. I can't tell anyone to do anything. No one respects me. All of those things, I thought [them] 100% at that moment...I just started sobbing.

The most painful aspect of Robyn's experience is that she interprets her mentor as not only impugning her handling of a particular classroom situation but also as impugning

Robyn's teacher self. Robyn's mentor teacher offers the assessment that Robyn has "lost the power," and Robyn interprets this "power" to be an internal quality that teachers either do or do not possess. Without that power, "I have no authority…No one believes what I say. No one cares what I think…No one respects me." Robyn fears that she has lost the power to be a teacher. As Robyn explains,

> I let [my mentor's comment] tell me everything about myself. I can't control a classroom if I have a 10th grade boy who has power over me…When my mentor teacher said those things, I was like, *I have failed.*

The meaning that is disclosed to Robyn in this moment is not that teaching is difficult, but that Robyn, herself, is unequipped for teaching: "In that moment, I felt like I had to drop out [from teaching]…How am I supposed to come back from this?...There's no coming back." Devastated by her mentor's assessment, Robyn experiences a sense of foreclosure of possibilities ("There's no coming back"). Furthermore, Robyn's failure as a teacher is a result of her failure as a person ("I let [my mentor's comment] tell me everything about myself…I have failed"). Robyn's sobbing betrays her existential despair.

Kathryn Preparing a Presentation

During our conversation, Kathryn told me about a moment in which she found herself being undone by her passion for teaching. Kathryn explained to me: "The thing I do like about teaching is that I love that I can be creative. I like to be creative. I like to try new things…[and] that's the cool part about teaching." One night, however, this desire to be creative backfired:

> I stayed up until 4 a.m. one day, making a PowerPoint [presentation]…I was super-creative and the kids loved it…I made this PowerPoint with prepositions in Spanish and it had Miley Cyrus [in it]…When I presented it and the kids loved it. But I was up that night and I was like, *"Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this?...Why am I wasting my life doing this?*"...When I was making it I was like, "God, I hope these kids like this…I think they will…It's creative…[and it has] current culture [in it] so they'll be interested in it," but at the same time, it's like, past whatever [hour, and] I'm like, "I hate myself, I hate myself. I am going to be so tired tomorrow and just want to sleep the whole day."

In this anecdote, Kathryn describes how, even when alone, she is living through her relationship with her students, making her plans with their engagement in mind. Furthermore, the fact that Kathryn is exhausted and worried about the effects that her efforts will have on her body underscores the embodied and temporal context of her lived experience.

The reoccurring question in Kathryn's mind is, "Why am I doing this?" That is, Kathryn doubts the extent to which she is behaving in concert with her own intentions. She wants to sleep; so, why does she willingly stay up to complete the lesson? Why does she work against her own wellbeing? Interestingly, the lesson that Kathryn is preparing is not appearing to her as "broken" or problematic; instead, Kathryn is confident in her ability to create a pedagogical tool that will appeal to her students, and, indeed, engaging in this type of instructional planning is something that she enjoys. At the same time, however, as she plans her lesson, she negatively evaluates herself:

> I hate *myself*…It's not [that] I hate teaching, but I hate *myself* in the way that I'm doing this to myself…I feel like I'm sacrificing because I'm not sleeping, so I'm like sacrificing my life just to entertain people for five minutes. It's a five-minute PowerPoint [presentation]. It took me four hours to make [it]. Just things like that. Like, *why?* Why do I do this to myself?...I like to do this, because I like to have fun in class…but what's the point of like doing all this when you can only do it once and…[you] damage yourself in the process?…I always want to have fun with kids and be entertaining and stuff, that's what I feel engages them the most, but I don't want to kill myself in the process…I hate that I'm doing this to myself.

Kathryn explains that she likes to be creative and to share her creativity with her students, but it is precisely this part of her self that is "damaging" her. Kathryn, therefore, doubts whether or not she can trust herself to take care of her own wellbeing. Kathryn does not hate teaching, her students, or her instructional methods: she hates *herself*, specifically, the part of her self that inspires her to engage in the work of teaching in a way that is both rewarding and harmful. This perplexing moment in her teaching practice was able to illuminate this paradox for her.

Mackenzie Being Evaluated

Mackenzie had just finished her first full year of teaching when she and I met to discuss her experiences of doubt. Mackenzie told me that she often experienced doubt stemming from questions of responsibility: "There were days when I was like, Am I literally hurting these kids by being here, teaching them?" In spite of these self-deprecating feelings, Mackenzie was held up by her administration as an outstanding

teacher; she received excellent evaluations and was given awards; and, yet, at the same time, Mackenzie felt that she was betraying her students. A particularly strong tension that Mackenzie felt involved the fact that Mackenzie taught students who were achieving below grade level, and she felt that she was being asked to follow curricular standards that were not appropriate for her students:

> I really started to look at the curriculum and…[the] standards…I would look through it and I would just think, "How am I supposed to get these kids to this level?"…My pay is tied into what they test…I would sit there and be like, "I care about these kids, but I'm also scared about me." And the moment when you think that you have to choose between...68 students or myself, like, that's not why I signed up for teaching, to choose who wins…

Mackenzie, thus, felt torn between two loyalties: serving her students (i.e., teaching a curriculum that aligned with her students' preparedness) and serving herself (i.e., teaching a curriculum that aligned with the standardized test).

This internal conflict reached a boiling point when Mackenzie had to prepare a lesson for a formal administrative observation:

> I remember putting together my lesson plan for [my observation]…There were so many parts of it that I wasn't satisfied with…As I was making the graphic organizer [for the lesson, I had] a very cynical laugh, because, I'm like, "This is way too hard for them, This is way too above them, and it's not fair to them."

Despite these reservations, Mackenzie prepared and taught the lesson that she assumed her administrator wanted to see:

> As I was teaching [the lesson], I was thinking, I hope the woman observing me is getting something out of this, because I don't feel like the students or myself are getting anything out of it...I went through a lesson on [the short story] "The Lottery," and had [the] insane graphic organizer and I was pushing and pushing [the students] so hard.

As Mackenzie had anticipated, the administrator approved of the observed lesson, lauding Mackenzie's efforts. This, ironically, precipitated Mackenzie's most intense moment of internal conflict:

> When I debriefed with [the administrator]…She just went on and on and on about how she couldn't believe the [excellent] classroom management I had, and she couldn't believe how much that lesson was a success, and it took everything I had not to laugh because I didn't feel that way, because I didn't feel that that's what [my students] needed… [But the administrator] was *in love* with [the lesson]. She was like, "This is the *best thing* I've seen…the best lesson I've seen all year." And…I felt ashamed and embarrassed that she said that to me, and I know that's not how she meant it, but to me, like, that [lesson] wasn't good, and how was that the best thing you've seen all year?…I feel like [the administrator] just look[s] at [my students] as a statistical number. I actually get to talk to them every day. So those are the moments where I was like…I don't know….Something was crumbling and I couldn't figure out what.

For Mackenzie, the effusive praise from her administrator highlights the absurdity of the situation, and (as she did while planning the lesson), Mackenzie's first instinct in response to her administrator's praise is to laugh. Despite the angst that Mackenzie

suffered while planning and teaching a lesson that she felt was appropriate for her students, her administrator hailed it as the best lesson she had seen all year. For Mackenzie, this only underscored the fact that, for her, there exists a trade-off between the best interests of her students and the best interests of her own career. Reflecting on this trade-off, Mackenzie expressed her despair:

> [After the debrief with my administrator] I hated myself…I had to fake it…I was like, "*I am a fraud. I am a fraud*"...I got really good evaluations but I feel like I sold myself out to get those evaluations…I felt so *cheap*…It did make me feel cheap, like I had to choose. I had to choose…I felt, "I'm a bad person…How dare you become a teacher and ruin these kids' lives?...Are you even teaching them the right thing? What are you doing?"…I'm bad. I'm a bad teacher…How do I do this to 68 kids?...I'm a bad person for thinking I could be a teacher."

Although Mackenzie is an exemplary teacher in the eyes of her administration, Mackenzie strongly feels that this manner of teaching (e.g., teaching predetermined curricular standards regardless of her students' preparedness) goes against her own values and ambitions. Mackenzie is conscious that she is play-acting, living as a fraud; yet, she plays along with this absurdity because of her own self-interest in her career. Mackenzie is aware of what she is sacrificing: she is selling her principles for a good evaluation, and, as a result, feels "cheap." Furthermore, Mackenzie's questioning of her actions gives rise to an emotionally charged, self-accusatory question, "How dare you become a teacher and ruin these kids' lives?" Mackenzie is not ashamed of her administrator, of her students, or of her curriculum; rather, Mackenzie is ashamed of *herself*, precisely because

of the fact that she willfully chooses to sell herself for good evaluations and willfully play-acts in a role of which she disapproves.

Interpretations

The three teachers in this chapter experienced existential meaning within the moments of conflict that they experienced. Yet, as in the previous chapter (Chapter 4), when asked to narrate a meaningful or memorable moment of "doubt," the stories that these teachers describe focus less on the uncertain and paradoxical nature of teaching itself and instead highlight the vulnerable and paradoxical nature of the teacher's own self. For example, Robyn believes that her classroom management difficulties, and her mentor's assessment of her "lost power," reveal an important dimension of Robyn herself ("[I let those comments] tell me everything about myself"). Likewise, Mackenzie arrives at a definitive conclusion after her formal evaluation: "I am a fraud." In concluding this chapter, I will attempt to interpret my participants' experiences. Why might meaning about the nature of one's self be disclosed to these beginning teachers? Furthermore, why might these meanings be of such a despairing nature?

The vulnerable professional self

The anecdotes described in this chapter present beginning teachers confronting their own abilities and their own ambitions. As Robyn cries over her ineffectiveness, as Kathryn curses herself for staying up late, and as Mackenzie experiences guilt over her teaching, these teachers experience doubt: Can I be a teacher? What type of teacher do I want to be? In considering these questions, these three teachers recognize the vulnerable and conflicting nature of their professional self.

Intrator (2006) describes the self of the beginning teacher as "intense, conflicting, dynamic, and fragile" (p. 234), and Flores and Day (2006) describe a beginning teacher's experience as a "permanent dilemma" (p. 228). In part, these extreme characterizations are reflective of the fact that the beginning teacher's professional identity is still being formed while the beginning teacher is concurrently asked to assume the responsibilities of a teacher (Bullough, et al., 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The vulnerability that a beginning teacher experiences is, however, also reflective of the fact that teaching, by its very nature, is an intensely personal and interpersonal profession in which the teacher's self is perpetually exposed (Fenstermacher, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2009; Palmer, 1998; Tickle, 1999). As Liston (2000) argues, "If part of teaching is the public sharing of our personal love of learning, then we will always be vulnerable" (p. 101). If, teaching involves the sharing of personal passion, then, when students do not share in this passion, it is, in part, the teacher who has been rejected (Elbow, 1983). The professional self of the teacher is, thus, always in play – and always at stake – in the classroom.

As mentioned above, feelings of vulnerability may be exacerbated for beginning teachers. In particular, beginning teachers may be painfully eager to appear – to students, parents, colleagues, mentors, teacher educators, and administrators – as "real" teachers (Bird, et al., 1993; Britzman, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Greenwalt, 2008; Latta & Field, 2005; Rosaen, Lundeberg, Cooper, & Fritzen, 2010). For example, part of Ingrid's angst (Chapter 4) is motivated by her fear of how parents might perceive her: "I am a disaster, and if I'm a parent in this district, I'm offended that this is how my kid's teacher, two days before school starts, doesn't know her butt from a hole in the ground." Likewise, Robyn's (Chapter 5) experience of vulnerability is so intense that she

breaks down into tears when her mentor disapproves of her classroom management ("No one believes what I say. No one cares what I think…No one respects me…I just started sobbing"). Mackenzie, similarly, feels compelled to appear as an effective teacher to her school's administration, even as she perceives that she is betraying her students to do so.

Mackenzie's story highlights a particularly important feature of the vulnerability that beginning teachers may experience: Beginning teachers may experience themselves as being "split into desirable and undesirable elements" (Brown, 2006, p. 680) and, in the process, may feel like their own antagonist (Britzman, 2003; Lampert, 1985). Mackenzie reflects on the tension she feels by declaring, "That's not why I signed up for teaching, to choose who wins." This feeling of being torn by antagonistic motives is characteristic of what Friedman (2006) terms beginning teachers' "bi-polar professional self" (p. 722).

Smagorinsky and colleagues (2011), for example, observed a beginning English teacher who began enacting the same teacher-centered approach to instruction that she had decried only a few months earlier, prompting her to acknowledge, regretfully, that the teacher she had become was "not me" (Smagorinsky, et al., 2011, p. 279). Latta and Field (2005) present a similar testimony, as a beginning teacher reflects, "the thing I dislike is…this lecture style of teaching, which I absolutely hate, but that is exactly what I would end up doing." (p. 654). Wiggins and Clift (1995) describe this phenomenon as the experience of *oppositional pairs*: Beginning teachers must find ways to resolve the contraries and paradoxes of teaching: e.g., Am I an evaluator or an ally? Am I a friend or an authority figure? Should I let students create their own knowledge or should I tell them the information they need to know (Bullough, et al., 1992; Pillen, et al., 2013; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998; Windschitl, 2002)? If beginning teachers are unable to

reconcile these oppositional pairs, beginning teachers may remain obstinately stuck within one maladaptive pattern of pedagogy.

Since *the endeavor of learning to teach* requires adopting a new, "unnatural" professional identity (Ball & Forzani, 2009), and, because teaching is replete with tensions and oppositional pairs, Brown (2006) argues that, often, "[b]ecoming a teacher is experienced as becoming an increasingly fragmented person" (p. 676), where these fragments of the self are experienced not as "harmonious and integrated, but rather as split and antagonistic" (p. 677). This is similar to the experience that Kathryn describes: Although part of her wants to stay up late and craft a creative presentation for her students, another part of her curses herself for doing so ("I hate myself…I hate that I'm doing this to myself"). Kathryn's passion for teaching – specifically, her love for being creative and for engaging her students – is what makes her vulnerable. Within her mood of doubt, Kathryn experiences disharmony within her fragmented self and experiences herself as her own antagonist.

It is reasonable to expect teachers to feel torn in this way to some degree, because, although teachers must take care of their own wellbeing (just as all existing individuals must), there are very few limits placed on a teacher's obligations to her students. That is to say, there is no limit to how much a teacher can give (or be expected to give) of herself. Indeed, many of the emotional rewards of teaching are derived from the act of caring and the act of giving (Hargreaves, 1998), and, yet, giving too much can make the teacher feel like she is betraying herself. Returning to the example of the teacher presented by Bullough and colleagues:

> [N]urturing was at the center of her self-understanding and was the source of her greatest pleasures…as a teacher…[Yet,] the personal costs of maintaining this understanding of teaching were beginning to be too high…there were limits to how far she could or should sacrifice for the students. There was simply no end to the needs of the young people and no possible way for one person to respond to them all. (Bullough, et al., 1992, p. 109)

Like Kathryn, this teacher finds it difficult to know how to circumscribe her efforts to care for her students, even at the expense of taking care of herself (e.g., staying up until 4 a.m. to plan a lesson). This teacher, like Kathryn, is devastated to find that the extent to which she can care for her students may have limits, and recognizing that these limits exist may, in turn, become a source of profound despair (Orland-Barak & Maskit, 2011).

For beginning teachers, efforts to negotiate these limits of obligation are complicated by the fact that discourses within educational research and teacher education insist that beginning teachers care (without any concrete limits) for their students. Cochran-Smith (2003), in a prominent editorial for the *Journal of Teacher Education*, writes, "caring is, in fact, an integral part of teaching and learning. Teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings," and, furthermore, this ethic of caring comes "from the heart rather than the pocketbook." (pp. 372-373). While we might intuitively insist that caring is integral to teaching (Noddings, 1992), and while many beginning teachers – including Kathryn and Mackenzie – are motivated by an ethic of care (Goldstein & Lake, 2000), the claim that caring teachers are motivated by their "heart" rather than by their "pocketbook" potentially pits the intention of caring for oneself and the intention of caring for one's students in opposition.

For example, Mackenzie believes that placing her own career security (e.g., getting good evaluations from her administration) above the needs of her students implicates her as a bad teacher. She expresses this sense of guilt through questions such as, "Am I literally hurting these kids by being here?" and "I'm a bad person…How dare you become a teacher and ruin these kids' lives?" Perhaps Kathryn and Mackenzie despair over who they are because they are living a paradox: to care for one's self and to care for one's students is experienced by these teachers as an oppositional pair; yet, because these teachers cannot be rid of either motivation, they can only resort to despairing over this paradox in their existence.

The self and despair

Above, I have argued that a beginning teacher's professional self is, by its very nature, vulnerable and that this vulnerability arises, in large part, because the beginning teacher's professional self is fragmented and oppositional (i.e., "bi-polar"). As I consider the nature of being a beginning teacher, I find Kierkegaard's description of the self as particularly apt. Specifically, Kierkegaard (1946c) argued that the self is, by definition, a paradoxical relation: the self is made up of irreconcilable elements, and, yet, the self cannot escape itself. Of particular interest to Kierkegaard is the fact that the self is limited by its facticity while, at the same time, the self longs for existential freedom. What is critical for Kierkegaard is the fact that this oppositional pair cannot be "resolved." Instead, the self *is* this oppositional pair. That is, the self becomes a self only by relating the fragmented and conflicting elements of itself to one another. The task of existence – i.e., the task of becoming a self – is to reconcile the self's irreconcilable nature. This project of synthesizing the incompatible elements of the self

is fundamentally impossible. Therefore, existence, is, in Kierkegaard's (1946c) terms, a sickness unto death, an experience of perpetual despair.

While Kierkegaard's outlook on life seems gray – to say the least – it calls to mind the moods experienced by Robyn, Kathryn, and Mackenize. These teachers became aware of their selves and the oppositional pairs within their selves. Elements of their selves were disclosed to them, and the experience of this disclosure evokes Kierkegaard's characterization of despair.

First, consider Robyn's interpretation: "I let [my mentor's comment] tell me everything about myself…When my mentor teacher said those things, I was like, *I have failed.*" Robyn does not interpret her failure as being a function of lack of pedagogical skills; rather, her failure is a function of her self. Kierkegaard (1946c) would interpret this experience as follows: in spite of "all that [Robyn] wills to be rid of [herself]…[s]he cannot get rid of [herself]" (p. 344) and, hence, Robyn's self becomes "the thing over which [s]he despairs" (p. 361). In other words, Robyn experiences despair because the "problem" that she wants to be rid of is her own self. To return to Liston's (2000) words, while "disillusionment certainly feels disheartening, and can be demoralizing…[it] bespeaks the possibility of a 'reasonable' readjustment to a difficult situation. Despair does not. Despair entails a sense of doomed foreclosure" (p. 83). Robyn lives through the experience of doomed foreclosure ("I felt like I had to drop out [from teaching]…How am I supposed to come back from this?...There's no coming back") precisely because her self is the thing over which she despairs, and there is no way for Robyn to be rid of her self.

Perhaps Robyn directs this criticism towards herself not only because of her mentor's comments ("You have lost the power") but also because of the nature of *the endeavor of learning to teach.* As discussed in the previous chapter, the subjective warrant to teach is a formative influence on beginning teachers' professional growth (Bird, et al., 1993; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Preservice teachers believe that they know about teaching – and about what kinds of teachers they will be – because they have been observing and analyzing teaching throughout childhood and adolescence. In this way, our images of teaching are very intimately intertwined with our images of self and other (Britzman, 2007; Greenwalt, 2014). Because of this very personal dimension to one's identity as a teacher, it is easy to believe in the cultural myths that teachers are self-made and that everything in the classroom depends on the teacher (Britzman, 1986, 2003). Perhaps these dimensions of *the endeavor of learning to teach* are what precipitated Robyn's spiral into despair and resignation ("I have failed…There's no coming back"). As Lortie (1975) writes, "an individualistic conception of practice exacerbates the burden of failure" (p. 81). A teacher's identity is intimately personal, and, when this identity is revealed to be weak or flawed, the only response can be despair, for one cannot be rid of one's self.

Second, consider Kathryn's existential question: "Why do I do this to myself?" On the one hand, Kathryn wants to stay up making this presentation; on the other hand, she does not. As with Robyn, Kathryn's dilemma lies in the fact that she cannot be rid of herself: "I hate *myself*…It's not [that] I hate teaching, but I hate *myself* in the way that I'm doing this to myself." Kierkegaard (1946c) might describe Kathryn's experience as despair that is derived from wanting to be oneself despite one's own contradictory

judgment: the "willing despairing to be oneself" (p. 365). Within her mood of doubt, Kathryn does not know what to do; she despairs – she hates herself – because she willfully engages in what she does (and yet does not) want to do. Similarly, consider Mackenzie's interpretation: "I care about these kids, but I'm also scared about me." Mackenzie wants to do what she feels is best for her students, while, at the same time, she wants receive good evaluations. When Mackenzie is applauded for her performance, she recognizes herself as a fraud. In this way, Mackenzie "cannot win by choosing" (Lampert, 1985, p. 182).

The conflicting obligations that Mackenzie describes (i.e., having to choose between herself and her students) is characteristic of the existential dilemma that Britzman (2007) underscores: namely, becoming a teacher involves uneven and conflicted development precisely because beginning teachers must figure out, for themselves, how to be with and care for others in the world (see also van Manen, 1991). How does one balance caring for oneself while also caring for others? How much should beginning teachers give of themselves for the sake of their students? To whom is the teacher primarily responsible (Janzen, 2013)? These are critical, challenging, existential questions that are rooted not only in pedagogical philosophy but also in our own personal history and in our internal working models of self and others (Greenwalt, 2014; Riley, 2009; Riley, Lewis, & Brew, 2010; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011).

Within her moment of doubt, Mackenzie experiences the desire to care for herself and the desire to care for others as an oppositional pair. Mackenzie (selflessly) wants to serve her students, and she also (selfishly) wants to receive good evaluations. Because Mackenzie cannot get rid of either element of her self, she can only despair: "I'm a bad

person…How dare you become a teacher and ruin these kids' lives?...I'm bad...I'm a bad person for thinking I could be a teacher." To frame this interpretation in Kierkegaard's terms, Mackenzie is in despair over her self, precisely because she cannot get rid of her self. Mackenzie wants to be selfless, and, yet, she cannot be rid of the part of her self that cares for her own self. For this, she is, in her interpretation, "a bad person."

In conclusion, in this chapter I have presented anecdotes that illustrate how particular moments within development of a beginning teacher can disclose to the beginning teacher her own vulnerable and conflicted professional self. This has implications for how we understand the problems that beginning teachers experience. If beginning teachers' experience moments that illuminate their fragmented selves to themselves, beginning teachers may experience the moods of despair. Specifically, if the self is a source of doubt, conflict, or vulnerability for a beginning teacher, the beginning teacher may experience despair, precisely because the beginning teacher cannot be rid of his or her self. When the self is implicated, a beginning teacher's mood reveals an existential – not a technical – dilemma.

Regardless of their technical skill, teachers will always be in a vulnerable position. As Cohen (2011) writes,

> one of the more constructive things a teacher can do is to acquaint herself with students' knowledge…[However, to] turn up evidence that students have not learned is one of the most threatening things teachers can do; a student who fails to comprehend is an actual or potential failure for the teacher. The more vivid the evidence that students did not learn, the more troublesome it can be. (p. 186)

Thus, teachers, in order to engage in their daily work, "must make themselves vulnerable to evidence of failure" (p. 188). This is a vulnerability that cannot be escaped or ameliorated through technical skill or more advanced practices; rather, it is a vulnerability built into the inherent nature of being a teacher (Liston, 2000). This vulnerability is dramatically exacerbated for beginning teachers, who do not yet feel like real teachers (Britzman, 2003; Carlyle & Woods, 2002; Greenwalt, 2008; Sinner, 2012). As they are forced to embrace this vulnerability and confront their failures and weaknesses, and as they are forced into positions where they must choose between caring for themselves and caring for their students, beginning teachers may feel their selves being rent into conflicting components (Brown, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006; Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). Therefore, we might expect beginning teachers, in their development, to experience feelings of paradox and existential despair.

CHAPTER 6

The Unhomeliness of Teaching

When I asked some of my participants to describe meaningful or memorable moments of doubt, they shared stories in which they found themselves in situations that were strange. In particular, these were moments when these teachers suddenly became of aware of the weirdness of their situation. The stories I present in this chapter reflect this uncanniness. Feeling like a stranger in one's own life may be fundamental to *the endeavor of learning to teach*. For example, as beginning teachers step in front of the classroom for the first time, they feel their students' gazes projecting onto them a new, foreign, cultural identity (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). Despite the fact that beginning teachers did not themselves craft the cultural role of the classroom teacher, they are, nonetheless, held responsible for embracing and embodying this cultural identity. Teachers cannot escape the subjecting gaze of others, even if they actively work to resist this subjection (Butler, 1997; Janzen, 2013).

Beginning teachers are forced to negotiate between different contexts and different cultural expectations of what it means to "be a teacher" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Flores & Day, 2006; Smagorinsky, et al., 2004; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). In the process, beginning teachers may experience doubt in relation to what it means to learn, to teach, and to care for others, and, as a result, beginning teachers' own place in the world may increasingly feel uncertain. In other words, *the endeavor of learning to teach* may reveal to beginning teachers their "human condition as strangers" (Britzman, 2007, p. 3).

As I have explored in previous chapters, beginning teachers may encounter moments in which they feel alienated from their idealized futures or from their own selves. This chapter will explore how, for beginning teachers, beginning teachers may experience the existential state of "unhomeliness" – that is, an alienation from any sense of meaning in the world. According to Arendt (1993), if new things are to be introduced into the world via a new generation (i.e., if the world is to be renewed), the new generation must first understand the world into which they have been born. Education, by Arendt's definition, is, thus, the process of gradually introducing children to the adult world, and, in Arendt's framework, being a teacher involves embracing the responsibility of being a representative of this adult world. Of course, teachers themselves have been thrown into a world that they themselves did not create. In this way, choosing to be a teacher is a nontrivial existential choice. As Arendt writes, "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it" (Arendt, 1993, p. 196). Before teachers can decide if they "love the world" of teaching, they must first recognize how they are "strangers" in this world.

I will argue that the stories in this chapter reveal the strange, discomforting, and uncanny nature of teaching. The doubt that the teachers in this chapter experience is, I argue, far more profound than the doubt discussed in the previous two chapters, for, while doubt over one's future or over one's self still holds the possibility that one's existence as a teacher is meaningful, recognizing the unhomeliness of teaching forecloses the possibility of meaning itself. While attuned to the existential state of unhomeliness, the meaning and the significance that teaching once held is stripped away, and beginning teachers recognize themselves as strangers in their own world.

Kathryn Yelling in the Classroom

In our conversation, Kathryn described her challenges with classroom management and how her interactions with her students made her feel self-conscious about the teacher she was. Specifically, Kathryn rebuked herself every time she found herself yelling at her students:

> There were definitely moments where I kind of had to refocus myself and be like, "Why am I being a teacher if I don't even care and just yell at the kids?"…If I have to constantly yell at kids, I don't want to be a teacher.

Despite these espoused commitments, Kathryn's greatest frustrations emerged as she found herself in situations in which she felt compelled to yell at her students. In other words, Kathryn occasionally found herself in situations in which she found it necessary to become the teacher she did not want to be. She described one day from her first full year of teaching, during which she taught English in China:

> There was one day…It was before [a] test…and you have to understand, too, in the Chinese schools, these kids get up at 7 a.m. and they study until like 10 p.m. at night…So, it's a rough life for them…I would never want that for a child…[In class,] they're squirrely, and I understand. That's the thing: *I understand!,* I want to [say to the students,] "you know what, I understand completely, but at the same time you have to work." And I *did* explain that [to them]. But [the students] just went nuts…and…When [I] lose it, I don't know…When [I] lose it like that, [I'm] like, "STOP!"…I don't know, I don't even know what to do anymore, because I'm just standing there screaming, and it's like, *I'm an idiot!*...[On that day,] I just was like, "AHHHHHHHH! Your test is in 2 days!...And some of you are just

> running around the classroom!"…I would just revert to this one phrase, which is not good at all, but they would just be jumping around and kicking stuff and I'd be like, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!", and after awhile it's just not effective to just say, "What are you doing?!" because they don't know what they're doing. Why am I not doing something about [this]? I'm letting them do this. But how do I make them stop? I don't know. And they don't know. And we're looking at each other: *We don't know*! And so then they just keep doing whatever they want and I don't know what I want to do so I'm just, "AHHHH! I don't know what to do!" So, then I'll just be like, "Good thing class is over! Bye!" It's like the feeling of being trapped.

What is perhaps most interesting in Kathryn's interpretation of her experience is her admission of the strangeness and absurdity of the situation. Kathryn is frustrated both by her students' "squirrely" behavior and by her own inability to effectively manage their behavior; however, what makes the situation especially puzzling and maddening for Kathryn is that she empathizes with her students ("I understand. That's the thing: *I understand!*"). This empathy creates an untenable situation: Kathryn needs her students to work, but, at the same time, she fully understands that they, through no fault of their own, might be incapable of sitting and focusing after a full day of sitting and focusing.

Kathryn portrays herself and her students as being trapped within an insoluble situation: "How do I make them stop? I don't know. And they don't know. And we're looking at each other: *We don't know*!" Kathryn does not accuse her students of being insubordinate or disrespectful; nor does she blame herself. Instead, for Kathryn, this lived experience illuminates the fact that, within her classroom, there is no solution: the

students are being asked to sit still and work, but, realistically and ethically, this cannot be expected of them. Kathryn is expected to manage her students' behavior, but the strategies that she employs prove ineffective and only make her feel worse about herself. Thus, although Kathryn is forced to address this situation somehow, she feels foolish and uncaring in doing so, and the result is the experience of feeling trapped. The only "solution" is for class to be over: "Good thing class is over! Bye!"

Mackenzie at the Swimming Pool

Whereas Kathryn's anecdote disclosed the discomfort and strangeness inherent in the classroom, Mackenzie told me an anecdote within which she experienced doubt and anxiety not in regards to her instructional strategies in the classroom but in regards to her life as a teacher. During the spring of her first full year of teaching, Mackenzie became increasingly disillusioned with teaching and increasingly frustrated with her school. She found it difficult to keep up her resolve: "If you just let every day at that school…eat you…it would have taken you down for the count."

Mackenzie taught in Florida, and lived alone in her parent's vacation home. Although Mackenzie described the house as spacious and beautiful, she felt increasingly lonely and uncomfortable there:

> [We] have a beautiful house down there, it has a screened-in pool, it's on a canal, so there's a boat…It's a full house, but it was empty, and [I] don't know anybody down there…There were nights when I would just go home and go to bed, and wake up and go to work… I went through a bad phase where I wasn't sleeping well…I slept on the couch. I was terrified to sleep alone in a house…I was terrified to live alone in that house.

On one night, in particular, Mackenzie found herself sitting outside and being overcome with a very strange feeling:

> It was dark. It was probably 11 o'clock at night…It was a cooler night out and I wanted to sit outside, and I was just sitting there…and I'm looking over the dock, and I'm thinking, I know why people become alcoholics, because at this moment, anything to forget my week at work, I would do. And, I'm just a teacher, how is this a thing? But I felt like that in that moment, where I sat over and stared into the water…It was so funny because it was like a scene from a movie…I thought, I spent five years of my life thinking I would be good at something, thinking that I would walk in every day to work and I would love it, and I *hate* it, and I'm scared, and I'm alone…I don't want to go to work tomorrow…And it was just like that moment where I was like, I get it. I *get* why people start drinking, [I understand] why like that's a thing...I'll never be able to forget that feeling of, like, sheer emptiness and feeling like I spent five years of my life and I was so excited and I was so ready for it and I was ready to come in and put stuff up on my walls…and someone took it away. And it's stuff like that that will get you. I can't ever shake that feeling of…Did I just lose five years of my life?...It was weird.

Mackenzie is not wondering about how to be a more effective teacher; instead, Mackenzie is wondering (and trying to forget) her very existence as a teacher. As she stares into a veritable abyss, she states, "at this moment, anything to forget my week at work, I would do."

Mackenzie feels like a stranger in her own home and in her own existence as a teacher. Indeed, this moment discloses not only the frustration she feels in relation to her job ("I don't want to go to work tomorrow"), but a strange and demoralizing life narrative ("I spent five years of my life thinking I would be good at something, thinking that I would walk in every day to work and I would love it, and I *hate* it, and I'm scared, and I'm alone"). Mackenzie's mood manifests itself as "sheer emptiness."

Interpretations

Doubt as an inclination not to believe

Before going further, I want to return to the definition of doubt. Doubt denotes "a lack of confidence…an inclination not to believe or accept" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Etymologically, doubt connotes the experience of dread, fear, and hesitation (Harper, 2016). I believe that within their moments of doubt, the teachers presented in my dissertation experienced "a lack of confidence" in their particular teaching methods, in themselves, and in teaching itself. This "lack of confidence" implies more than a lack of self-efficacy (cf. Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Meristo, Ljalikova, & Löfström, 2013), for, even if teachers lose confidence in themselves, they may still believe in the project of being a teacher. In the stories told by Kathryn and Mackenzie (as well as in other stories throughout this dissertation), I believe that the mood of doubt to which the teachers were attuned disclosed "an inclination not to believe or accept" the premise that the project of being a teacher is, inherently, a meaningful endeavor. Indeed, these beginning teachers began to feel a sense of hesitation – even dread – in relation to the world of teaching.

This diffuse sense of dread is evident within my participants' words from previous chapters. Mackenzie (Chapter 5) remarked that, during her ostensibly

successful evaluation with her administrator, Mackenzie could feel that "something was crumbling and I couldn't figure out what." Later in our discussion together, Mackenzie elaborated further about how public praise felt empty to her:

> I was staff-elected teacher-of-the-month…I was recognized by the district for use of space [in the classroom]…I was recognized for all these things, but they were totally *meaningless* to me. You can give me whatever award you want…If I don't feel like I'm making progress with the kids, I don't give a rip about what title you give.

Mackenzie chooses "not to believe or accept" the meaning or weight that is putatively intrinsic to these awards. In this way, Mackenzie's inclination not to believe in the worth of her school's public praise serves to "crumble" the meaning inherent to Mackenzie's own existence as a teacher. Indeed, she almost recoils from the thought of these accolades.

Robyn (Chapter 4) is another teacher who directly questions her existence as a teacher, expressed most pointedly as she asks herself, "Is this my life?" Robyn, in her moments of doubt, experiences a "lack of confidence" in the meaningfulness of teaching. In particular, in our discussion together, Robyn described how she interpreted classroom management struggles as a game:

> I didn't come here for this game. I came here to talk about literature and to have a positive effect on kids…[but, instead,] this is the game that we're playing: "Oh, tomorrow you [as the teacher] should take this step to show [the student] that blah blah blah, and then [the student is] going to respond this way"…That's a game. I don't want to play it.

Robyn is doing more than acknowledging classroom management as a prominent challenge (something we might expect a beginning teacher to do; see Veenman, 1984). Rather, Robyn is actively rejecting the challenge of classroom management itself, reducing it to a game that one can choose to play or not to play, and she hesitates as she considers whether or not she wants to continue playing.

Mackenzie does not want to teach for-the-sake-of receiving acclaim ("I don't give a rip about what title you give"). Robyn does not want to improve her instructional skills for-the-sake-of more efficiently managing her classroom ("I didn't come here for this game"). These teachers are not having doubts about *what* or *how* to teach, nor are they interested in the meanings that others attach to teaching; rather, what is being disclosed to them is a "lack of confidence" in teaching itself. In trying to interpret these beginning teachers' experiences, I find Heidegger's description of our being-in-the-world to be particularly helpful.

Fallenness and unhomeliness

According to Heidegger (1962), one of the critical characteristics of our being-in-the-world is our state of "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*). That is, the world always already means something to us because we have been "thrown" into a world with particular meanings. Another critical characteristic of our being-in-the-world is our "fallenness" (*Verfallenheit*). As we continuously engage in the world, our engagement is shaped by the meanings and interpretations of the world that have been provided to us. In other words, we engage in our world in the way in which one is supposed to engage in our world. As we engage in the world in this way, we "fall" into a state of "average everydayness."

This quality of "average everydayness" is supplied to us by what Heidegger refers to as *Das Man* ("the they," or, alternately, "the one"). *Das Man* represents everyone and no one. It is *Das Man* who provides us with meanings, such as, "You are supposed to work hard at your job, *because that is what one does*," and "Teachers believe all children can learn, *because that's what teachers believe*." When we interpret the world in terms of the meanings supplied to us by *Das Man*, there is "a certain attitude that we generally adopt towards the world, which is more or less one of total submission…[We tend to] experience things *purely* in terms of their place in the world" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 83). For example, a hammer is *supposed* to be used for hammering; a teacher is *supposed* to believe that all children can learn. When we uncritically accept the interpretations of the world supplied by *Das Man*, we fail to author our own meaning:

> When we only say what anyone says, or what anyone ought to say, then we in a deeper sense fail to speak for ourselves; our words do not in these instances belong to us…[and] our speech is reduced to a recitation of quotations. (Cerbone, 2006, p. 58)

If, indeed, I have completely "fallen" into *Das Man*, then, in a sense, I do not exist: I am simply an extension of everyone and no one. Separating from *Das Man* – extricating ourselves from our state of "fallenness" – requires, first, recognizing that the language and "talk" provided to us by the world are, simply, to use Heidegger's term, "idle chatter." This can be quite disturbing, for, even as "falling" into *Das Man* (i.e., becoming everyone and no one) deprives us of the opportunity to speak for ourselves, "falling" back into accepted, taken-for-granted meanings is comforting. Indeed, if individuals recognize that their world and their existence have no intrinsic meaning, they may

become overwhelmed by feelings of emptiness, loneliness, anxiety, or banality (Fromm, 1941; Sartre, 2013). To recognize our state of immersion in *Das Man* is to recognize that everything we say may simply be a recitation of quotations, which leaves us feelings like strangers in our own world. Therefore, to become aware of our fallen state is to come to grips with the "unhomeliness" (*Unheimlichkeit*) of our existence.

To recognize the unhomeliness of our existence is to see the world as strange, unsettling, uncomfortable, and uncanny (in other words, the way that one's home should *not* feel). Perceiving the world in this state, it appears to us that "everything is broken, nothing is of any use, and what is revealed to us is the fact that [the world] *had* significance" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 96). Whereas in our "fallen" state, we find it possible to find comfort (i.e., to find our home) in the clichés and banalities given to us by the world, the disclosure of unhomeliness "takes away that possibility" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 96). Seeing the world as unhomely involves the "discovery that the meaningful weight of things is not inherent to them but can be stripped away" (Russon, 2008, p. 100).

I argue that beginning teachers have the potential to experience unhomeliness. As evidenced in the stories that I have presented in this chapter, beginning teachers may develop "an inclination not to believe or accept" previously taken-for-granted meanings, or, they may find themselves attuned to a sense of dread in relation to their teaching lifeworld. Of course, it is expected that beginning teachers will (or, at least, should) reassess and revise their beliefs as they gain experience in teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Kennedy, 1997; Pajares, 1993). What I am suggesting, however, is not that a beginning teacher may lose confidence in a belief associated with

an isolated element of teaching (e.g., beliefs about students or beliefs about content), but, rather, that a beginning teacher may lose confidence in the belief that the endeavor of teaching itself is meaningful. In other words, in a particular moment, a beginning teacher's mood may strip away all meanings associated with teaching, leading the teacher to sense the unhomeliness of teaching. When attuned to this state of unhomeliness, beginning teachers may not only come to see teaching in new ways (cf. Freese, 2006; Pareja Roblin & Margalef, 2013; Poom-Valickis & Mathews, 2013; Rodgers, 2002) but may come to hesitate reengaging with teaching. Significantly, unlike frameworks of reflection in which teachers acquire a renewed sense of engagement in and fulfillment from their work (cf. Korthagen, 2013; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005), attunement to the unhomeliness of teaching may leave teachers with a lingering sense of dread in relation to the project of being a teacher.

For example, Mackenzie describes her experience by the swimming pool as distinctly uncanny and "weird." The experience almost does not seem real to her: "it was so funny because it was like a scene from a movie." Mackenzie's anecdote is a literal example of "unhomeliness," as she feels ill at ease and "not at home," even a stranger, in her own family's house ("I was terrified"). Despite the spacious and beautiful surroundings, she feels ill at ease and alone. This is characteristic of the feelings that accompany unhomeliness: separated from "the they" and from the taken-for-granted meanings in which we take comfort, Mackenzie is forced to confront the void of meaninglessness by herself. As she dwells on her hatred of her job, Mackenzie is clear that the meaning that teaching used to have for her has been "stripped away" (Russon, 2008, p. 100). In her words:

> I'll never be able to forget that feeling of, like, sheer emptiness and feeling like I spent five years of my life and I was so excited and I was so ready for [teaching] and I was ready to come in and put stuff up on my walls…and someone took it away.

In this moment, Mackenzie experiences the discomforting revelation that "everything is broken, nothing is of any use, and what is revealed…is the fact that [the world of teaching once] *had* significance" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 96). Mackenzie is left staring into the swimming pool – a veritable void – as she wonders, "Did I just lose five years of my life?"

Clothes and skin

To be a teacher requires acknowledging one's alienation in the world that one did not create while simultaneously accepting responsibility for this world. Surprisingly, while there is much research that speaks to the challenges of negotiating between contexts and cultures of teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Flores & Day, 2006; Smagorinsky, et al., 2004; Valencia, et al., 2009), little research speaks to the way in which a beginning teacher must assume responsibility for one of these worlds. In the words of Gaudelli and Ousley (2009), beginning teachers must not only try on different "clothes" (i.e., different variations of teacher identity), beginning teachers must make one such set of clothes their "skin." That is, they must embrace one of these culturally prescribed identities (even as – or, if – they seek to resist it).

As beginning teachers are forced to try on these different sets of clothes, they may find that none of the clothes fit; furthermore, they may find the project of taking on a particular set of clothes as one's skin to be an alienating and uncanny prospect (indeed,

imagining such a process is disturbing and strange, and, yet, this is what beginning teachers must do). Beginning teachers often enter into the profession of teaching with a subjective warrant to teach – a belief that they possess a personal disposition towards being a teacher (Bird, et al., 1993; Lortie, 1975). The realization, however, that being a teacher is merely a matter of putting on a particular outfit (threaded by someone else) threatens to strip away any sense of personal or inherent significance that teaching may have held (e.g., "I am a born teacher"). Of course, this does not preclude teachers from finding meaning in their work; however, if this meaning is to be found, it requires teachers to accept responsibility for a role that they did not create. That is to say, any personal meaning to be found in teaching always requires, at least in part, adopting the meaning that is supplied by someone else.

This point serves to highlight the role of subjective meaning in *the endeavor of learning to teach.* Many scholars have argued that the profession of teaching should be defined from within the profession. Specifically, by generating and diffusing knowledge within communities of practice, teachers can perpetually redefining the profession of teaching from the inside out (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lampert, 2010). This framework of teacher knowledge, however, is, de facto, social and shared. If *the endeavor of learning to teach* involves becoming apprenticed into such a community of practice, then, as part of this process, a beginning teacher must choose to adopt this shared meaning as his or her subjective meaning. When socially shared – or, to use Kierkegaard's term, "universal" – meaning is felt to contradict one's own subjective meaning and lived experience, one may find oneself in a mood of doubt.

Returning to Arendt's words, becoming a teacher requires that "we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it" (Arendt, 1993, p. 196). The moments described by Kathryn and Mackenzie in this chapter complicate this decision; Kathryn and Mackenzie both "see the world wear out." (Britzman, 2007, p. 11). When Kathryn reflects on the nature of her school, she declares, "I would never want that for a child." She asks herself, "Why am I being a teacher if I don't even care and just yell at the kids?" Kathryn interprets her teaching as doing more harm than good. Within this interpretation, Kathryn finds herself to be a stranger in her own classroom:

> [I'd ask the students,] "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!", and after awhile it's just not effective to just say, "What are you doing?!" because they don't know what they're doing. Why am I not doing something about [this]? I'm letting them do this. But how do I make them stop? I don't know. And they don't know. And we're looking at each other: *We don't know*!"

Kathryn describes her classroom not only as a place in which she experiences frustration but also as a place that makes no sense; a place where no one knows what they are doing or why they are doing it; a place where "everything is broken [and] nothing is of any use" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 96). The entire project of teaching, therefore, is disclosed to Kathryn within this lived experience, as uncanny and absurd, a project for which she does not want to take responsibility.

It may not be common for beginning teachers to realize that they did not create their identities and that, furthermore, they do not love their identities enough to take responsibility for them. Gaudelli and Ousley (2009) present a teacher who reflects, "My engagement with students is nothing more than a hoax…Every class, I'm so focused on

things getting covered. I'll try to justify it to myself..,.I wonder if I'll be justifying these things myself for my career" (p. 937). One *can,* throughout one's life, choose to justify this mode of hollow engagement to oneself; one can, however, just as easily choose not to take responsibility for this way of being in the world. It bears reiterating that, following Heidegger's philosophy, all ways of being in the world are, to some extent, a "hoax." We did not author our world. All we can do is choose whether or not we want to take responsibility for it.

As it relates to *the endeavor of learning to teach,* the existential state of unhomeliness implies more than being emotionally exhausted (cf. Näring, Vlerick, & van de Ven, 2012) and more than having one's dreams shattered (cf. Friedman, 2000). Unhomeliness implies an "existential vacuum" (Längle, 2003, p. 110) – a profound feeling that meaningfulness itself has been stripped away (i.e., the uncanny feeling that my skin is actually not my skin, but merely a set of clothes). While attuned to this vacuum of meaning, an individual may feel "emptiness in spite of relaxation" (p. 111), which is, indeed, the lived experience that Mackenzie describes:

> [We] have a beautiful house [in Florida], it has a screened-in pool, it's on a canal…It was a cooler night out and I wanted to sit outside, and I was just sitting there…and I'm looking over the dock.

Although the setting sounds paradisiacal, Mackenzie begins to dwell on how much she hates her job ("I don't want to go to work tomorrow"). Her experience becomes uncanny, strange, disorienting, alienating: "I'll never be able to forget that feeling of, like, sheer emptiness." When beginning teachers see their world wear out before their eyes – when they feel like strangers in their own home or in their own skin – they may

hesitate to reengage in teaching, for, perhaps, through their lived experience, they have come to realize that they do not love the project of teaching enough to assume responsibility for it.

CHAPTER 7

The Essence of Beginning Teachers' Doubt

In the previous three chapters, I have presented anecdotes as told to me by my participants, organized around particular themes: a broken future; despair over the self; the unhomeliness of teaching. In this chapter, I bring together these findings and present my own interpretation of the essence of beginning teachers' mood of doubt, and I attempt to describe what makes this experience (i.e., the mood of doubt) unique from other experiences that beginning teachers might have. The essence that I describe is not intended to represent a "universal" experience that applies to all beginning teachers, nor is the essence I describe intended to be clearly defined or unambiguous; rather, my goal in this chapter is to bring one possible experience into view and to help my readers to grasp the "theme" of the stories told by my participants. My readers will judge for themselves as to whether or not what I depict evokes a resonant and recognizable aspect of lived experience (van Manen, 2014).

I have crafted the depiction of the essence of beginning teachers' mood of doubt by fusing together multiple horizons of understanding. Gadamer (1996) defines a "horizon" as a given individual's range of vision. This vision is, by definition, finite; hence, "universal" knowledge is impossible to achieve within a single horizon of understanding. We cannot "see" everything from one single perspective, and, thus, when a person interprets a text or participates in a conversation, he or she does so situated within his or her own prejudices and pre-understandings. Hence, when I began this inquiry, I began with my own prejudices and pre-understandings. As explored in Chapter 2, my own lived experiences as a teacher revealed to me the emotional, confusing, and

personally meaningful nature of being a beginning teacher. My exploration of educational research (e.g., Brown, 2006; Hostetler, et al., 2007; Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009; Wagner, 1987) has, likewise, deepened my appreciation for these features of *the endeavor of learning to teach.* These pre-understandings allowed me to ask particular questions and to see particular meanings within the context of this inquiry.

The goals of the hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry presented in this dissertation were to question my own understanding of the phenomenon of beginning teachers' doubt and to facilitate a dialogue between different interpretations of this phenomenon (Dahlberg, et al., 2008). This chapter represents the outgrowth of my "musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed" (van Manen, 2014, p. 27) with this phenomenon and presents the result of my hermeneutic dialogue with multiple texts. By considering multiple perspectives regarding the question of what it is like for a beginning teacher to live through challenging experiences that might inspire doubt, vulnerability, and existential uncertainty, I aim, through my writing, to fuse together different horizons (my own experience, my pre-understandings, the words of my participants, educational research, and Mozart's music) in order to create a new vantage point from which to interpret the "doubt" that beginning teachers experience.

The language of doubt

At this point, it is worth turning to the issue of language and considering what is implicated by using the particular word "doubt" to describe my participants' experiences. Heidegger (1962) cautioned that language has the ability to conceal meanings, especially since words of existential importance (e.g., being, meaning, consciousness, humanity) tend to be fraught with overuse. As beings-in-the-world, we use language to assign

definitive meanings to words; however, the essence of our lived experience may or may not be reducible to these definitive meanings and discrete concepts (Wheeler, 2015). Indeed, the essence of what it is like to find ourselves in the world in any particular mood may be distinct from the way that we conceptualize that mood. Heidegger and Gadamer both rejected the notion that any given word or text possesses within it a definitive, immutable meaning. However, both philosophers argued that while it is important to acknowledge the limits of language, it is also important to recognize language as a flexible tool. In particular, through dialogue, individuals are able to fuse new, shared understandings of any given word, text, or way of being in the world.

Similarly, Wittgenstein (2009) rejected the notion that words could be reduced to fixed definitions rooted in necessary and sufficient conditions; instead, he insisted that words take on different meanings in different contexts and across different networks of activity (Grayling, 1996). Although different usages of a word may share a "family resemblance" to one another, the meaning of a word is determined by the function it serves within a particular linguistic context.

We might apply these ideas to the word that I have employed throughout this dissertation: Doubt. I began my inquiry by arguing that doubt is a mood within which individuals hesitate; within the mood of doubt, individuals may feel uncertain or may experience a lack of confidence; when particular habits fail to work, individuals may find themselves in a mood of doubt, wherein they may reconsider their actions and evaluate alternatives.

As I engaged in dialogue with my participants, however, I began to realize that the word "doubt" held a deeper, more existential significance for my participants than the definition with which I had originally began. For example, some of my participants narrated moments of doubt in which they questioned whether or not they could be – or wanted to be – a teacher. In describing these moments, "doubt" took on a quality of certainty (rather than uncertainty), through phrases such as "I was so sure that I was about to fail," "I am a fraud," and "I am a bad person." For my participants, these were moments of fatalistic, existential evaluation.

The word "doubt" (as I had originally conceptualized it) may be an imperfect way to capture what my participants experienced. Within *the endeavor of learning to teach*, particular definitions of the word "doubt" may be assumed, and, yet, this conceptual definition may not subsume what it is like to *live through* doubt as a beginning teacher. In this way, language is limited, but perhaps my inquiry can reveal some important nuances of the word "doubt." Specifically, by investigating the lived experience of doubt, the meaning of doubt within a particular network of activity (i.e., the lives of beginning teachers) is illuminated. As van Manen (2000) writes, when a word (like doubt) is folded into the vocabulary of a profession, the word may become "charged with meanings that in everyday life are not always recognizable, and…[as a result, the word may become] discharged of meanings that are existentially at its very centre" (p. 315). In this chapter, therefore, I aim to present a potential meaning of the word "doubt," in particular, a meaning that is "unmediated by conceptualization" (p. 316). I do this to call attention to the existential meanings that were at the center of my participants' lived experience.

The Crumbling of Meaning

The instrumental role of doubt vs. the lived experience of doubt

I will revisit the argument that doubt is a natural – perhaps inevitable – mood for a beginning teacher to experience. Regardless of beginning teachers' expectations and preconceptions about what it means to "be a teacher" (see Kennedy, 1997; Labaree, 2000; Weinstein, 1988), there is much about the professional (and "unnatural") work of teaching that beginning teachers must learn (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Ball & Forzani, 2009). As beginning teachers encounter new practical dilemmas, they may experience feelings of tension and uncertainty (Beach & Pearson, 1998; Floden & Clark, 1988; Pillen, et al., 2013).

Not only might these moments of doubt be inevitable, but they can also be productive, pushing teachers forward in their professional development. Specifically, when their habitual ways of coping with the problems of teaching prove to be unsatisfactory, beginning teachers may become motivated to reflect on their practice and to experiment with different methods of curriculum and instruction (Danielowich, 2012; Hamlin, 2004; Pareja Roblin & Margalef, 2013; Rodgers, 2002). In this way, doubt can catalyze development of more responsive and ambitious ways of being a teacher (Bullough, Young, Hall, Draper, & Smith, 2008; Helsing, 2007; Settlage, Southerland, Smith, & Ceglie, 2009; Wheatley, 2002) and may bring teachers into closer contact with their own deeply held missions for teaching (Korthagen, Kim, & Green, 2013).

When the mood of doubt is explored phenomenologically, however, different and darker dimensions of this mood emerge. There exists much educational research that lauds the merits of critical reflection and the power of learning from dilemmatic

classroom moments (e.g., Bates, Ramirez, & Drits, 2009; Lampert, 1997). The experience of "living through" these dilemmatic classroom moments, however, may be different from the experience of uncertainty and reflection presented in research literature (Helsing, 2007; Lampert, 2001; Muir & Beswick, 2007). I believe that the results of my phenomenological inquiry powerfully illustrate that, for beginning teachers, challenging moments may not only inspire a mood of doubt; these moments may also have implications that stretch far beyond the negotiation of exigent classroom dilemmas or the cultivation of increasingly effective instructional practices.

In my inquiry, I did not find my participants' self-questioning to be unusual: Can I complete this overwhelming amount of grading? Can I motivate this student who is flagrantly disengaged? Can I maintain order in this unruly classroom? (see Bullough, et al., 1992; Meijer, et al., 2011; Pillen, et al., 2013; Veenman, 1984). I was struck, however, by the *implications* that my participants derived from these questions. What I found to be remarkable – and moving – was the extent to which these teachers went beyond the problem at hand to extrapolate what these moments told them about their lives. Within a challenging experience or dilemmatic moment, a beginning teacher may experience not only a mood of "doubt" (e.g., uncertainty, hesitation) but also a revelation that communicates meaning about her relationship to her future, her relationship to her self, and her relationship to the profession of teaching. In this way, I argue that the essence of a beginning teacher's doubt is *existential* in nature.

The existential nature of doubt

The existential nature of beginning teachers' doubt may be due, in large part, to the fact that aspirant teachers hold tight to a *subjective* warrant to teach (Bird, et al.,

1993; Lortie, 1975). Beginning teachers may not perceive their work exclusively (or primarily) in terms of the meanings (or warrants) provided by the profession (Hostetler, et al., 2007). Instead, beginning teachers may think of their work as fundamental to their own personal mission or purpose in life (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen, 2004). Whether or not a beginning teacher's subjective warrant to teach is grounded in what all teachers should know and be able to do (cf. Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) is irrelevant, for, as Kierkegaard argues, "universal" ways of understanding the world can never fully subsume the subjective truths upon which we base our lives. Thus, the subjective warrant to teach – the personal and subjective reasons for pursuing the project of being a teacher – can be assumed to be a reality within the existence of a beginning teacher.

For this reason, within moments that inspire doubt, a beginning teacher may be wrestling with more than just a technical problem; rather, because teachers are motivated not only by the "universal" ethics of the profession but also by their own subjective warrant, difficulties and dilemmas may give rise to the revelation of subjective truths and pressing questions about the teacher's own subjectivity (Janzen, 2013). That is to say, within particular moments, beginning teachers may be inspired to consider issues that are both pragmatic (i.e., What should I do next? What would a professional teacher do?) *and* existential (i.e., What is my life? To whom am I responsible?).

Furthermore, not only do beginning teachers enter the profession with a subjective warrant to teach, but the very work of teaching itself may be deeply rooted in the self of the teacher (Kelchtermans, 2009; Palmer, 1998; Sage, Adcock, & Dixon, 2012; van Manen, 1994). Our understanding of teaching is intimately linked to our understanding

of our own life since "our sense of self and our sense of the world is profoundly affected by having to grow up in school" (Britzman, 2007, p. 2). As a result, when we embark on *the endeavor of learning to teach*, "we cannot seem to leave our childhood of education. (p. 2). Furthermore, if we assume that our caregivers also serve as our "teachers," (see Greenwalt, 2014; Riley, 2011) then *the endeavor of learning to teach* and the project of being a teacher extends far beyond what is circumscribed by any given professional community of practice (cf. Ball & Forzani, 2009; Lampert, 2010).

Thus, despite efforts to filter or focus the meanings that beginning teachers derive from their experiences in classrooms (Davis, 2006; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Gallego, 2001; Rozelle & Wilson, 2012), teacher educators or professional mentors cannot fully control *the endeavor of learning to teach*. While this argument is (perhaps) self-evident, it implies that *the endeavor of learning to teach* has the potential to draw upon any and all dimensions of a teacher's life (Huber & Whelan, 1999; Kissling, 2014). Because a beginning teacher's practice may be informed by multiple aspects of her lived experience, the challenging moments that she experiences may precipitate moments of doubt, uncertainty, and vulnerability that reveal implications for multiple dimensions of her being-in-the-world.

Doubt as the crumbling of meaning

To this point, I have argued that the mood of doubt, as experienced by beginning teachers, is, in part, existential in nature. That is to say, when beginning teachers find themselves in moods of doubt, these moods have the potential to reveal not only implications for the problem at hand (e.g., How do I cope with this disengaged student?)

but also implications for the meaning that the teacher makes of her life (e.g., Does my work as a teacher consist entirely of coping with disengaged students?).

Doubt implies experiencing a lack of confidence and an impulse to hesitate. Therefore, because a beginning teacher's doubt can be existential, a beginning teacher who finds herself in a mood of doubt may experience a lack of confidence or an impulse to hesitate *with respect to her existence*. Since the mood of doubt holds meaning in abeyance, a beginning teacher may experience the mood of doubt as a vortex of meaninglessness: Meaningful possibilities are (at least momentarily) taken away; matters of significance are robbed of any significance they once had.

In this way, moments of doubt and vulnerability may do more than reveal the complexity of teaching; rather, these moments have the possibility to manifest a sense of "doomed foreclosure" (Liston, 2000, p. 83). Because beginning teachers relate to teaching as a project that provides them with existential meaning (Pines, 2002), moments that threaten this project (i.e., the project of being a teacher) may not only open opportunities for inquiry but may also shatter imagined futures (Cole & Knowles, 1993) and disturb a teacher's sense of who she is (Brown, 2006). In Mackenzie's words, "Something was crumbling, and I couldn't figure out what" (Chapter 5).

I am not arguing that all beginning teachers will inevitably conclude that teaching is a meaningless project and that all beginning teachers will come to despair over themselves. I do, however, wish to argue that such dark and dysphoric subjective truths may emerge as a beginning teacher lives through challenging and vulnerable moments. Within the mood of doubt, the foundational meaning upon which the beginning teacher has based her existence (i.e., the existential project of being a teacher) may crumble. She

is, then, left only to despair over herself, realizing that she is a "fraud" (see Ingrid, Chapter 4; Mackenzie, Chapter 5) and that the project of being a teacher is no more than a "hoax" (Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009, p. 937). While being a teacher was a project that once "had significance" (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 96), that meaning has now been stripped away. The beginning teacher is left lingering in an "existential vacuum" (Längle, 2003, p. 110), and feeling, in that moment, as if "there's no coming back from this" (Robyn, Chapter 5).

What Does It Feel Like to Live Through the Crumbling of Meaning?

The essence of doubt that I have described (i.e., the crumbling of meaning) is intended to represent a *theme* (van Manen, 2014), not a theoretical abstraction. This theme is to serve as the material for further musing and evocative writing, rather than as a concrete and static distillation of reality. In the remainder of this chapter, I will compose a variation on this theme using Mozart's music (1879a, 1879b).

Mozart's music is itself a horizon of understanding with which I am engaging in hermeneutical dialogue. I do not intend to present a comprehensive or objective analysis of this music; rather, my writing is intended to serve as a hermeneutic reading of the music, situated in the context of this study. That is to say, my phenomenological inquiry into the mood of doubt informs my understanding of this music, just as this music informs my phenomenological inquiry.

I choose this piece by Mozart – the second movement of his Piano Concerto in A major, K. 488 – because it evokes not only despair but also the uncanny feeling of existing in an existential vacuum. In this movement, Mozart composes a world which "*had* significance" but where now "everything is broken, [and] nothing is of any use"

(Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 96). At times – most notably in its middle section – the music depicts beauty and happiness; however, this music's most powerful revelation is the way in which it is able to present beauty and happiness as having been stripped away, leaving only a shell of what this existence once was. A world that was once cherished has crumbled and disappeared into a vortex – an existential vacuum.

I will annotate the music and present my interpretations as the music develops. In doing so, I hope to draw a link from Mozart's music to the words (and worlds) of my participants. Tracing the argument I have made in this chapter, initially, these beginning teachers were excited about the project of being a teacher; because of their subjective warrant to teach, teaching was a project that they felt, in part, gave meaning to their lives. Within the lived experiences that they narrated, they found themselves in a state, not of disillusionment, but of "doomed foreclosure" (Liston, 2000, p. 83). In this way, the mood of doubt, can, for a beginning teacher, disclose the crumbling of meaning. I believe that this selection of Mozart's music captures this essence. You will be able to view and download the video here:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B7IcYG-uECiTS2ZFRHRQSzVpdHc

CHAPTER 8

Revisiting the Endeavor of Learning to Teach

In this dissertation, I have attempted to explore – through the methodology of hermeneutical phenomenology – the mood of doubt as experienced by beginning teachers. I have presented a number of stories that illustrate different ways that the mood of doubt can manifest itself in the lived experience of beginning teachers. In this concluding chapter, I will re-illuminate *the endeavor of learning to teach* in light of these manifestations.

The endeavor of learning to teach involves being

The central premise of hermeneutical phenomenology states that being and meaning are inextricably linked (Heidegger, 1962). Examining (or, "remembering") what it is like for us to "be" in the world consequently illuminates how the world matters to us. The mood of doubt, as exemplified by the anecdotes presented in this dissertation, serves as a moment in which beginning teachers may experience a heightened awareness of their lifeworld existentials (i.e., body, space, relation, and time; van Manen, 2014). In this way, the mood of doubt can, for beginning teachers, facilitate a "remembering of being." (Quay, 2013, p. 103), and, consequently, an illumination of subjective meaning.

Through her troubled interactions with her students, Robyn (Chapter 4) questioned, "Is this my life?" Sweating, tired, and having been physically and emotionally "beaten down," Ingrid, alone in her empty classroom space, revised her identity from "phenom" to "fraud." Kathryn, working at 4 a.m., experienced time in such a way that it catalyzes her doubt and self-hatred ("Why am I wasting my life doing this?"). Mackenzie, by simply sitting by her swimming pool, realized that she hates her

job and would do anything to forget her existence as a teacher. What these anecdotes illustrate is that beginning teachers "learn" about teaching (and about what teaching means to them), in part, through lived experience (i.e., by "remembering" their "be-ing"). Therefore, in addition to carefully engineered components of teacher education (see Darling-Hammond, 2006), "be-ing" is a significant component of the curriculum of *the endeavor of learning to teach.*

The endeavor of learning to teach involves subjective meaning

Experiencing a "new apprenticeship" (Darling-Hammond, 2006) is an important component of *the endeavor of learning to teach*. Teaching, it has been argued, is not an individual enterprise based on each teacher's own personal desires and idiosyncrasies; rather, teaching is a *profession* where knowledge is collectively generated and shared within communities of practice (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Lampert, 2010). *The endeavor of learning to teach,* therefore, involves being integrated into such a professional community of practice.

The socially constructed dimension of teaching cannot, however, fully eclipse the subjective nature of a beginning teacher's lived experience. Within singular moments of lived experience, beginning teachers may "suspend the universal" (see Kierkegaard, 1946b) and recognize the "mineness" of their existence. Heidegger (1962) defines "mineness" (*Jemeinichkeit*) as an attunement to the fact that our experience is ours alone. When we "fall" into *Das Man* (i.e., everyone and no one), we forget the "mineness" of our existence. That is to say, "mineness" describes how my lived experience and my subjective meaning does not belong to everyone; it belongs uniquely *to me*.

The anecdotes presented in this dissertation illuminate how the mood of doubt can manifest as an attunement to the "mineness" of one's own lived experience and subjective meaning. For example, there is little doubt that grading monumental amounts of student work (see Shannon, Chapter 4) and motivating disinterested students (see Robyn, Chapter 4) are "universal" challenges of teaching; however, within their moods of doubt, Shannon and Robyn did not defer to or interpret their lived experience in terms of the "universal" elements of teaching. Said differently, Shannon and Robyn did not consider their experiences to be representations of generalizable knowledge about teaching (cf. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Rather, Shannon and Robyn interpreted their lived experience in terms of what they felt it meant *for them*. Shannon wondered about what her seemingly insurmountable task implied about her future as a teacher. Robyn did not ask, "What does this moment teach me about the universal challenges of teaching?" Instead, she asked, "Is this my life?" Although her mood of doubt does, indeed, illuminate an important principle of teaching practice (e.g., students are not always interested in your content area just because you are interested in it; see Holt-Reynolds, 1992), Robyn's mood of doubt and existential dilemma are *hers* and hers alone. For Robyn, the ramifications of this moment of doubt are not "abstract" or "universal" – rather, the ramifications are uniquely hers; the ramifications concern *her* life.

Therefore, within *the endeavor of learning to teach*, challenging moments that inspire doubt and vulnerability may serve as a "reminders" of the "mineness" of a beginning teacher's lived experience. Within these moments of the "remembrance" of one's own uniqueness, the beginning teacher finds herself responsible for answering

questions such as, “Why am I doing this? Is this meaningful to me? Is this what I want my future to be?” The mood of doubt, in this way, can serve as “an instant in which the normative discourses [of teaching can] no longer carry the [teacher’s] lesson” (Janzen, 2013, p. 4). The mood of doubt is, instead, a moment in which “the stability of [the teacher’s] identity is unhinged” (p. 4) and the teacher herself is forced “to consider [her] own becoming” (p. 3).

The endeavor of learning to teach involves pre-reflective action

Given that teaching is not a natural act (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Murray, 2008), *the endeavor of learning to teach* requires that beginning teachers acquire professional knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman, 1986b). In this way, *the endeavor of learning to teach* assumes a tacit rationality: i.e., as teachers construct their curricular and instructional practices, they draw upon their knowledge as a resource (Schoenfeld, 2011).

The results of this dissertation complicate this assumption by presenting anecdotes in which teachers described engaging in their experiences *pre-reflectively*. Specifically, my participants did not describe their experiences as being mediated by mental representations. Teachers did not filter their doubt through professional knowledge. Instead, these beginning teachers *found* themselves in particular moods, feelings, and reactions *before* they were able to rationally analyze their situation and deliberatively formulate their interpretations or responses (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008; Garcia & Lewis, 2014; Gottlieb, 2012).

For example, Kathryn (Chapter 6), while trying unsuccessfully to manage her unruly classroom, reacts in an instinctual, pre-reflective manner. In particular, she yells

at her students, "What are you doing?!" even as she intellectually rationalizes (before and after the fact) that yelling is both an ineffective way to manage the classroom ("After awhile it's just not effective to just say, 'What are you doing?!'") as well as incongruent with the image of the teacher she wants to be ("If I have to constantly yell at kids, I don't want to be a teacher"). As a beginning teacher, Kathryn is figuring out how to be a teacher; in doing so, she encounters "knots" (Wagner, 1987) in her thinking (and feeling).

Indeed, because Kathryn's actions are, to some extent, *pre-reflective*, they have the potential to be *irrational.* Specifically, although Kathryn decries yelling as a classroom management strategy, she, *pre-reflectively,* yells. As a result, Kathryn finds herself in a situation in which her action and her espoused beliefs conflict (see Kennedy, 1999). Likewise, when Kathryn (Chapter 5) finds herself to be exhausted at 4 a.m. and worried that she will be unable to function effectively the next day, she curses herself; yet, she is still able to justify for herself why she wants to stay up late (i.e., to create an engaging and creative presentation for her students). In this way, Kathryn's behavior is *irrational* in the sense that it is incoherent and cannot be logically reconciled with itself. It would seem that Kathryn, in these moments, is not employing a cognitive flowchart to reason through her options (cf. Schoenfeld, 2011; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Instead, Kathryn *finds* herself, *pre-reflectively*, acting irrationally, engaging in action she simultaneously denounces. In this way, the act of teaching can be paradoxical (Palmer, 1998), and *the endeavor of learning to teach* engages beginning teachers in more than reflective, rational considerations.

The endeavor of learning to teach involves mood

A fundamental premise throughout the current inquiry has been that *doubt* is a *mood* that beginning teachers *live through*. Through my arguments throughout this dissertation, as well as through the stories told by my participants, I have attempted to demonstrate that *doubt* implies more than a revision of mental representations (i.e., a reevaluation of one's beliefs). Although such cognitive work may be essential in *the endeavor of learning to teach* (Kagan, 1992; Kennedy, 1997; Rowland, Turner, & Thwaites, 2014; Stürmer, Könings, & Seidel, 2012), doubt, in the lived experience of beginning teachers, is a mood. Doubt implies more than thought; doubt (in whatever manner it manifests) is a particular way of being "tuned" to the world. Therefore, one important implication of this inquiry is to recognize that, in *the endeavor of learning to teach*, "learning" occurs not only through cognitive work (i.e., "learning" by means of mental representations) but also holistic "tuning" (Dreyfus, 2007; van Manen, 1991; Zembylas, 2006). Beginning teachers encounter existential questions and discover subjective meaning as they "find themselves" to be in particular moods.

This conclusion underscores the fact that teaching is an embodied and affective encounter (McWilliam, 1996; Saevi, 2011; S. J. Smith, 2012), and *the endeavor of learning to teach* requires sensitivity to the "mood" of the classroom as it spontaneously unfolds itself (Latta & Field, 2005). As Garcia and Lewis (2014) write,

> while the intellectualist strand of psychological research emphasizes that preservice teachers should get a grip on their beliefs through reflective, critical thinking, a phenomenological approach would emphasize sensitizing preservice

> teachers so that the classroom can get a grip on them. (Garcia & Lewis, 2014, p. 144)

My participants allowed the classroom (even an empty classroom) to "get a grip on them" in powerful ways: for example, Shannon (Chapter 4) was profoundly frustrated by being trapped in her own classroom at 7 p.m. as she felt compelled to finish grading student assignments. Ingrid (Chapter 4), exhausted and desperate, felt "beaten down" and defeated in her empty classroom. For these beginning teachers, the mood in which they found themselves revealed important subjective meaning: both Shannon and Ingrid concluded that they were unprepared for their futures.

While I would not argue that the meanings revealed through "subjective" moods are somehow "more true" than meanings derived through the "objective" means of rational, analytical thought, I would argue that subjective, ephemeral experiences provide meanings that complement rational deliberation. Ingrid thought she was prepared well by *the endeavor of learning to teach* ("I thought, 'I'm ready'"). Yet, in this singular moment in her empty classroom, she feels herself being revealed to be an "idiot" and a "fraud." Ingrid may be overreacting, and, indeed, she may be well prepared for her career as a teacher. Nevertheless, in the context of Ingrid's existence, this moment of doubt in her empty classroom was, for her, a significant experience. For *the endeavor of learning to teach* to deemphasize "moody" experiences is to risk deemphasizing one of the most significant dimensions of a beginning teacher's life.

The endeavor of learning to teach involves existential doubt

I have argued throughout this dissertation that *doubt* is fundamental to *the endeavor of learning to* teach. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) writes, "the work of teaching,

itself complex, uncertain, and full of dilemmas…[reminds] beginning teachers at every turn of what they cannot yet do" (p. 1027-1028). In this sense, beginning teachers will (hopefully) recognize that teaching is a difficult practice that only *looks* easy (Labaree, 2000). Beginning teachers may ask themselves a flurry of questions: e.g., How do I get all of these students to learn what they need to know? How do I get all of these students to do what I tell them? How do I survive the work of teaching without physically and emotionally exhausting myself?

Beginning teachers may enter their careers with naïve answers to these questions. They may be (overly) optimistic that "other" teachers (rather than they) will experience challenges (Weinstein, 1988). Of course (the beginning teacher tells herself), she will be fine, because, after all, she is a "natural" teacher (i.e., she is entering teaching with a subjective warrant to teach). Complicating this subjective warrant is fundamental to *the endeavor of learning to teach*, for, otherwise, teachers may hold fast to unproductive and unresponsive pedagogical habits (Bullough, et al., 2008). For this reason, a beginning teacher's doubt can inspire professional growth (Settlage, et al., 2009; Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996).

My dissertation, however, has sought to highlight how doubt (and the different ways in which it may manifest, including certainty of a broken future, a despairing over one's own self, and a recognition of the existential state of unhomeliness) is not only a cognitive exercise achieved by means of analytical reflection (cf. Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Davis, 2006) but is, more importantly, an *experience*. In particular, doubt and its manifestations draw upon our pre-reflective being-in-the-world and are experienced as moods. Therefore, although doubt may serve an *instrumental* purpose

within *the endeavor of learning to teach* (i.e., through reflection, beginning teachers recognize the complexity of teaching and develop more adaptive instructional habits), the mood of doubt, for a beginning teacher, can also manifest itself as a powerful personal experience.

In this dissertation, I have gone as far as to argue that the essence of a beginning teacher's doubt can be characterized as *the crumbling of meaning.* I derived this essence by noting that my participants, within their the stories they narrated, did not dwell on instrumental questions (e.g., How might I improve my practice? What do my students not understand about this content? How might I more effectively motivate my students to engage in class?). Rather, my participants actively searched for subjective meanings (What does teaching mean to me? Do I have what it takes to be a teacher?), and their answers to these questions resulted in personal – rather than professional – evaluations (e.g., I am an idiot; I am a fraud; I am a bad person for wanting to be a teacher; I have lost five years of my life). In other words, for a beginning teacher, doubt may not manifest as an *instrumental exercise* but, rather, an *existential mood.*

Despite the fact that the existential dimension of teaching is not always an emphasized element of *the endeavor of learning to teach* (cf. Darling-Hammond, 2006; Green, 2014), beginning teachers – like all individuals – search for existential meaning in their lives (Frankl, 2006). When beginning teachers begin to question whether or not their search for existential meaning can be fulfilled through their work, existential doubt (and, potentially, burnout) results (Brown, 2006; Evelein, Korthagen, & Brekelmans, 2008; Längle, 2003; Pines, 2002; Spilt, et al., 2011). The stories of my participants reveal what Orland-Barak and Maskit (2011) refer to as a "black box" of teaching, a

hidden element of teaching that contains "an existential core which transcends issues of management [or] subject matter" (Orland-Barak et al., 2011, p. 446). Indeed, the concerns of my participants transcend the profession of teaching itself and deal, more prominently, with personal matters of meaning and being.

The illumination of this existential "black box" is particularly timely in the midst of discourses that suggest that *the endeavor of learning to teach* can be standardized – or, for that matter, that successful teachers can be "built" (see Green, 2014). Such discourses ignore the fact that beginning teachers are existing individuals and that beginning teachers are not entering into the field as blank slates upon which prepackaged teacher identities can be implanted. To return to a metaphor from a previous chapter, teacher education may craft the clothes that a teacher should wear, but only the individual teacher can make the subjective, existential choice as to whether or not he or she chooses to adopt these clothes as his or her skin. Every beginning teacher, by virtue of being an existing individual, is engaged in a search for personal, existential meaning. For this reason, becoming a teacher requires "courage" (Palmer, 1998), because finding meaning in the profession of teaching is not guaranteed, and every moment of lived experience in (and out) of the classroom holds the possibility of catalyzing the crumbling of this meaning. If nothing else, teacher educators (and beginning teachers' themselves) should acknowledge and admire the courage that is required within *the endeavor of learning to teach.*

EPILOGUE

Final Reflections

Consistent with the aims of hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1990), this dissertation, by drawing on the unique stories of a small sample of teachers, has attempted to illuminate the meaning and significance of a particular aspect of human experience: i.e., the experience of existential doubt. As we transition from one role to another, or from one stage of our lives to another, we experience existential doubt over who we are and who we want to be. We must choose, for ourselves, how we want to relate to our lives. We find ourselves grasping for existential meaning. We ask ourselves indeterminate questions, such as, "Is this my life?"

Throughout the process of engaging in this inquiry, I have been continually reminded that *the endeavor of learning to teach* is an endeavor in which beginning teachers have a great deal at stake. Because of their subjective warrant to teach, challenging moments (no matter how pedestrian they may be in the life of a teacher) may precipitate moods of profound doubt, vulnerability, despair, and even uncanny alienation.

This inquiry has helped to bolster my resolve to remain skeptical of frameworks of teacher education that are satisfied with measureable outcomes of new teacher effectiveness. While aiming towards this outcome is, of course, vital (especially in light of recent critiques on teacher education; see Greenberg et al., 2014)**,** I encourage beginning teachers and teacher educators to remain sensitive to the subjective meanings revealed through lived experience. Drawing upon Kierkegaard's ideas (1946a), I might say that beginning teachers who entrust their meaning-making to *the endeavor of learning to teach* (rather than to their own lived experience) fall prey to the "objective

tendency, which proposes to make everyone an observer, and in its maximum to transform [everyone] into so objective an observer that he becomes almost a ghost" (p. 210). That is to say, when beginning teachers derive meaning only from the "objective" truths developed through the machinations of technocrats (see Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), or, when beginning teachers allow themselves to be "built" into "better teachers" (see Green, 2014), beginning teachers become "ghosts." Beginning teachers and teacher educators can avoid this existential fate if beginning teachers are reminded to remain attuned to their own being-in-the-world.

I want to honor the fact that beginning teachers are existing individuals in the process of defining their own selfhood – i.e., *the endeavor of learning to teach* involves existential doubt and involves determining what type of relationship one wants to have with one's own life. I will resist the temptation to trivialize this dimension of *the endeavor of learning to teach* by prioritizing measurable outcomes of teaching effectiveness above a beginning teacher's own lived experience and existential truth.

The meaning of teaching for a beginning teacher is something that will remain in flux, for, as Heidegger emphasized, the way in which the world matters to us is not something that is given once and for all. Rather, subjective meaning (i.e., what my life means *to me*) is perpetually illuminated as we attune ourselves to our own lived experience; i.e., as we "remember" our "be-ing." Said differently: "Being...is not just the actuality of what actually is, but is also the as yet unrealized power to be otherwise. What it is to be, in other words, has yet to be revealed" (Russon, 2008, p. 107). As I conclude this dissertation, I will state that the subjective meaning to which I lay claim as a teacher educator is precisely this: To encourage beginning teachers to remember their

"be-ing" and to insist that what being a teacher means to them has yet to be revealed. The philosophy of existentialism also inspires me to conclude that, for beginning teachers, this process of revelation may also require living through moods of doubt, vulnerability, and despair.

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