

**AN INTROVERT IN THE MIDST: A POETIC SELF-STUDY OF THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF AN INTROVERTED TEACHER**

by

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Abstract

This research represents a highly personalized account of the complexities, interpretations, and reflections on the experiences and challenges faced by an introverted teacher in the workplace. Positioning myself as both the subject and the researcher in the social context of a middle school setting propelled this self-study of my experiences as a teacher in the Avalon Region of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Through an insider's vantage point, I have chronicled and traced my own experience using a combination of qualitative methodologies: autoethnography and poetic inquiry. These genres of qualitative research, complemented by a phenomenological lens, bring the reader closer to the lived experience of the author. This study supports the notion that poetic inquiry, critical reflection, and personality investigation can prove to be valuable tools for empowering teachers and helping to improve their understanding of self, their professional practice, and their relationship with their students. Using self-study to explore my experiences with introversion helped to unfetter my own unique voice and convey personal thoughts and emotions that led to findings that contribute to the knowledge base of the introverted experience as a sociological phenomenon.

General Summary

Teaching is a profession that demands effective communication, extended interactions, and collaboration. Yet, for introverted teachers, who are more reflective in nature, the social demands of the profession present challenges that require distinctive approaches, adjustments, and solutions to dealing with what may otherwise be viewed as “mundane” situations, such as a discussion with administration or participating in a collaborative session. Guided by the Jungian conception of *introversion* and contemporary psychological views on the sensitivity of introverts and extroverts to stimulating environments, this qualitative phenomenological study investigates the lived experience of an introverted teacher in a stimulating work environment. The combined methodologies of autoethnography and poetic inquiry offer introspection and reflection that greatly facilitate an acute understanding of the sometimes unconventional challenges that introverts face, while also taking into consideration that each individual is unique and every school presents a distinctive culture and environment.

The results of this investigation yielded some expected findings, such as sensitivity to a stimulating work environment, preference for solitary work, uneasiness with socialization and small talk, and a need to recharge after intense socialization. Some of the additional findings were more unexpected, including the role that daydreaming plays in the reflection process, the expectations around male teachers, and the impact that an introverted personality plays in the teacher-student relationship. Overall, the findings of this study open a window into the introvert’s thoughts and preferences in the workplace, allowing educators to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse ways that teachers adjust and cope with the demands of their job while taking into account the disparity between their overall disposition and the gregarious roles of a teacher.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Stumbling onto Introversion

For most of my life, the word *introvert* never meant more to me than a synonym for “shy.” I would expect to find the word in a thesaurus alongside “introspective”, “withdrawn”, or “reserved.” This is not to say that I never recognized that I was shy or reserved, it is simply to say that the word *introvert*, for me, never carried much weight. Ultimately, however, it was a desire to understand my own reserved disposition, and how it befits my profession, that led to some rudimentary research into teacher personality and identity. This research gradually gave way to a search to find literature and stories from teachers with a similar disposition to mine, and soon the topic of *introversion* was illuminated by the light at the end of the rabbit hole. Only then did the word *introvert* take on a new depth, and only now, upon painstaking reflection, am I beginning to see how this part of me has simultaneously led, trailed, and accompanied me on my journey as an educator.

The word “empowerment” has passed through my lips many times in the context of teaching and learning. The theme of empowerment is at the helm of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District’s (NLESD) grade 7 social studies course that I have taught now for 7 years. Yet, I never spoke the word “empowerment” in relation to my own life until I began to read and research the topic of introversion and reflect on my own experience as an introvert. Consequently, I have started to see a change in how I perceive myself and how I understand my interactions with others. During adolescence and early adulthood, I invariably thought that I would “come out of my shell” and “overcome” my inclination towards quiet and solitude. I hoped that I could learn to converse with others with ease and confidence. Though I found social outlets in my youth and followed the familiar adolescent exploration for identity, friendship, and acceptance, I gradually settled back into

the comfort zone of my introverted disposition and preferences. For a long time, I saw this as a failure to be social and a retreat into awkwardness. However, I am beginning to see that personalities are complex and “shy,” “quiet,” and “awkward” do not have to be “bad” words.

Background to the Problem

In the early 20th century, Jung (1921) acknowledged society’s preference for extroverted types and recognized an increasing prejudice against introversion as a result of its perceived weaknesses as a personality type. There has been a long history of society celebrating and giving preference to attributes associated with extraversion and this mindset continues to permeate through most individualistic Western cultures (Helgoe, 2010; Cain, 2013; Lawn, Slempe, & Vella-Brodrick, 2019; Taylor, 2020). Consequently, many introverted qualities have been rejected as socially undesirable or deficits in need of fixing (Helgoe, 2010; Cain, 2013; Lawn, Slempe, & Vella-Brodrick, 2019; Taylor, 2020). This prevalent misunderstanding of introvert personality and preference has ultimately contributed to risks towards introverts’ health and well-being (Caldwell-Harris & Aycicegi, 2006; Walsh, 2012).

Lawn, Slempe, and Vella-Brodrick (2019) emphasized the need for further research into how living in an extrovert-centric context can impact introverts’ well-being and how introverts may find ways to improve their overall well-being. Their suggestion that introverts living in Western cultures should aim to be more authentic and accepting of their introversion to “boost their overall well-being” (p. 2072), is, in part, motivation for this self study. The belief that an introverted personality is somehow deficient leaves many introverts feeling alienated from society and burdened by “the need to explain, apologize, or feel guilty about what works best for them” (Helgoe, 2010, p. 58).

The cultural bias in favor of extraversion combined with the often quiet and reserved nature of introverts contributes to misconceptions about the type (Helgoe, 2010), including the belief that introverts are poor communicators and not interested or willing to engage in social situations (Blanchard, 2020). However, Eve-Cahoon (2003) stresses the fact that introverts often need time to reflect on their inner thoughts and feelings, particularly in highly stimulating situations and, therefore, often prefer activities and tasks that allow for solitary work rather than group work and collaboration.

Despite the influence of more popular writings on the topic of introversion in drawing attention to stigma around the personality type (Helgoe 2010; Cain, 2013), there is still room for improved understanding of the type and its preferences. Grant (2014) points out that “despite growing social and professional acceptance, introverts are still wildly misunderstood. People may be more open about being introverts, but they cling to assumptions that don’t stand up to the test of rigorous evidence” (para 5). Consequently, educational systems need to place more of a focus on embracing the diverse abilities that teachers with different personality types contribute to the development of a school (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019). The authors argue that “the picture provided regarding extraversion/introversion implies that an education system develops into a more mature one when it embraces both characteristics, as each personality type generates features that can foster teaching and learning processes” (p. 75). By recognizing that introverts and extroverts have different strengths and work-related preferences, organizations can begin to establish more accommodating and balanced work environments (Skakoon, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic Poetic Inquiry (PI) study is to investigate and interpret the place that introversion occupies in a teacher's profession and practice. The research will center on an in-depth personal examination of the introverted-teacher experience through a combination of poetic inquiry and supporting narrative (Furman, 2007; Gallardo, Furman, & Kulkarni, 2009). I will explore how the ongoing process of discovering the "teacher-self" (Zembylas, 2003) is enriched by the unique dimension of an introverted personality, despite the necessarily extroverted role that teachers perform in the classroom.

As someone who identifies their personality as "introverted" and sees it as definitionally in-line with the Jungian definition of introvert: "inwardly directed psychic energy" (Jung, 1976), my teacher "self" continues to take shape through self-identifying with this personality type. Yet, the term "introvert" retains a history of classifications that include: "character flaw," "disorder," and "disease" that "needs to be fixed" (Dossey, 2016). Consequently, my reason for exploring the topic of introversion is both personal and professional. My experiences reveal some of the challenges that arise from working in a profession where extrovert qualities, such as outward expression, collaboration, and sustained interchange, are largely valued and encouraged. Given that teachers have to be overtly extroverted to perform, I see a need to explore how an introverted personality still has a place in and is compatible with the teaching profession. Ultimately, my goal in this study is to develop the notion that an understanding of how a teacher experiences and interprets introversion can help reveal how they make sense of the role it plays in their teaching practice and yield a richer understanding of the teacher "self."

Poetry Beginnings

My introduction to figurative language and poetry can be traced back to elementary school. The school's principal was tasked with teaching language arts to my grade 3 class and the lesson on poetry and rhymes opened my eyes to the endless possibilities that the genre had to offer. Later, in my teenage years, the lyrics of Dylan, Reed, Bowie, and countless others, provided an introduction to poetry in the form of lyrics and songs. Playing and performing in bands with friends became a creative outlet and medium of expression. On occasion, I even felt comfortable enough to write and share my own lyrics.

Still, poetry has not been a constant in my life. As Owton (2017) acknowledges, "Poetry has breezed in and out of my life at different times," (p. 2). It finds me (or I find it) when ideas are overflowing, and the need is there to convey thoughts and feelings in a way that cannot be satisfied by any other means than the intimate succinctness of a poem.

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The discussion around the phenomenon of introversion and teaching is motivated by a desire to help clarify misconceptions and misrepresentations that may be associated with introversion (Cain, 2013; Kaufman, 2014; Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019) and to examine how this personality type configures into a chiefly extroverted profession. In doing so, I intend to explore and investigate my own experience as an introverted teacher and bring some visibility to the experience.

The following research questions are ultimately what I hope to discover:

- How is introversion manifested in the context of one's professional teaching identity and practice? (What does introversion look like in a teacher's professional role?)

- What are the challenges that one faces as an introverted teacher? How do these challenges impact their overall well-being?
- What feelings and emotions are experienced by this introverted teacher?

Rationale for the Study

Autoethnography, as an exploration of one's own narrative, shares commonalities with narrative research, which emphasizes the experience of the individual, promotes discussion around what those experiences mean, and helps individuals gain an understanding of the topics that they need to process (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018, p. 513). In an educational setting, this approach can prove to be an effective tool for teachers. In addition to emphasizing teacher reflection and teacher's knowledge, it brings "teachers' voices to the forefront by empowering teachers to talk about their experiences" (p. 513). Likewise, by sharing my self-story using an autoethnographic methodology, I endeavor to give voice to my teaching experiences as a self-identified introvert. Maurino (2016) argues that poetry can serve a similar purpose: "encompassed in poetry's ways of experiencing how to know and live is the matter of identity, related closely to the study and experience of self" (p. 207). In Vincent's (2018) discussion of Poetic Inquiry (PI) as a method of inquiry, he also identifies *education* as one of the major fields in which PI is frequently used as a methodological process (p. 54).

The review of the literature on introversion brought to light a gap wherein the story of introverted teachers has seldom been revealed through their own voices and interpretations. In Zafonte's (2018) investigation into the learning experiences of introverted college students, he argues that there is a need to explore the lived experiences of introverts and that these experiences should be articulated in their own voices. Creswell and Guetterman (2018) argue that the understanding gained through qualitative research can "lead to information that allows individuals to 'learn' about the

phenomenon or to an understanding that provides voice to individuals who may not be heard otherwise” (p. 206). In a discussion around the transformational value of autoethnography in education, Starr (2010) argues that this approach provides “in-depth analysis of the complexity of the lived experiences of the self, the nature of the ebbs and flows, then goes further to examine the emergent identity in relation to others and the culture in which we dwell” (p. 4).

Given the current teaching and learning context in the NL K-12 school system, as it relates to the increased emphasis on Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning’s (CASEL) framework and the need to respond to new stresses resulting from the COVID pandemic, an enhanced knowledge and open discussion of the lived-experience of introverts warrants attention. The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) model has become a core feature of how curriculum and school culture is evolving, and this includes a more intentional engagement with the diversity of identity and how this informs school communities and relationships. Two areas of focus in the NLESD’s (2020) most recent three-year strategic plan include Student Engagement and Success and Health and Well-Being and these developed through a consultation process which engaged students, teachers and school-based staff, school councils, parents. In this document, SEL is defined as:

...the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (p. 19).

Recognizing introversion as both a part of the conversation around diversity and as a complex phenomenon that plays a role in relationship building inevitably ties it into the discussion around SEL. Whether introvert personalities exist amongst teachers or students, schools should recognize that these individuals may have certain learning and teaching preferences, and that their interactions and relationships with others may look different.

In addition to contributing to the study and interpretation of the lived experience of a teacher introvert, I advance to examine the role that introverted personality plays in a teacher's professional identity and the relationships that they build with students in the classroom. The motivation behind this discussion around introverted personality and teacher professional identity is to investigate how this personality type configures into a chiefly extroverted profession. Starr (2010) stresses that autoethnography is "a valuable tool in examining the complex, diverse and sometimes messy world within education where we stress cooperation, teamwork and distributed leadership but are mired in hierarchy and power tensions" (p. 7). Using this reasoning, I see autoethnography as the most appropriate qualitative approach for examining the introverted teacher experience within an educational environment.

The Researcher's Role

Austin and Hickey (2007) identify the autoethnographic researcher's location as "central, reflexive rememberer" (p. 3) Similarly, Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010) position the researcher "at the center of the investigation as a "subject" (the researcher who performs the investigation) and an "object" (a/the participant who is investigated)" (p. 2). As both subject and object, the researcher draws upon their story to tell a self-narrative while examining their experience in a particular social context. Due to the nature of this style of qualitative research, this study will not entail an extensive discussion on site selection, population selection, and sampling technique. However, detailed information regarding the researcher's (participant) background, recognition of their experience as it relates to introverted personality, and a description of the context of the experiences will be documented in the study. While Prendergast (2009) acknowledges that this supplementary contextualizing lends to the academic strength of the research, the inquiry poems

should be “good poems in and of themselves” with “the potential... to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way” (p. 545).

I aim to use a first-person, delimited view as the qualitative voice in this study. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) assert that autoethnography is generally written in first- person and incorporates dialogue and self stories (p. 201). Dethloff (2007) argues that this use of a first person perspective in delivering the story, is what makes the story so “compelling to its readers” (p. 29) and distinguishes it from traditional research, where the researcher’s voice is kept separate from the data and context under study. The weaving together of the researcher’s unique voice with rich descriptions of their experience engages the reader in an examination of the social context being studied and allows them to construct their own meaning. In this respect, autoethnography “utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context” (Ngunjiri et al., 2010, p. 2).

Injecting my own voice through the amalgam of narrative and poetic writing offers a unique expression that captures some of the idiosyncrasies and nuances that may be missing from more conventional academic language (Öhlen’s, 2003). McLeod and Ruebsaat (2014) argue that “Without embodied language, which evokes emotion and draws the reader in, key elements of the story are rendered invisible. The naked human voice and its persuasive power in the narrative are lost. Certain forms of knowledge are best evoked through image or metaphor” (p. 31).

In Danforth’s (1997) autobiographical article, he concludes with an acknowledgement that using self-reflection as a channel for finding one’s voice was initially “intended for that person finding the power of voice to be a disempowered or oppressed individual” (p. 13). While I hesitate to describe me or my experience as “marginalized” or “alienated,” much in the same way that Danforth felt the need to share his “silenced stories” (p. 13) to enact social change, I see this autoethnographic

work as an instrument for interrupting the dominant discourse in North American society that Cain (2013) calls “the Extrovert Ideal” (p. 4).

Limitations/Delimitations

In Leggo’s (1999) *Research as Poetic Ruminaton*, he articulates his vision of poetry as a promising and worthy method of research. He states: “I want research that knows its humility, its futility, its volatility, that seeks its validity and reliability in places other than statistics” (p. 120). Despite these venerable objectives, contention and debate continue to obscure the value of such unconventional qualitative methods as poetic inquiry and autoethnography, heightening the need to recognize and discuss the limitations and uncover the delimitations of a study of this type.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) submit that the meaning and use of terms such as reliability, validity, and generalizability become altered when applied to autoethnography, and some challenges arise when determining its validity as quality research. Nevertheless, Ellis et al. (2011) contend that auto-ethnographers uphold the belief that “research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena” (p. 283-284). Furthermore, Austin and Hickey (2007) identify the “researcher’s Self” as “the last remaining frontier for rigorous, sustained and powerful anthropological work (p. 1).

The Concept of Truth in Autoethnographic Research

The notion of “truth” is of particular consequence in autoethnographic research and the singular viewpoint of this study of “Self” calls into question the reliability of the approach. One’s understanding of truth can change based on the genre of representation used in writing about our experiences (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282). Furthermore, through the act of recalling memories, there is no way to guarantee that writing about past events can capture the exact feelings and experience of the event, or accurately describe how someone else may have experienced the same event (p. 282).

As a result, critics often view autoethnography as lacking truth or even “narcissistic in nature” (Dethloff, 2007, p. 29). However, Dethloff (2007) contends that self-narratives give readers the opportunity to interpret the author’s experience in order “to support their understanding of a particular culture” (p. 29) and Ricci (2003) maintains that this makes autoethnography “limitless insofar as readers bring their own lenses through which to share in at least some part of its meaning (p. 594). Rawlins (2018) acknowledges that “Autoethnographic poetry is not a litmus test for the truth or falsity of a claim, but rather an invitation to think about life issues in more sensuously embodied and nuanced ways” (p. 160). Poetry allows us to revisit past experiences and extract new insight from those experiences through a rigorous process of reflection (p. 157).

As Ricci (2003) discloses, there is no way to know with certainty if all readers of an autoethnography will come to new understanding or discoveries, but if the writer can achieve this goal for their self, then something significant has resulted (p. 594). Moreover, Ellis et al. (2011) claim that when the story is believable and coherent, then readers will connect to the experience described by the author, and this provides validity and generalizability (p. 282-283).

In response to the methodological debates surrounding the value of autoethnography, Wall (2016) proposes a “middle ground” that recognizes “the unique value of personal experience, while maintaining the scholarly potential of autoethnography” (p. 1). I aim to strike this “middle ground “through the weaving together of personal narrative, thorough analysis, and corroborating scholarly literature.

Overview of the Chapters

In Chapter One, I have endeavored to delineate my role, as both subject and researcher, in this self-study that blends poetic inquiry and auto-ethnography. I have provided background information relating to the phenomenon of introversion and a brief summary of my personal

experiences with poetry as a form. Moreover, the purpose and rationale for the study were examined and the limitations/delimitations were presented and assessed.

In Chapter Two, I present a literature review that establishes the conceptual framework for the study and clarifies how the term introversion is defined in the paper. This chapter will also highlight some of the challenges that introverts face in the workplace, provide a summary of introvert strengths and weaknesses, and stress the need for creating a more inclusive and approachable workplace setting for teachers with introverted personalities.

In Chapter Three, I outline the methodological and theoretical framework of the study, providing the reader with a clear justification for and explanation of the combination of qualitative approaches employed in this study. Additionally, this chapter outlines the data collection/analysis process and reviews the ethical considerations in conducting a self-study.

Chapter Four is a data chapter consisting of a poetic inquiry and supporting narrative, which represents an in-depth personal examination of the introverted-teacher experience. By excavating memories, translating imagery and experience into words, and shaping those words into poetry and vignettes, I convey my intimate reflections on the phenomenon.

In the final chapter, Chapter Five, I discuss the findings of the self-study, consider the methodological challenges and limitations of the study, and propose recommendations and implications for educators and future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review establishes the conceptual framework for this thesis and supports the documentation of and justification for exploring the topic of teachers with introverted personalities. To ensure that the review remains within the parameters of the purpose of this study, I have used my research problem and questions to help guide and organize the section topics and subtopics of the review. The literature review will reveal how this study may add to the existing literature and help identify practices that may serve to be more inclusive for diverse personalities. The core topics include a comprehensive background of the terms introvert and extravert, personalities in the workplace, introverted teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and the need for creating a more inclusive and approachable workplace setting for teachers with introverted personalities.

Creswell and Guetterman (2018) explain how the purpose of a literature review in a qualitative study differs slightly from that of a quantitative study. Instead of an extensive review at the beginning of a study, the author cites a minimal amount of literature at the beginning of the study and integrates considerably more literature at the end of the study in order to support, by contrast and comparison, their findings. This ensures that the views “emerge without being constrained by the views of others from the literature” and determines “whether the findings of a study support or modify existing ideas and practices advanced in the literature (p. 80). Therefore, the following literature review is not intended to flesh out all of the themes that exist in the literature, rather it serves to identify some of the challenges that introverted teachers may face.

Personality Theory and Types

“Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race.”

(Cain, 2013, p.2).

Carl Jung (1921) was the first to popularize the terms “introversion” and “extraversion” in his classification and discussion of psychological types (Zelenski, Sobocko, & Whelan, 2014). Jung (1921) initially distinguished the two types based on how individuals direct their “psychic energy.” While extraverts express their libido (drive or energy) outwardly, directing energy towards “objects” and people outside of themselves; introverts direct their energy inward, examining their own feelings and experiences in an effort to make sense of them. In this sense, introversion is “a mechanism in which the libido concentrates itself wholly on the complexes, and seeks to detach and isolate the personality from external reality” (Jung, 1921, p. 501).

Over time, Jung’s conceptions of introversion and extraversion have become commonly used interpretations in academic research (Opt & Loffredo, 2000) and the foundation for the way that the terms are applied in the lay vernacular (Cain, 2013). However, in modern personality psychology, the meaning and interpretation of the terms (introversion in particular) has evolved over time, and some definitions have drifted from Jung’s original concept . Today, the personality dimensions of introversion and extroversion are assigned based on a combination of “patterns of behaviour” that “tend to go together within individuals” (Kaufman, 2014 para. 3).

Hans Eysenck is another 20th century psychologist often associated with the origins of the terms of introversion and extraversion. His two-factor model situated the two personality types at opposite poles (McAdams, 2000). Eysenck’s contribution is significant for its rejection of Jung’s “psychic energy” theory and for distinguishing the “Big Two” traits of Extraversion and Neuroticism (McAdams, 2000). Through the development of a physiological theory and conception of traits,

Eysenck explained that extraversion is the result of chronic understimulation, in which extraverts use compensatory behaviours to meet their stimulation needs. Introverts, on the other hand, are easily stimulated and prone to over-stimulation when confronted with “highly social contexts, thus preferring quieter activities” (Zelenski et al., 2014). The labels introvert and extravert are frequently assigned based on an individual’s preference or sensitivity to external stimulation (Skakoon, 2015). As a result, introverts’ physiologies “compel them to withdraw from high-stimulation environments” (Cain, 2013, p. 12) and they experience a personality that “confers on them a preference for the inner world of their own mind rather than the outer world of sociability. Depleted by too much external stimulation, we thrive on reflection and solitude” (Helgoe, 2010).

Eysenck (1967) also proposed a biological difference in the level of cortical arousal between the two personality types that may account for their tolerance of different levels of stimulation. Cooper (2013) argues that the real difference between the two personality styles relates to how an individual mentally and physically responds to stimulation. Due to extroverts having a lower basic rate of arousal, they need more external stimuli to feel normal, whereas introverts' rate of arousal is much higher and can easily be overwhelmed. This notion of different responses to stimulation has become the central element of the definition of the extroversion-introversion dimension and one that modern psychologists generally agree on (Cain, 2013).

Few would argue that the world can easily be separated into a binary of introverted and extraverted individuals, and Jung (1977) clearly expressed his conviction that a “pure” introvert or extrovert does not exist. Though some individuals exhibit extreme introversion or extroversion, most people fall on a continuum, sharing traits and dimensions of both types (Helgoe, 2010) and each psychological make-up includes strengths and weaknesses (Taylor, 2020). Cain (2013) argues that introverted and extroverted behaviours cannot be predicted across the board because of the

complexity of individual make-up and the existence of different types of introverts and extroverts. She contends that “introversion and extroversion interact with our other personality traits and personal histories, producing wildly different kinds of people” (p. 14). Furthermore, individuals are generally oriented towards one end of the spectrum or the other, but they can learn to move along the continuum. This involves using up energy and may not necessarily be beneficial (Eve-Cahoon, 2003).

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was developed in response to Jung’s theories of personality type and serves as an instrument for indicating an individual’s personality preference, while assuming a primarily biological explanation for the temperamental traits (Opt & Loffredo, 2000). The original version of the MBTI was developed in the 1920s by Katherine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Brigg Myers. The mother and daughter duo used the personality preferences described by Jung, elaborated on them, and separated them into four dimensions of personality types (Nadel, 2008). Three of these dimensions (Introversion vs. Extraversion, Sensing vs. Intuition, and Thinking vs. Feeling), were identified by Jung (1921), while the final pair (Judging vs. Perceiving) was first identified by Katharine Briggs (Myers et. al., 1980). By focusing on attitudes, orientation, and cognitive behaviour, the MBTI indicates a preference for one type amongst each of the four dimensions and compounds those preferences to reveal an individual’s unique personality profile (Nadel, 2008).

The Five-Factor Model

In recent decades, the Five-Factor Model (FFM) or “Big Five” has been accepted by personality psychologists as a way to describe the domain of traits that make up an individual’s personality: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience

(Winter, John, Stewart, Klohnen, & Duncan, 1998). In the context of the FFM, extraversion can be defined as “a tendency toward assertiveness, sociability, and leadership qualities”, while introversion, its dispositional opposite, is defined as “a tendency to prefer individual activities and a reserved nature” (Perkins, 2014, para. 7). McAdams (1992) was critical of the overly broad level of analysis offered by the Five-Factor Model and suggested that “trait scores may not be especially useful in the prediction of specific behaviour in particular situations” (Göncz, 2017, p. 85). Though there is disagreement as to which traits should be used to classify personalities, all theorists and researchers agree that extraversion-introversion is a “prominent master trait” (Winter et al., 1998, p. 233). However, extraversion is favored in this model, as introversion is interpreted as lacking the desirable qualities of assertiveness and sociability (Cain, 2013).

The Use of the Terms “Introversion” and Extraversion” in this Study

Jung’s original conception of the terms “introversion” and “extraversion,” in conjunction with the expanded definitions of the Jungian concepts developed by modern personality theorists, will be applied in this study. However, every effort will be made to avoid interpretations of introversion as a “character flaw” or “disorder” (Dossey, 2016, p. 151). The decision to use the Jungian categories of introversion and extroversion corresponds with the generally accepted layman use, association, and distinction which “play meaningful roles in our culture” (Cain, 2013). Dossey (2016) is apt in his observation that the simple dichotomy of *introversion* and *extroversion* cannot unambiguously convey the complexity of human personality. Hence, throughout this study I intend to explore and highlight some of the attributes that underscore my own unique introverted personality and distinguish them from the diametrically opposed characteristics that are associated with extraversion and what Cain (2013) labels the “the Extrovert ideal.” While this study will use Jung’s personality types as its foundation, the appreciation that everyone’s personality is unique, regardless of their

personality classification, deserves emphasis. Still, it is important to acknowledge, through my own apperception, that my personality does not fall squarely on the extreme end of the introversion side of the spectrum. I recognize that my personality aligns with many of the attributes that characterize introvert preferences and behaviours, yet I still require social outlets, relationships, and conversation to meet some of my stimulation needs.

Shyness (Fear of Judgment)

Is introversion just another word for shy? The simple answer is no. Nevertheless, this study still warrants a discussion of shyness as it makes up a part of my personality that is not easily distinguished from introversion. Cain (2013) and Walsh (2012) caution people not to confuse shyness and introversion, though they are quick to point out that the two concepts can overlap. Cain (2013) draws a line between the two in describing introversion as “a preference for environments that are not overstimulating” and shyness as “the fear of social disapproval or humiliation” (p. 12). While shyness is “inherently painful,” introversion does not necessarily result in social discomfort or restraint (p. 12). Introverts can actively engage in social interactions but will often become overstimulated and feel depleted or drained of their sociable resources (Helgoe, 2010).

The ambiguity and difficulty in separating the two concepts stems from the fact that shy people often become more reserved as an escape from the anxiety that arises from socialization, while introverts often manifest shyness as a result of being consistently confronted with the message that their behaviour is in need of correcting (Cain, 2013). Many shy individuals have a desire to connect with others, but they find the act of socializing to be challenging, whereas introverts will find opportunities to connect with others but experience an intrinsic preference for being alone (Helgoe, 2010).

Through the implementation of their own shyness scale, Cheek and Buss (1981) determined that shyness is something more complex than merely low sociability. This finding was demonstrated by the discovery that “shy-sociable subjects were generally more tense and inhibited than shy unsociable subjects.” (p. 336). The notion of internal conflict was used to explain these findings. Though *shy-sociable* subjects felt a desire to spend time with others, they were reluctant to do so due to the overwhelming feelings of fear and inhibition at the thought of socializing. Ultimately, this internal struggle led to increased feelings of unease. Whereas *shy-unsociable* subjects did not appear to experience the same internal conflict due to their general preference to be alone (p. 336).

Cheek and Melchior’s (1990) definition of shyness adds an additional layer to the concept, describing it as “the tendency to feel tense, worried, or awkward during social interactions with unfamiliar people” (p. 117). In their investigation into the relationship between shyness and self-preoccupation during conversations with strangers, the authors discovered that “shy individuals seem to be so acutely self-conscious that they literally find themselves unable to interact with others due to their inappropriate distribution of attention” (p. 126). The authors also draw on Cacioppo et al. (1979) to point out that a large extent of the self-focusing that shy people engage in when anticipating interactions with strangers is overwhelmingly negative self-perception (p. 124).

Finally, Cain (2013) argues that shyness, like introversion, is perceived as a weakness in competitive cultures and neither type is revered as alpha. Society’s overwhelming preference for alpha roles leaves shyness to be interpreted as submissiveness and passivity. The combination of introversion and shyness as facets of an individual’s personality leaves them considerably more vulnerable to the “Extrovert Ideal.”

The Extrovert Ideal: Implications for Introverts

Cain (2013) was instrumental in popularizing the concept of “the Extrovert Ideal,” which describes the overwhelming preference and acceptance in Western society of extroverted behaviour and disposition while often characterizing introversion as a deficit or flaw. Other researchers have also explored and unveiled this history of celebrating and giving preference to attributes associated with extraversion (Helgoe, 2010; Cain, 2013; Lawn, Slemp, & Vella-Brodrick, 2019; Taylor, 2020). The essence of the problem that many introverts face in cultures that subscribe to an extrovert ideal is succinctly summarized by Helgoe (2010) in the following statement about American life:

As American life becomes increasingly competitive and aggressive, to say nothing of blindingly fast, the pressures to produce on demand, be a team player, and make snap decisions cut introverts off from their inner power source, leaving them stressed and depleted. Introverts today face one overarching challenge—not to feel like misfits in their own culture. (p. 57)

Isabel Myers (2010) pointed out some of the causes of Western civilizations’ cultural bias in favor of extraversion. She explained that the tendency for extraverts’ viewpoint to dominate was a direct result of them being more vocal, more numerous, and easier to understand. The lack of accessibility to the introvert’s personality means that they are “not readily understandable, even to each other, and are likely to be thoroughly incomprehensible to the extraverts” (Myers & Myers, 2010, p. 54).

The implications for introverts’ health and well-being, as a result of living and working in a society that prefers extroverted attributes, are cause for concern. Caldwell-Harris and Aycicegi (2006) developed a personality-culture clash hypothesis to stress the risk towards mental health for those with "an orientation inconsistent with societal values" (p. 332). The authors’ findings supported the notion that a misalliance between personality and cultural values is indeed a risk factor for poor

mental health. Additionally, Walsh (2012) points out that this mismatch leaves introverts vulnerable to a greater risk of depression.

Lawn, Slemp, and Vella-Brodrick's (2019) research into Australian introvert's authenticity and well-being also revealed the existence of a marked cultural preference for extraversion and indicated that extraverts tended to experience a better person-environment fit and higher levels of authenticity and well-being than introverts. They discovered that the majority of participants in their study held *extraversion-deficit beliefs* - a desire to become more extraverted than what they were currently - and they "overwhelmingly indicated that they lived in a society where extraversion was more socially desirable than introversion" (p. 2055). The authors' interpretation of these findings prompted them to suggest that introverts in Western cultures could achieve greater dispositional authenticity, and thus improve their well-being, by changing their *extraversion-deficit beliefs* and becoming more accepting of their introversion. Additionally, the authors acknowledge and emphasize the need for further research into how living in an extrovert-centric context can impact introverts' well-being and how introverts may find ways to improve their overall well-being.

Acting Out of Character

How can introverts succeed in a culture that requires extroverted behaviour? They fake it. Though individuals are naturally inclined toward an extravert or introvert disposition, they can act "out of character" in some situations. When people grow accustomed to behaving in a manner that goes against their disposition, it can sometimes be difficult for others to even recognize that it is unnatural or uncomfortable behaviour (Cain, 2013). This can put pressure on introverts to maintain what they perceive as a socially desired behaviour and it may forge a distorted identity. Sackett and Walmsley (2014) unraveled this capacity to act out of character by differentiating between *disposition* and *identity*, stating that "*Disposition* reflects a fundamental tendency, with biological

and genetic links, to certain patterns of behavior, whereas *identity* reflects self-perceptions.” (p. 540). Though these concepts overlap, identity is more flexible to change when a situation dictates a certain behaviour (such as behaviour that will lead to workplace success). Therefore, a person may learn to behave counter-dispositionally, sometimes even changing the way they see themselves, in time, re-shaping their identity. As the authors contend, “even if underlying dispositions prove quite fixed, patterns of behavior reflecting an attribute are indeed changeable” (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014, p. 541).

While there have been some recent studies to suggest that introverts can benefit from acting counter-dispositionally (in short stints), there is a need for research into the long term implications of this behaviour (Zelenski, Santoro, & Whelan, 2012; Zelenski, Whelan, Nealis, Besner, Santoro, & Wynn, 2013; Zelenski, Sobocko, & Whelan, 2014). Zelenski et al. (2012) were unable to find any evidence to suggest that introverts suffer costs as a result of acting extraverted. In fact, extraversion, even as a momentary behaviour, can produce feelings of enjoyment and happiness (Zelenski et al., 2014). In contrast, others have argued that extended periods of acting against one’s disposition can come at a cost (Little, 2008; Cain, 2013; Lawn et al., 2019). Even Zelenski et al. (2014) concede that “it remains plausible that prolonged periods of extraverted behaviour would drain trait introverts or that the negative consequences do not appear until after time has passed” (p. 196). Lawn et al. (2019) also argue that there are possible implications for introverts who behave in a manner that goes against their core personality traits as they are “likely to spend substantial time behaving extraverted (versus introverted) in order to fit in with the prevailing cultural norm and meet situational demands” (p. 2058).

Through his own experience of introversion and his research into personality and motivation, Brian Little, recognized the ability of introverts to behave more like extroverts in order to succeed

and achieve personal and professional goals in which they are passionate about (Bloom, 2013). Little (2008) explored a social ecological model of human development as a means of rethinking personality psychology. It is his assertion that the pursuit of core personal projects may serve as motivation to temporarily suspend *biogenic fixed traits* - “genetic and evolutionary based influences and may operate without awareness” (p. 1236) and adopt *free traits* - “culturally scripted patterns of conduct that are strategically crafted to advance projects which a person cares deeply” (p. 1235). Little (2008) acknowledged the adoption of free traits could have both positive and negative influences on wellbeing and argued that “the costs of free-trait behavior can be mitigated by the provision and use of restorative resources” (p. 1235). Likewise, Cain (2013) affirms that when introverts act out of character for extended periods without *restorative niches* -times and places where teachers are able to revert to their natural introverted tendencies - it can eventually lead to burnout. Though Little’s (2008) free trait theory is relatively new, he believes that it can help to “explain inconsistencies or seemingly paradoxical aspects of a person’s everyday behavior” (p. 1250).

Cain (2013) encourages people to make life choices that align with their temperament, no matter where they fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Though she acknowledges that there are times when we have to behave in ways that do not come naturally, this behaviour should not make up the majority of our daily lives or the time that we spend at work. Cain (2013) draws on research in the area of “person-environment fit” to propose that people will thrive in occupations that are in agreement with their personalities (p. 253-54)

Personality Styles in the Workplace

Most workplaces are composed of a diverse representation of personalities. When differing personalities are brought together in a work environment, it can sometimes lead to tension and

misunderstanding, but with a more profound understanding and acceptance of the nuances of different personalities, organizations can learn to accommodate the needs of all personality types (Taylor, 2020). In her investigation into the challenges faced by intuitive introverts in the workplace, Nadel (2008) discovered that the primary challenge relates to integration, as many introverts do not feel comfortable expressing thoughts or feelings in a traditional work setting. Continual frustration stemming from the anticipation of disapproval is thus a real possibility.

Though personality has long been recognized as a significant variable in teacher effectiveness and a factor that plays a role in the way teachers engage in the process of learning and teaching (Díaz Larenas, Rodríguez Moran, & Poblete Rivera, 2011), there is a need for a more comprehensive psychological theory of teacher personality in educational psychology that can thoroughly explain the role of teachers' personality traits within education (Göncz, 2017). Taking such an intricate variable as personality and analyzing it within the context of a complex profession will inevitably reveal both strengths and limitations associated with different personality types. A classroom bustling with activity seems like a natural setting for an extroverted teacher who derives his energy from the essential interaction and socializing demands of the classroom. However, introverts will undoubtedly experience exhaustion from the overstimulating atmosphere. Their preferred energy comes from meaningful one-on-one conversations and solitary work (Bloom, 2013).

A classroom is a setting where teachers are asked to play a multitude of roles and they are often called upon to perform more than one role simultaneously or in quick succession. Feldon (2007) affirms that, for some teachers, even the balance of remembering and implementing a lesson while attending to student needs and behaviours can overwhelm one's "cognitive resources" (p.123). Consequently, the approach that introverts and extroverts take to such workplace demands may manifest very differently. While extroverts are more likely to make quick work of their assignments,

engage in multitasking, and take risks, introverts are inclined to “work more slowly and deliberately” (Cain, 2013, p. 11). The introvert’s approach is not always conducive to a fast-paced school environment. Furthermore, the demands of teaching extend beyond the classroom and social interactions play a part in many daily work duties: supervision, staff and department meetings, communication with parents, professional development sessions, and collaboration with other teachers. This conundrum may lead some to ask: Why would someone with an introverted personality choose such an outgoing profession?

From his point of view as a professor, Little insists [during his conversation with Bloom (2013)] that introverts have the capacity to be effective teachers and that given the choice to pursue a different, yet similar, vocation, most introverts would discover that many related career choices are equally geared towards an extroverted orientation. Little also believes that students will generally cooperate with teachers who aim to establish a quiet classroom atmosphere and they can potentially act as a resource for introverted teachers who take the time to build trusting relationships. Introverts’ tendency towards agreeableness and their desire to avoid confrontation are qualities that can earn students’ respect (Bloom, 2013).

Perkins’ (2014) research into the effects of workplace culture and environment on personality expression revealed that extraversion was overwhelmingly favoured in the workplace and that this preference can impact employee wellbeing and productivity. She stressed that the relationship between the individual, situation and environment must be considered in an effort to ensure workplace well-being and that this interaction requires further investigation.

Areas of Strength and Challenge for Introvert Teachers

In Little’s experience, he found that an introverted teacher can genuinely earn the admiration and respect of his students. He claimed that “the introvert is the one who makes someone feel like an

individual student, rather than a blob with buttons in the third row” (Bloom, 2013, p. 3). However, this ability to zero in on individual students and to detect the subtle temperamental cues is both a blessing and a curse. Little argued that it can cause introverted teachers to experience stress in the classroom when they detect students who show signs of disengagement or frustration with a lesson (“punishment cues”). Extroverted teachers, on the other hand, tend to focus on the students who show engagement and interest in a lesson (“reward cues”). This difference in awareness that presents in the moment of delivering a lesson can lead introverted teachers to question the difficulty level and appropriateness of the material, while extroverted teachers may tune out discouraging cues and focus on signs of engagement that propel the lesson (Bloom, 2013).

Another possible advantage of an introverted teaching style is a preference for one-to-one interaction. While extroverts will thrive in large group settings with conversation and contributions from more outgoing students, introverted teachers are “more likely to stop an individual student and ask her pertinent questions about her life: how she is getting on with her new pet, for example, or whether she is still struggling with long division” (Bloom, 2013). Some other traits of an introverted personality that have been recognized as valuable in the workplace include the propensity to build deep and meaningful relationships, the tendency to act deliberately and cautiously after exercising thorough thought, and the ability to listen, focus and work for long periods in solitude (Walsh, 2012).

Leadership

The need for teachers to function as leaders in the classroom and to act as agents of school improvement and reform has been increasingly recognized as a significant role that teachers must perform in schools (Crowther, 1997; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Phelps, 2008). This form of leadership exists outside of administrative leadership or other designated authoritarian positions and often begins in the classroom (Phelps, 2008). However, the qualities and skills that are generally

associated with effective leadership tend to be extroverted characteristics, such as strong social skills, charisma, the ability to make quick decisions, and being able to engage and motivate groups of people. As a result, extroverts are generally perceived to be better, more successful leaders, while introvert strengths are often overlooked (Farrell, 2017). In reality, both introverts and extroverts bring strengths and weaknesses to leadership roles and “have the potential to be successful leaders capitalizing on their unique strengths (Farrell, 2017, p. 437). Similarly, Cain (2013) argues that adopting a “quiet, decision-making style” in a leadership role may hold benefits over the “quick and assertive answers” provided by extroverts (p. 49).

Korn’s (2016) experience as the introverted dean of a law school highlights the insecurities that surface in an introvert who may question their capacity to be a successful leader. By the same token, introverts can easily be trounced by the stereotype that a leader, such as a dean, is expected to be “outgoing...with an easy ability to engage others in conversation and make small talk” (p. 297). Korn (2016) dispels this stereotype by articulating the strengths that derive from an introverted personality, while at the same time, acknowledging that adjustments and concessions are required in order to succeed in a role that involves many gregarious duties. Though working with large groups may not be an appealing part of the job, when called upon, introverts can perform this duty. As Korn (2016) acknowledges, “it may be that because it is my job, as opposed to mere socializing, I have found that I can do it. I do not love it, but I can do it” (p. 302). The author also notes the exhaustion that inevitably follows large gatherings and concedes that afterwards: “You may want to get into bed and pull the covers up over your head or read a book. But the large gathering was successful, and no one knew you were an introvert” (p. 302). He stresses the need for managing and limiting the number of highly social duties throughout the day and planning quiet downtime to recharge.

Creativity

Dannar (2016) outlines the difference in the ways that introverts and extroverts manifest creativity and suggests that there exists a bias toward the more outward (extroverted) projection of creative ideas. He highlights the importance of embracing more innovative styles of creativity that emerge from more intuitive and “knowledge-based” thinking styles (Wilde & Labno, 2001, as cited in Dannar, 2016). Dannar (2016) states the introverted variety of creativity “comes largely from memories, education, and past experience, supplemented with archival know-how and knowledge from libraries and other content sources (e.g., Internet)” (p. 40).

A staff room can be a place where teachers come together, socialize, vent, and decompress, but it also has the potential to cultivate a toxic environment where tension, competition for stature, cliques, and gossip distend (Pitt & Kirkwood, 2009). A negative atmosphere, where gossip is primarily sustained by those with extroverted personalities, can lead to an increase in emotional exhaustion and an undermining of creativity (Liu, Kwan, & Zhang, 2020). Conversely, Liu, Kwan, and Zhang (2020) found that introverts maintain creativity despite the conditions caused by workplace gossip and further determined that “extroversion may harm employees in a negative situation and can inform the continuing debate surrounding the usefulness of extroversion in applied contexts” (p. 339). The authors also draw on Jung to highlight the advantage of introverts’ inclination to avoid more outgoing and social behaviour (such as gossiping) due to the tendency of introverts to experience exhaustion as a result of social interactions and “instead focus on the internal world of reflection, dreaming, and vision” (p. 330).

Reflective Teaching

“Reflective teaching” was undoubtedly one of the most frequently discussed and promoted concepts that cropped up in my undergraduate education courses ten years ago. At the time, the

concept seemed to me to be such an intuitive and involuntary practice that I could hardly believe that it required lengthy discussions in an academic context. It is clearer now that this practice does not come naturally to everyone, though notably this reflective quality is more commonly found in introverts (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019). A more current, yet equally permeating concept, is the term “mindfulness.” Mindfulness makes up a key component of what Korthagen and Vasalos (2009) term “Core Reflection.” Core Reflection is a broadening of the term reflection that shifts the focus from “quick-fix” problem solving to an increased awareness of the task at hand. The authors argue that by “being *in* the situation with full awareness of thinking, feeling, and wanting” teachers can use reflection as a tool for transformational learning (p. 14). Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers’ (2004) discussion of the topics of presence and connectedness revealed an upshot to the type of reflection that introverts engage in on a daily basis. They determined that the focus on self and development of a strong sense of personal awareness that is involved in this type of reflection was ultimately an important process for individuals in becoming more connected to the outside world.

Freese (2006) emphasized the role of reflection in positioning the teacher as “an inquirer who is constantly striving to make sense of her practice and her students’ learning” (p. 102). Likewise, Dewey believed that teachers could arrive at new understandings through the process of reflection. This is made possible when teachers are given opportunities to analyze and reflect on teaching practices, assess the effectiveness of their instruction, and adjust and improve their performance (Darling-Hammond, 2008). Rashtchi and Sanayi Mashhour’s (2019) study focused on investigating the relationship between reflectivity and burnout in teachers and whether introvert and extravert personalities traits revealed differing degrees of burnout and a tendency towards reflectivity (p. 74). The notion of reflective teaching is based on the assumption that teachers can gain insight into their

professional practices by reflecting and scrutinizing their experiences and in the classroom in order to find an underlying meaning. By “self-monitoring, observing one’s own activities, and evaluating them” teachers can engage in reflection that helps them better understand themselves, their students, and the relationship between them (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019, p. 76). It also involves facing the sometimes painful recognition and acknowledgement of our mistakes and an openness to exploring our vulnerabilities. As Wiebe & Snowber, (2012) profess, “Honest reflection, which follows vulnerability, is rarely welcome in teaching. Few want to reveal mistakes or weaknesses” (p. 453). However, this in depth reflection may assist teachers in overcoming both social and personal struggles which they encounter in their profession (Hillier, 2005).

Unfortunately, reflection does not happen at the drop of a hat. Teaching is fast-paced and reactionary, and oftentimes a moment has passed before any genuine reflection can occur. Van Manen (2008) insists that “reflection in action is limited to an (inter)active thoughtfulness” (p. 1) and when in the moment, “teachers must constantly and instantly act in a manner that hopefully demonstrates a thoughtful considerateness” (p. 2). For introverts, this presents a challenge. Meaningful and prolonged reflection is likely to occur after the events of the day when solitude and quiet can conspire to create the right milieu for reflection. Introverts’ sensitivity to prolonged stimulation and social interaction require them to take time for reflection on their thoughts and feelings in order to help recharge (Grant, 2014). Though introverts are more reflective by nature, when lacking the opportunity to reflect, they are more inclined to experience burnout when combined with the daily stressors of teaching (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019).

Communication

Cain (2013) points out that introverts prefer to “listen more than they talk, think before they speak, and often feel as if they express themselves better in writing than in conversation” (Cain, p.

11). In Bloom's (2013) interviews with introverted teachers, he found that participants expressed a preference for using email as a way to contact parents and conduct parent-teacher conferences. The obligatory small talk and interaction with strangers can be overwhelming for teachers who have already spent a stimulating day in the classroom and then must continue into the evening. Though the increased use of communication technologies can interfere with introverts' search for solitude, these tools are generally preferred by introverts "because they provide a buffer that telephone conversations and face-to-face meetings don't." (Walsh, 2012). Unfortunately, for teachers, written communication is not always possible.

Despite the challenges that introverts' face due to their preferred communication style, Lieberman and Rosenthal (2001) discovered that introverts possess normal decoding skills when engaged in conversation. It is only when conditions involve multitasking ("the coordination of two tasks simultaneously") that introvert's experience a deficit in applying their decoding skills. The authors also concluded that this deficit becomes apparent "in a multitasking context and when the nonverbal decoding was the secondary, not the primary, goal" (p. 306). The ability to observe and decode are introverted strengths, but when expected to participate in a conversation with a number of competing distractions present, introverts can easily become overwhelmed. The complexities of a one-on-one conversation alone can require the engagement of a diverse set of simultaneous tasks (Cain, 2013). This "mental multitasking" becomes increasingly demanding and stressful when introverts are expected to participate in a conversation, in addition to observing and processing information quickly, without becoming distracted (p. 237).

Workplace Atmosphere

Is a school setting conducive to success for introverted teachers? While there has been increased research around the topic of student learning and classroom environment (Cornelius &

Herrenkohl, 2004; Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009), there is a need to explore how school and classroom settings can suitably accommodate teachers of diverse personalities (Rashtchi and Sanayi Mashhour, 2019). Many modern institutions, including schools, are designed as stimulating environments where group work can easily be pursued through flexible seating arrangements (Cain, 2013). Moreover, the manner of behaviour promoted in most schools and classrooms is outgoing and sociable, with most teachers perceiving a child with an extroverted demeanor as the “ideal student” (Meisgeier, Swank, Richardson, & Meisgeier, 1994). Maintaining an atmosphere that is conducive to group learning, high levels of stimulation, and interaction, also means noise. On any given day, managing a classroom of 25 or more students is challenging and mentally taxing work. Minimizing noise and controlling volume are key to ensuring an environment that acknowledges and responds to the inclusivity of students who are sensitive to noise and distraction. Additionally, a noisy environment can be detrimental to a teachers’ ability to focus and over-stimulating for many introverts. Such an environment is likely to result in “cognitive overload...when the total processing demands of external stimuli and internal cognitions exceed available attentional resources (Feldon, 2007, p. 123).

In an experimental study to determine the impact of noise on mental performance, Belojevic, Slepcevic, & Jakovljevic (2001) found that “introverts had more pronounced subjective effects of annoyance, poor concentration and fatigue during mental performance in noise compared to quiet conditions” (p. 212). Introverts’ higher sensitivity to noise and vulnerability to distraction is ultimately detrimental to their performance of mental tasks (Belojevic, G., Jakovljevic, B., & Slepcevic, 2003). The authors draw on Green’s (1984) research to show that, due to introverts’ tendency to become easily overstimulated, performance is affected when noise levels exceed an optimum volume (whereas extraverts prefer a higher intensity volume). Once noise levels exceed a

comfortable auditory threshold, introverts experience a deficit in performance, unlike extroverts who can thrive in a more stimulating environment (Belojevic et al., 2003).

Burnout

The increasing challenges and demands that teachers face both inside and outside the classroom can take a toll on their mental and physical health overtime and impact their overall professional performance (Colomeischi, 2015). These challenges arise at personal, social, and professional levels and can result in “emotional stress, inadequacy feelings, loss of enthusiasm, and lack of reward” (Colomeischi, 2015, p. 1067). These symptoms are the consequence of what researchers have labelled “burnout”. Maslach et al. (2001) recognized that burnout can result from discord between the nature of a job and the nature of a person performing the job and “the greater the gap, or mismatch, between the person and the job, the greater the likelihood of burnout” (p. 413).

While the early days of teaching and becoming familiar with the nuances of the profession can be stressful, burnout -a more extreme consequence of stress -can result from ongoing stress and disillusionment with the profession. Rashtchi and Sanayi Mashhour (2019) point out that “with higher demands, more intricate responsibilities, and ongoing knowledge construction, many teachers deal with professional stress and burnout, experience difficulties to give of themselves to students as they used to do earlier” in their career (p.74)

Cano-García, Padilla-Muñoz, & Carrasco-Ortiz (2005) recognize that teacher burnout is related to both contextual and personality variables, but research into contextual variables has consistently taken priority over individual variables. The authors stress the need to explore the combination of these variables and how they interact to contribute to teacher burnout. In their study of teacher burnout using a group of ninety-nine Spanish teacher participants, they determined that the highest levels of burnout (consisting of “greater emotional exhaustion, greater depersonalization, and

less personal accomplishment”) occurred in teachers with a high degree of neuroticism and introversion (p. 14-15). Introverted characteristics, such as “passivity, lack of interest in social exchanges and less disposition towards positive emotionality” promoted emotional exhaustion and depersonalization while diminishing personal accomplishment (p. 15). Chang (2009) explored the connection between teacher burnout and the emotional work that teachers perform in the classroom. The author argued “that the habitual patterns in teachers’ judgments about student behavior and other teaching tasks may contribute significantly to teachers’ repeated experience of distinct unpleasant emotions and may eventually lead to certain degrees of burnout” (p. 191). Chang (2009) pointed out that “the emotional needs, labor, and work required for a teacher are significant compared to other professions” (p. 194).

Consistent with other studies, Rashtchi and Sanayi Mashhoor (2019) found that personality traits can help predict teachers’ predisposition toward burnout, and introverted teachers are more prone to burnout than extroverted teachers. They suggest that “an explanation for this finding is that burnout happens when teachers lack adequate resources to cope with teaching challenges and stressors. Extravert teachers may have more immediate resources to deal with some stressors, such as seeking help from others” (p. 83) Furthermore, the authors submit that finding ways to deal with teaching challenges can help control the degree of burnout and training teachers to become more reflective “can help them respond to the teaching stressors appropriately and be successful in coping with the challenges” (p. 83).

In Colomeischi’s (2015) study of “burnout as a work-related syndrome,” she researched teachers’ experience with burnout in the Romanian educational system and how it related to emotional intelligence and personality traits (p. 1067). The author concluded that “personality traits

influence the teachers' predisposition to experience burnout" and that higher levels of neuroticism and lower levels of extroversion were some of the predictors of burnout (p. 1072).

Misconceptions about Introverts in the Workplace

The cultural bias in favor of extraversion may have implications for introverts in the workplace. Helgoe (2010) emphasizes the quiet nature of introverts and their preferred communication style as aspects of the type that lend themselves to misjudgment. As the author notes, "perceptions of competence tend to be based on verbal behavior. An introvert who is silent in a group may actually be quite engaged—taking in what is said, thinking about it, waiting for a turn to speak—but will be seen in the U.S. as a poor communicator." (Helgoe, 2010, p. 58). Introverts may also come across as "disinterested or unengaged" in situations that require social interactions (Blanchard, 2020, p. 440). However, Blanchard (2020) explains that when introverts hesitate to speak up during meetings, keep to themselves during networking events, or leave a social event early, it should not be taken for granted that they are "not interested", "arrogant", or "bored." For introverts, it is really just a natural response to the situation.

Another common misreading of introverts is the notion that their inward focus suggests that they are self-absorbed and uncaring. In fact, the need for introverts to reflect on their inner thoughts and feelings "helps them understand the world and be empathetic" (Eve-Cahoon, 2003, p. 192). Similarly, the fact that many introverts prefer to work alone and tend to avoid projects that involve group work lead many to believe that they are "poor team players" (Nadel, 2008, p. 9). In reality, many intuitive introverts have "a strong sense of integrity and will work through the night, if necessary, as long as they believe in the inherent value of any project assigned to them" (p. 9-10).

Feiler and Kleinbaum's (2015) research suggests that people are likely to overestimate the number of extraverts in the general population and thus a bias exists when building networks that

predominantly include extraverts. This “social miscalibration” can potentially impact people’s judgement of their own social behavior resulting in “reduce(d) feelings of belongingness, self-esteem, and self-worth.” (p. 601). The authors’ findings, however, did suggest that introverts may benefit from a smaller “network extraversion bias” and “a hidden social-calibration advantage,” as they are likely to actively seek out both introverts and extroverts as part of their network while extroverts generally seek out other extroverts (p. 601). This tolerance for personality diversity is also conducive to more open-minded and effective leadership (Feiler & Kleinbaum, 2015).

Perhaps the most glaring misconception that introverts face in certain types of professions and workplaces is that there is an assumed “ideal” personality type associated with the profession. An introverted librarian, researcher, or writer may be more acceptable and fitting than an introverted teacher, lawyer, or performer. Blanchard (2020), an introverted emergency medical physician, expresses a misconception in her work environment that could equally apply to teachers: “Maybe because we are always in the public’s eye at the workplace, we are expected to be interested in that same type of public engagement in other settings” (p. 440). This misconception may lead co-workers, parents, or students to anticipate that a teacher will behave the same way at work as outside of work.

Though popular literature (Cain, 2013; Helgoe, 2010) on the topic of introversion has brought more awareness to the nuances of the personality type, as well as the stigma that surrounds it, there is still a need to rectify misguided assumptions about introverts and educate people about the personality type (Grant, 2014).

Embracing and Accommodating Introverts

Rashtchi and Sanayi Mashhour (2019) stress the need for educational systems to recognize the diverse abilities that teachers with different personality types contribute to the development of a

school. They believe that “acknowledging personality differences can lead to individualized, culturally-sensitive teaching, and stimulate teachers to look for new ways of classroom management” (Rashtchi & Khoshnevisan, 2019, as cited in Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019, p. 83).

Accommodating and supporting the needs of varied personality types should be no different than making adaptations to appeal to the diverse strengths, needs, and learning styles of students. As Godsey (2015) adds, “It’s also reasonable to assume that students will be better off when each of their respective teachers are in an environment that suits their teaching style” (para. 20).

Considering that many introverts enjoy some level of social interaction and collaboration, the motive behind making adjustments to the workplace environment is not to create an anti-social climate. Many organizations can begin to create a more accommodating work environment for introverts by recognizing their work preferences and gaining an understanding of the type of contexts in which introverts work best (Skakoon, 2015). In this respect, the focus should be on establishing a workplace environment that aims for a healthier balance between introvert and extravert propensities. As things currently stand, introverted teachers often “lack the required support and capacity to create a positive learning environment” (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019, p. 74).

In addition to ascertaining a need for schools to establish a more inclusive and approachable workplace, this literature review has served to discuss the conceptual framework for this thesis while exploring some core topics and themes. I have identified and outlined some of the challenges that introverts face in the workplace and reviewed potential introvert strengths and weaknesses. The next chapter will outline the methodological approach for investigating the phenomenon of introversion and describe the process for collecting and analyzing the findings.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach

For this study of the introverted-teacher experience, I intend to use a hybridization of autoethnographic narrative and poetic writing as a method of inquiry. Prendergast (2009) has referred to this method of “researcher-voiced poem,” that blends these two qualitative approaches, as “Vox Autobiographia/Autoethnographia” (p. 545) and more recently this voice (or “vox”) form has been categorized as “Vox Theoria/Vox Poetica – Poems about self, writing and poetry as method” (Prendergast, 2015, p. 683). While there is no shortage of qualitative approaches and methodological choices to pursue, given the characteristically introspective nature of the phenomenon of introversion, the choice to use an approach that emphasizes personal narrative and reflection was an intuitive one.

Like all qualitative research, researchers must recognize when an approach is most appropriate and how effective it will be in revealing significant and practical findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). My resolve to connect an understanding of self to the broader socialization process is where I look to autoethnography. Autoethnography is defined by Ellis (2004) as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 200). Likewise, Mischenko (2005) champions Denzin’s (2001) assertion that “...the personal is always social. The private struggles and endeavors of individuals are linked to social and cultural values and meanings” (p. 206).

Vincent (2018) references Faulkner’s (2007) suggestion that researchers who engage in PI must remain critically aware of their motivation for using poetry as a method of inquiry (p. 63).

Ultimately, some of the merits in support of PI that are addressed in the literature include the facts

that it “promotes criticality, can make explicit the position or reflexivity of the researcher, and allows for different perspectives to be considered through the artistic medium of poetry” (p. 50).

Furthermore, my decision to employ a form of poetic inquiry that integrates autoethnography corresponds with my belief in Ellis, Adams, and Bochner’s (2011) stance that an autoethnographic approach “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (p. 274).

Having recognized this, it must be understood that this approach is undertaken in order to investigate a unique introverted -teacher experience, but not an attempt to uncover the quintessential introverted experience. Ricci (2003) claims that:

Autoethnography can, and often does, challenge the epistemological position of traditional (read positivist) research. It relies, instead, on the postmodern ontological position that the nature of reality is local, co-constructed, and the truth cannot be known with any certainty. It holds no pretense of objectivity, of omniscience, - nor does it claim the apprehension of reality or truth (p. 593).

Ricci (2003) bridges the divide between poetry writing and qualitative research by revealing that both “share in their goals of providing meaning, density, aestheticism, and reflexivity” (p. 590). His choice to employ “autoethnographic verse” (a combination of autoethnography and poetic verse) as a means to express his childhood experiences provided an opportunity for the reader to reflect on the experience shared by the researcher and to make discoveries through their own unique interpretations (p. 590). This interchange between researcher and reader is also emphasized by Calley-Jones (2010), who stresses that sharing personal experiences “invites dialogue and the possibility of catalyzing others to make sense of things in a new way” (p. 282).

Richardson (2003) insists that by recognizing the act of writing as a method of inquiry, it opens up new and unconventional possibilities for understanding ourselves and the phenomenon under investigation. She recognizes that writing goes beyond ‘telling’ and can act as “..a way of

‘knowing’ - a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways , we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.” (p. 923). A commonality that autoethnography shares with poetic inquiry is that the method functions as “both process and product” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). With Maurino’s (2016) coupling of poetic and narrative inquiry to explore the concepts of self, masculinity and transformation, he defended the claim that using narratives to assist in the explanation of poems can reliably serve as data and analysis (p. 207). Vincent (2018) also draws comparisons between PI and autoethnography in acknowledging that “the reflective and reflexive nature of the writing... is akin to autoethnographic and ethno-poetic ways of knowing (p. 55). Similarly, it is my intention in this study to write and carve out poems based on reflections of my lived experience that represent “the product of my writing as a method of inquiry” (Ricci, 2003).

Single-Voice Rationale

Beyond articulating my own experiences through my own voice, the rationale for employing a single-voice approach in this study ties back to the idea of finding my voice and vocalizing personal experiences relating to the phenomenon of an introvert teacher that have lain dormant and unanalyzed. While a single-voiced approach to a multi-layered phenomenon may leave considerable room for critique and a possible risk of bias (Poerwandari, 2021), taking this risk also introduces a profound level of personal engagement on the part of the researcher that opens up the possibility to discover new findings (Fasulo, 2015). Alvesson (2003) points out another advantage to this single-voice approach, which is the prospect that it may initiate “reflexivity in relation to one’s own organizational practice, thus combining theory and practice, and transcend the border between doing research and being an organizational member in other capacities (teacher, committee member, administrator)” (p. 189). The author also acknowledges that the researcher in this situation does not

need to commit to conducting research within the constraints of a particular time and space, but instead is able to scan their “lived reality for research options for some time there is a good chance that one sooner or later runs into events making a good account possible, providing a feeling for what goes on and facilitating productive interpretations” (p. 189). In other words, there is a certain freedom and flexibility in pursuing research using a single voice that can permit the researcher to circumvent degrees of hindrance and restraint, providing latitude in exploring less-travelled paths where new findings may await.

Philosophical Stance

This qualitative study will be structured around a phenomenological framework, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology as developed by Heidegger, which will serve as a philosophical lens for investigating the phenomena in this study. Like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is both a philosophical stance and research methodology that aims to examine the “lived experience” (Lavery, 2003). Heidegger’s school of phenomenology focuses on ‘Dasein’, meaning ‘the mode of being human’, and emphasizes the situatedness of human experience as it is linked to culture, society, and historical background (Lavery, 2003). As a research orientation, phenomenology abides by a social constructivist philosophy of human experience with sociocultural and historical contexts linked to the interpretation of one’s own life. Lavery (2003) underscores this duality of social and individual construction in contending that: “Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences” (p. 24).

It is important to recognize the compatibility and cooperation between a phenomenological framework and an autoethnographic or narrative research approach (Maurino, 2016; Öhlen, 2003). Autoethnography is an effective approach for achieving the goals laid out in hermeneutic

phenomenology as it “makes available the bridge linking the personal with the cultural” (Ricci, 2003, p. 595). As Pitard (2016) maintains, this combination of framework and research tool “places the self at the centre of a cultural interaction, as it explores the impact of an experience on the writer” (p. 2). This necessitates a critical analysis and reflection of one’s personal lived experience in order to understand a cultural experience. Using this research approach in combination with a phenomenological framework, I intend to offer an insightful investigation into my own introversion through personal reflection and examination.

Integrating PI into the methodological approach is also compatible with a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. In Öhlen’s (2003) inquiry into human suffering, he explored the use of poetics in phenomenological and narrative research as a means of condensing the experience of suffering into writing that was easily digestible. He maintained that “metaphoric and poetic language” has “the power to give life to the mysteries of life” and enrich conventional scientific language (p. 565). Likewise, Leggo (1999) describes the significance of hermeneutics as it relates to research as poetic rumination. In his imparting of the potential that he sees in developing poetry as a genre of research, he states:

I want research that hangs out in the spaces between a poetics of possibility and a poetics of impossibility. I want research fired in the spirit of a hermeneutics riddled with riddles, a hermeneutics that conceals, as well as reveals, a hermeneutics that obfuscates, even as it clarifies. I want research that pokes into the cracks where light can find release (Leggo, 1999, p. 122).

As a philosophical stance, phenomenology serves as a means for “looking at what we usually look through” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 12). Remus (2005) explains that phenomenology aims to uncover the essence of “lived experience”, meaning “the way in which humans exist in the world as selves” (p. 28). Furthermore, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) maintain that phenomenologists attempt to uncover what individuals experience inwardly (thought and feelings), as well as *how* they

experience the phenomenon outwardly (objects and actions). This elucidation is crucial to the undertaking of this study, as the objective is to offer more than a mere description of the introverted teacher experience, but instead, initiate interpretation of the introverted phenomenon within an “Extroverted Ideal” (Cain, 2013).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a theoretical framework fit with the objectives of this study as the literature review yielded very few studies focusing on the daily “lived experience” of introverted teachers. Working within this framework, I aim to unfetter a voice that can provide insight into the introverted teacher experience. Lavery (2003) explains that, unlike Husserl’s branch of phenomenology, a hermeneutical approach embraces preconceived notions and “the researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched” (p. 28). Using autoethnography to explore my own experience with introversion will make “overt the voice of self as it achieves the goal of contributing to the knowledge base of sociological phenomena” (Ricci, 2003, p. 595). I anticipate that a comprehensive interpretation of the meaning of this experience is better suited to a hermeneutic phenomenological framework that adheres to *interpretation*, rather than a purely *descriptive* (Husserlian) examination of the experience (Remus, 2005; Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Research Problem and Research Questions

The central problem concerning the phenomenon of introversion and teaching is derived from the notion that the voices of introverted teachers need to be heard in order to help clarify misconceptions and misrepresentations that may be associated with introversion (Cain, 2013; Kaufman, 2014; Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019) and to examine how this personality type

configures into a chiefly extroverted profession. In doing so, I intend to explore and investigate my own experience as an introverted teacher and bring some visibility to the experience.

The following research questions are ultimately what I hope to discover:

- How is introversion manifested in the context of one's professional teaching identity and practice? (What does introversion look like in a teacher's professional role?)
- What are the challenges that one faces as an introverted teacher? How do these challenges impact their overall well-being?
- What feelings and emotions are experienced by this introverted teacher?

Data Collection Method and Rationale

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) explain that data collection tools vary greatly depending on the autoethnographic approach adopted for a study, but the process customarily requires the act of hindsight in order to “retroactively and selectively” write about past experiences (p. 275).

Consequently, Ellis et al. (2011) recognize that the author of an autoethnography “does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document” (p. 275). Reflection and the unearthing of memory are necessary steps in revisiting these lived experiences. While Austin and Hickey (2007) emphasize the pivotal role that memory plays in the reflexive process, they also concede that, for many participants, the “dredging up of memories” can present one of the greatest challenges (p. 5). The authors acknowledge that this exercise in recollection can cause frustration when events do not appear relevant or significant in the broader scheme of things, but they insist that these events can indeed be evocative and worthy of examination in order to determine how they influence our lives and identities (p. 5). Austin and Hickey (2007) see this revelation as a crucial moment in the autoethnographic process and insist that “it is only when participants come to

understand that it is largely what passes as the *mundane* (and, thereby, the generally unnoticed) that is in fact the *significant* that the evocative memories flow” (p. 5).

Butler-Kisber (2010) offers a useful scaffold for pursuing poetic inquiry, which she describes as a “‘visualizing process’ for poetic portrayals” (p. 29) The process involves recalling a “pivotal memory” (p. 29) of an event or phenomenon by casting one’s mind back to vivid imagery procured from the specific context(s) of the event. The poet/researcher can then “brainstorm and record concrete and evocative words or phrases and /or metaphors” (p. 29) The next step involves the shaping, constructing, and editing of the poem in order to “bring the memory to life” (p. 29). The poem is then “read aloud to fine-tune” and revisited once some time has passed (p. 29). It is this data collection process which I intend to follow in this study.

Lahman, Geist, Rodriguez, Graglia, Richard, and Schendel, R. (2010) explain that autoethnographic poetry reveals “some experience of the researcher, shedding light on aspects of life pulled from personal experiences that would not traditionally be considered data” (p. 40). While this methodological approach can rely on autoethnographic poems alone, prose is sometimes included in the body of the text to supplement and clarify the experience. The latter approach is undertaken in this study. As Furman (2007) explains, using “narrative reflections that contextualize, explore, or expand each poem” can serve as additional layers of data and data analysis (p. 1).

As articulated by many poetic inquirers, finding meditative moments during the day to contemplate existential thoughts and capture words that give voice to those reflections is a part of the process. While some authors identify long walks in solitude (Maurino, 2016; Leggo, 1999) or with a partner to deliberate (McLeod & Ruebsaat, 2014), I have found my own moments in the quiet early hours before my workday begins, in the thirty-minute commute to work, or during an unaccompanied stint at the local coffee shop. I have also accepted and found comfort in the fact that the reflective

process is, at times, messy and fragmented. The words and lines rarely take shape in a spontaneous or linear manner, but instead progress and develop through “many twists and turns” (Maurino, 2016, p. 220).

Data Analysis

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) acknowledge that the process of “doing autoethnography” must go beyond the mere telling of one’s story (p. 276). Ellis et al. elaborate on this point by drawing on an excerpt from a personal interview with Mitch Allen, in which he emphasizes the idea that validating one’s story requires that auto-ethnographers analyze the experiences that they document in their work, and it is this step that distinguishes autoethnography from nonacademic storytelling. According to Ellis et al. (2011), the analytical process means that:

Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. (p. 276).

The process of analysis for written forms of inquiry, both poetic and narrative, can sometimes present a mystery for the reader. Though it is challenging to find a comprehensive description of the analysis process for narrative style research, Maple and Edwards (2009) recognize that a “lack of formal analytic steps allows for a freedom and flexibility of data analysis that may be lost when using other methods” (p. 39). The process is an ongoing and iterative one that begins at the initial moment of data collection and develops and emerges over time (Dethloff, 2007).

Austin and Hickey (2007) categorize autoethnographic data analysis as “theorising within; explaining & reconciling the Self as a socially constructed entity” (p. 3). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) acknowledge that narrative analysis “treats stories as interpretive, ‘storied,’ social products that individuals produce in unique contexts, to represent themselves or their worlds, rather than as facts to be assessed for ‘truthfulness’” (p. 444). I aim to achieve a similar narrative style of analysis

through the use of “writing as a method of inquiry” (Richardson, 2003). Miller (2008) shows how writing can serve as a way of both presenting and analyzing stories through the written accounts of his experiences with race in higher education. By employing writing in a dialogical method, he engages in a process of reflexivity and interrogation of his stories that allows him to uncover dialectics embedded within the stories that reveal understandings. He concludes that “writing can be used as an effective method for reflecting, interrogating and modifying one’s own perspective to arrive at more nuanced and complex understandings” (p. 347).

The process of reflection cannot be overemphasized in the analysis process. Wall (2006) acknowledges that through this “intensely personal and introspective” process, “themes and meanings emerge” (p. 150). Likewise, Prendergast (2009) points out that, as with any form of collected data, the process of deriving meaning through poetic analysis involves:

Sifting through data... the process of intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, passages that synthesize meaning from the prose (see Glesne, 1997, p. 205-207). These siftings will be generally metaphorical, narrative and affective in nature. The process is reflexive in that the researcher is interconnected with the researched, that the researcher’s own affective response to the process informs it (Prendergast, 2009, p. 547).

In reaction to Wall’s (2016) message to autoethnographic writers “to ‘provide some kind of analysis of the description of the experience to link the personal with the social,’” (p. 4) I have endeavored to employ a conscientious and deliberate analysis process for interpreting the poems in this study and linking it to the “broader social context” (p. 4). Following Mischenko’s (2005) methodological approach, I intend to identify key concepts in the poetry (empirical data) and use a phenomenological perspective (Mischenko used a poststructuralist perspective) to inform the theoretical framework. By blending and layering narrative and theory into the analysis, I resolve to unravel multiple interpretations of the poems (p. 209-210). The narratives of lived experience can then serve to “illuminate the complex realities” of the introverted teacher experience (Calley Jones,

2010, p. 269). Ellis et al. (2011) suggest that one way to accomplish this is by “comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research” (p. 276). By blending literature and theory into the writing process, I intend to use them as tools for analyzing my poetic and narrative data recorded. Richardson (2003) refers to this strategy as “the ‘seamless’ text, in which previous literature, theory, and methods are placed in textually meaningful ways, rather than in disjunctive sections” (p. 383).

Ethics

While some of the standard ethical concerns that arise when conducting qualitative research are not applicable to autoethnographic research, self-study still presents a number of ethical concerns and challenges (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010; Ellis et al., 2011; Jago, 2002; Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang, 2010). Ngunjiri et al. (2010) point out that the vulnerability associated with autoethnographic writing is a notable concern in self-study, but also a part of the appeal to readers, “as researchers expose their pains, hurt, loss, grief, heartbreaks, and other emotions experienced as they travail through events in their lives” (p. 8). In this respect, vulnerability is often associated with the risk of exposing facets of one’s life that can lead others to see you in a different light (Mischenko, 2005, p. 204).

It is no secret or surprise that those who know me would describe me as “calm,” “reserved,” or “quiet.” The vulnerability associated with exploring and discussing these traits comes from the acknowledgement that the nature of my personality is not a choice and therefore it is an always-present part of me that factors into my professional life as a teacher. It is not the persona that I use to achieve calmness and order in my classroom, nor a passive reaction to a hectic school setting. Moreover, teachers do not have the luxury of behaving calmly and quietly at all times, therefore, the act of performing and behaving in an extroverted manner inevitably leads to moments of exhaustion,

overstimulation, and even burnout (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019; Godsey, 2015). In this sense, as Mischenko (2005) articulates, “I open up to your scrutiny one of my vulnerable ‘selves’” (p. 205).

In Chatham-Carpenter’s (2010) article “Do Thyself No Harm,” she cautions researchers about making wise choices when investigating topics that may affect their own personal well-being. The autoethnographer must make an effort to protect themselves in the process of writing their self-stories. She stresses the importance of being in a “comfortable” mind space and being “willing to do the hard work of feeling the pain and learning through the process of writing, approaching autoethnography not as a project to be completed, but as a continuous learning experience” (p. 9). Jago (2002) asks autoethnographic researchers to question their motives for publishing their story. In writing about her experience with depression, her primary motive was “to demystify and demythologize depression” and “promote understanding” (p. 754). I share a similar objective in my approach to writing about introversion and will keep this motive at the forefront of my writing intentions. She claims that performing quality autoethnographic work means “...constantly questioning the ethics of your pursuit. As soon as you put that ‘I’ on the page, you can’t avoid asking if your revelations might be harmful to you or anyone else” (p. 753).

Though many of the ethical challenges concerning autoethnography revolve around the researcher-subject and their own vulnerability and personal well-being, there are also concerns surrounding others who are depicted in these personal experiences. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) warn autoethnographic researchers that our lives are connected to those around us. She insists that “‘relational ethics’ are heightened for autoethnographers...” because “...when we conduct and write research, we implicate others in our work” (p. 281). Therefore, autoethnographers must be particularly mindful of these relational concerns during the research and writing process. Ellis et al.

(2011) suggest that autoethnographers alter identifying details of the people and events in their narratives in order to protect their privacy and safety. Calley-Jones (2010) uses 'mindful slippage' in order to change any identifying details relating to the identities of others. This is a step that I see as important in the writing of my experiences, including applying pseudonyms to all nouns and pronouns to protect confidentiality and maintain anonymity.

Despite these ethical concerns, Ngunjiri et al. (2010) highlight some of the benefits of taking on the challenge of autoethnography. The authors insist that autoethnography can provide opportunities to study subject areas that would not be as accessible or profoundly explored through other methods. Similarly, they acknowledge that autoethnography can unearth discoveries that would not necessarily come to light through a standard interview process because "autoethnography allows researchers to dig deeply into their own experience, including the attendant emotions" (p. 8). Furthermore, the unique perspective offered through autoethnography can challenge dominant views and reveal alternative views that "remain in the shadows as long as we shine our research lights only on mainstream culture" (Calley-Jones, 2010, p. 269).

Overall, this chapter serves the purpose of highlighting the methodological and theoretical framework of the study by providing the reader with a clear justification for and explanation of the combination of qualitative approaches employed. The data collection/analysis process have been carefully outlined and ethical considerations have been reviewed. The next chapter employs this methodology and presents the data in the form of poetry and narrative.

CHAPTER 4: SLICES OF INTROVERSION

“Speak clearly if you speak at all;
Carve every word before you let it fall.”
— O. W. Holmes

Any Given Day

In my head,
I rehearse and repeat.
Form each word deliberately,
measure and monitor,
fine tune every phrase.

I must remind myself
to savour this solitude,
cast malaise to the corner,
straighten my spine,
procure a sense of calm
in the face of chaos,
and wait
to be overwhelmed
by adolescent noises.

The bell,
a starter pistol,
setting in motion
a surge of students
engrossed in relentless chatter.

I fasten my smile
and it's off to the races.
A series of steps and moves.
Chewing the fat,
recycling old jokes,
reciting amusing anecdotes.

When it's over,
I collect myself
and my things,
and take their voices home in my head.

I am indisputably a creature of habit and I freely admit that a well-established routine brings me my greatest sense of comfort. While I am open to change and able to adapt to new situations, finding a workable routine is ultimately what keeps me satisfied in the various roles that I play as a teacher. Working in different schools, under different administrative styles, and within different departments and grade levels, has meant establishing new routines, and carrying forward tried and true rituals.

I have always been the first teacher in the building. Even now, ten years in, I arrive at school two hours before students begin to trickle in. The school's caretaker arrives at 6:30 am and I routinely trail by five minutes. *My* parking spot is always empty when I arrive and when I open the car door the world is still at peace. Preparing for the work day can be a complicated affair for any teacher: devising a lesson plan, booking technology/outdoor time, arranging alternate learning spaces, coordinating and collaborating with resource teachers, etc. For me, I need to feel mentally prepared for the interactions that I will face throughout the day. I have learned to take the extra time and effort to anticipate conflicts or concerns that will arise over the course of my day. It's this feeling of preparedness and anticipation that reassures me that I am ready to face any situation.

Of course, it is impossible to meticulously plan out and predict all the hiccups that could ruffle my routine as the day unfolds, but that doesn't stop my brain from frantically running through the conceivable complications. The momentary thought of accidentally sleeping in or being delayed by traffic is enough to frighten me out of bed in the morning. Anything that will deny me my mandatory session of solitude in the morning is a threat. This time spent alone is my brand of meditation and the ritual is essential for mentally preparing for the inevitable stimulation-overload that ensues once the bell rings in the morning.

I use this early morning solitary time for more than just planning. I formulate the ideas and messages and even the wording that I will use to communicate with my students. Not literally every word, but certainly the phrasing and timing are well choreographed. I fear the notion of not knowing what to say. This fear is less pronounced around people that I have known my whole life and who have grown to accept my “quietness,” but teachers are expected to teach, and communication is key. I readily admit that I’m not a dynamic, animated performer. I can’t engage mass groups in a way that students beg to participate and everyone leaves feeling entertained. My strengths are found in my ability to listen, to carry on meaningful conversations with individuals or small clusters, and to appeal to and draw out a more emotional and intimate side of others.

Thrift Store Podium

Thrift store podium
at the front of the class,
a pulpit for plain sailing sermons,
a tide breaker between me and them.

A piece that sparks the fascination of students,
and the leeriness of pedagogues.
Eye daggers darken the doorway
and cast judgement over
this blot on the instructional landscape.

Yet, I fear
that if I don’t lower this shield and armor
they’ll begin to fuse and fossilize around me
If I keep burrowing into my work,
hiding in my head,
I’ll fully submerge and disappear.

“You’re a stranger,” observed the secretary, “I wasn’t sure if you still worked here. We hardly ever hear a whisper from you.”

“Ha. I’ve heard that before,” I replied without missing a beat. I’ve always had an agreeable relationship with school secretaries. I ask for very little and try not to take up too much of their time.

“You gotta watch out for those quiet ones, ha,” she quipped as the principal entered the office common space from her own private office.

I smiled and rationalized that because I work upstairs it’s easier to use the photocopier in the staffroom nearby than to visit the office downstairs. The truth is that I avoid the administration’s office at all costs. I always feel like I have to interrupt someone in order to be heard. The awkwardness is palpable and seems to hover over me. Any opportunity to stay under the radar has been carefully deliberated over. Typically, I’d send an email looking for clarification, but Jack, the assistant principal, wants to discuss a disciplinary plan for a student who has repeatedly gotten into trouble during unstructured times. As soon as the conversation begins, my first thought is - *what excuse will I use to end this conversation?* In the same way a safety-conscious person may look for an emergency exit, I instinctively look for my way out of social situations. That’s not to say that I don’t or can’t derive satisfaction from a meaningful discussion. It’s more of a safety net. When the socializing becomes too overwhelming, I like to know that I have an out. I’m relieved when our conversation ends somewhat organically. I exit his personal office and return to stand, adrift in the middle of the main office, until I can awkwardly wiggle my way out and retreat to my classroom.

It is not uncommon for co-workers and friends to comment on my quietness. Some have openly said that they can’t imagine me in front of a class full of students. I guess that the easiest way to explain this discord between my domestic demeanor and the persona that I exhibit in the classroom is to compare the classroom act to a performance. Somedays, it’s a performance that

leaves me uncomfortable in my own skin. Though I've become steadily more immersed in the extroverted behaviour required of a teacher, I feel like my performance is unnatural and awkward and I find myself wishing that I was more at ease with myself and my vocation. Most experienced teachers and administrators who have offered mentorship advice over the years point out that teachers don't come out of their teacher programs and enter into teaching positions as fully-formed pedagogues. There are a lot of lessons to learn along the way.

I've learned that self help guides for improving conversation skills don't work for me. I can grasp all the advice inside the books, and it makes sense, but putting the advice into motion is a different story. The behaviour recommended in these books is so diametrically opposed to my own demeanor that I can't fathom the unbearable anxiety I would experience by trying to maintain a conversation while juggling the techniques and tips concurrently. Instead, I've had to learn to deal with the nuances of my personality in my own way.

My thrift store podium was purchased just a few weeks before the first Covid lockdown was ordered in NL. The piece had clearly come from a church and still had a microphone cord wired in. It turned some heads when I had a co-worker help me unload it from my car and wheel it to the classroom. While the other teachers on my hallway were delighted by the novelty of the piece and amused by how comically oversized it seemed, they cautioned me that it might send the wrong message in relation to 21st century learning and the move away from lecturing ("chalk and talk") style teaching. I kept it regardless. However, when students returned to the classroom in September and the need for physical distancing necessitated more open classroom space, the podium was exiled to the corner.

*"Am I sitting in a tin can
Far above the world*

*Planet Earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do"*

— *David Bowie, Space Oddity*

Tin Can

The painful part of
a long day.

I'm a captive here,
and there's no way out.
The wheels are spinning,
but I'm not moving fast enough.

Why did I agree to this?
Comatose conversation,
inescapable chit chat,
the stuff of nightmares.
Give me some awkward silence, please.

So much waiting,
winding detours,
stops and starts,
hellos and goodbyes.

I mull over the ways out
and enact my exit speech,
but inevitably,
I end up strapped in again.

I was dragged into more than one carpool arrangement in the years spent commuting to my teaching position in school situated an hour's drive away. Though I was always reluctant to join, the determining factors that caused me to give in came down to the cost of gas money and the grueling drive home at the end of the day. The one school year that I spent carpooling with three coworkers took years off my life. About a month in, it became apparent that the abundance of compulsory socializing and the unnecessarily complicated scheduling were far more draining than the burden of doing all the driving myself, but I felt committed and I had recently purchased a house with a mortgage hanging over me.

Small talk kills me. I am content to indulge in in-depth discussions about meaningful topics, but what do you say to someone once you've reached the end of a long week of small talk? One of the other drivers wanted chatty passengers to help keep her alert. There was always pressure to be "on." Eventually, on days that I didn't drive, I tried correcting or planning, but the chatter in the car was just too distracting. What's more, I dwelled on the likelihood that I wasn't doing a good job of concealing my social exhaustion and impatience towards the others in the carpool. Was I being anti-social? Rude? I avoid confrontation at all costs, so most of my resentment was locked inside and left to fester. As the school year began to wind down, one of the carpoolers went on maternity leave and conflicting schedules warranted less frequent carpooling. It was a godsend.

Not all of my carpooling experiences were as demanding as this. However, having commuted solo on occasion, I know that my preference lies in driving alone. If I could identify one benefit from carpooling, it would be the outlet that it provides on difficult days. I believe that it's important to vent and confer about workplace frustrations. It can be helpful to unload some of those irritations and, when others share the same vexations, it can potentially be relieving and allow you to see yourself as normal. On the other hand, a car filled with teachers that resort to the same complaints and gossip can quickly become a mobile incubator for toxicity. I found that this relentless toxicity, compiled with existing anxieties, just led to increased stress and, by the end of our carpool adventure, I felt bitter towards my fellow commuters. I don't know how well I did at hiding these feelings. I was not about to engage in confrontation, but I was left feeling guilty about my growing reservation to engage in conversation. I imagine that they had unflattering things to say about me on days when I was absent.

Come Around From Your Daydream

I remember a day in grade 3,
we sat in a circle on the carpet.
A corral of grey pants, white shirts, and red vests.

The teacher read aloud.
I stared straight ahead.

I don't remember the lesson,
the subject,
the time,
the day,
the weather...
I do remember the daydream.
Something to do with a hang glider.

The teacher spoke my name,
asked a question,
and waited for a reply.
I didn't hear her.
Again...
"Joey?"
I wasn't there.

Slowly
reality came back into focus
and I could see her
and the other children in the circle.
What had she asked?
It was easier to feel embarrassed
than to question whether the feeling was warranted.

I catch the words, "Good morning!" hurtled through my door as an elementary teacher dashes past my classroom and scurries away to get situated for the morning. I startle slightly from the clutch of a deep dream and promptly echo the greeting.

Sometimes in the morning, when there are no distractions and I feel prepared to face the day, I allow my mind to drift away for a little while. Other times, at the end of the work day, if I've been focusing on a fully engrossing task or overstimulated for an extended period, taking a moment to

daydream is the ensuing reward that helps settle my mind and manage the stress that has built up over the course of the day.

I never grew out of daydreaming. At times, it could (and can) be a welcome escape, but daydreaming has always meant more than that to me. It has often served as my own brand of reflection and contemplation. It is a way of understanding myself and the people around me, and it allows me to more thoroughly read a situation. Though I no longer lapse into deep and distant daydreams, the way I did as a young student, I still find my mind wandering while in meetings or social situations in which I feel detached. I have learned to control how deep I plunge into my imagination and how far I am transported away, perhaps in the same way that some people can wake themselves without setting an alarm or manipulate the details of their dreams.

These days, my daydreaming is set in the real world and I find myself working through solutions to personal and professional problems. I walk through scenarios of conflict resolution, conversations with students and parents, or try to predict reactions to the lessons and activities that I plan in my head. That's not to say that I'm afraid to ask questions or seek out clarification when I need it. It's more of a personal reassurance that I've considered various approaches to a situation and weighed my options. I use the same technique when confronted with a new experience. For example, if I have an interview for a new position or I am obligated to give a presentation, it helps to play out the event in my mind and I feel better prepared for the actual situation.

Education Fever

I rise in the dark
and return home as the sun descends.
I put my head down and sweat blood.
I can make this work.

“Annyeonghaseyo.”

“Annyeong!”
I can’t speak much more.

The familiar smell of photocopies
and sickly sweet coffee
hang in the air of the staffroom
as people hover around like noiseless bees,
fashioning an energy that is both calm and calming.

I sometimes forget that
I came here alone,
made friends,
soaked up the way of life,
and found a new calling.

Before enrolling in my undergraduate education program, I spent a year teaching ESL in South Korea. I sought out the experience after plans to teach in Taiwan with some friends fell through. So, I arrived in a country where I didn’t know a soul or have any knowledge of the language. The experience was my introduction to teaching, planning lessons, and collaborating with other teachers. Ultimately, this new adventure led to my decision to pursue a teaching career. Up to that point, I had never worked a job that I felt suited my personality or in which I could see long term career possibilities. I had spent several years bouncing between occupations, such as a job coach (working with individuals with disabilities), youth care worker, security guard, and warehouse worker. They were just a way to make ends meet until I could “apply” my Bachelor of Arts degree.

In South Korea, success in education is very much a source of pride for parents and can ultimately lead to social mobility for students, therefore, children are expected to take it seriously. That’s not to say that there are no discipline issues or a need for effective classroom management, but gentle reminders could go a long way. I enjoyed working with students of all ages (kindergarten to adult), but I felt that I was best suited to intermediate/secondary-age students. Maybe some of the awkwardness that students display at that age made me more comfortable with my own

awkwardness. I also recognized that I retained a passion for language and grammar that emerged when I was a high school student and broadened in university.

When I reflect back on the South Korea teaching experience, I can identify aspects of the job that appealed to me. The staffroom in the *hagwon* (private academy) where I worked had an open-concept layout, but the cultural preference for a low-volume working environment, combined with some language barriers, led to an atmosphere that was well-suited to solitary work, independent lesson planning, and operating at a moderate and steady pace. I mostly planned lessons and activities independently and meetings with cooperating teachers were brief, just a formality to ensure that we were on the same page. Moreover, the class sizes were very manageable. A classroom with 10-12 students would have been on the upper end, while the majority of the classes that I taught were closer to 6-7 students. This meant that the volume was easy to control and there was minimal movement within the classroom. Because of the language barrier, “foreign” teachers were not expected to communicate with parents. A report card went home at the end of each term with some brief comments written in English, but there were no conferences or follow up messages required. Being a young, inexperienced teacher, it all seemed pretty manageable.

Perhaps, the novelty of living and working in a new culture and foreign country led me to romanticize teaching to some extent. Though I worked long days, waking up at 4:45am to teach early adult classes and often working until 8:30pm, I never felt that I brought much mental or emotional stress home and the demands of the job didn’t seep excessively into my leisure time. I was in my early twenties and could delay sleep until I inevitably spent half of Sunday in bed. Though I can now see signs that some aspects of the profession were not compatible with my personality, these aspects seemed tolerable at the time, or at least the incompatibility did not become fully evident until later.

“Just tell me how to be different in a way that makes sense.”

— Stephen Chbosky, The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Student Teacher

Her lips moving,
mouth opening and closing,
but I stopped listening.
Eye contact
and head nodding
will get me through.

It was during my teacher internship that I began to see a discord between aspects of my personality and workstyle preferences, and my ability to operate effectively in a role that calls for frequent collaboration. I worked with two very different cooperating teachers during my internship. One teacher gave me the flexibility and discretion to develop my own lessons that centered on relevant topics, while the other, in an effort to collaborate, would present a multitude of ideas and approaches and expect a lesson developed around our discussion. I struggled in my effort to satisfy the latter, and consequently, I found the experience increasingly arduous with the mentoring often seeming dictatorial. I felt that my creativity was stifled and my brain was overloaded with objectives to plan into my lessons. The more rigid of the two cooperating teachers sometimes grew frustrated with both my sparse communication and the apparent disconnect between my lesson development and the various approaches that we had discussed. I had no understanding of introverted personality at the time, and I blamed myself for not living up to the expectations of my cooperating teacher. I felt completely inadequate and questioned whether I could succeed in the program or, subsequently, in a teaching career.

It was only after a glowing review by an observing supervisor that I realized that I wasn't doing it all wrong. I had effective classroom management skills and maintained a heightened

responsiveness to the needs of the students that I had come to know over the last three months. Perhaps my teacher-mentor was unable to see those qualities in me, or maybe my inability to communicate all of my thoughts and ideas came across to her as incompetence. It was a relief to move on and exciting to think about establishing my own classroom routines.

The Skin of My Teeth

I am spent
every five days.
Buried.
Each day a demand for cordial discourse,
a fixed face going through the motions.

My head barely bobs above the surface,
arms and legs frantically tread water.
Toss me a piece of the wreckage,
just a little leverage to stay afloat.

I endure their endless questions
and dig for unerring answers.
The trick is
to answer quickly
and decisively
and never second guess.

I hang in there
by the skin of my teeth,
and hope that maybe,
just maybe, I'll make it through the year.

My first year replacement position was teaching junior high English Language Arts (ELA), French, and Social Studies in a busy grade 4-9 school about an hour drive outside of St. John's. The school population comprised over 700 students and 40 staff members. The school day began at 8:30 and ended at 2:30, but I typically arrived at 7am and stayed until 5pm. Even after putting in these extended hours, I often felt ill-prepared for the next day. I would come home after work, eat some

supper, drink a beer, and pass out in pure exhaustion. The whole school year was such a whirlwind that I rarely took any time for genuine reflection or to consider how the long hours and constant stimulation was impacting me.

The pressure to participate in extracurriculars and make a good impression added to the demand of the position. As a first year teacher, I was assigned a teacher mentor with whom I would regularly convene, I was expected to attend a first year teacher orientation provided by the district, and I was regularly subjected to classroom observations and evaluations. Feeling perpetually stimulated and needing to decode all the new information that I was taken in left me feeling completely and utterly burned out. Every long weekend, holiday, and snow day was a small miracle for catching up on correcting and distancing myself from the daily pandemonium.

I found myself volunteering for after school activities that I knew nothing about and for which I could offer no expertise. Throughout the school year, I assisted with volleyball, lent a hand with the Lego robotics club, volunteered with the breakfast club, and coached students through public speaking competitions and musical performances. Although I really enjoyed these opportunities to connect with students, the expectation to participate in so many activities, even when I had little expertise, left me feeling even more uncomfortable in social situations. Some of the pressure that I felt came from the expectations associated with me as a male teacher. Having always taught in schools with significantly less male teachers than female, I have noticed that an introverted personality does not always fit the image and role that schools, students, and parents expect from a male teacher. At the junior high level, many of my students had never had a male teacher before. Since other male teachers on staff coached sports, students would frequently ask me if I would be coaching a sport. I used to find myself assisting coaches with sports that I knew nothing about after being told that they needed another male teacher involved. It seemed like students were always

expecting an added layer of humor and excitement injected into the lesson because that's what Mr. So and So is like. Over the years, I learned to work on those added ingredients. I guess, like a lot of teachers, I feel the need to be liked. I want to be a role model and to live up to the expectations of others, but I worry that in doing so, I'll create a persona that I can't sustain. Furthermore, if I promote an inclusive space for my students and accept them for who they are, is conforming to the expectations of an upbeat, outgoing personality hypocritical?

Test Anxiety

My students
working on a test
in silence,
desks pushed apart.

Raised hands
beckon me to help
and queries roll in
hushed tones
like gentle ripples

I am afraid to breathe,
circulating on tiptoes,
shooshing
any sign
of sound or agitation.

Tranquility
until the last paper
is handed in.

Such Thing As Quiet

Pen tapping, chair dragging, desk moving,
book slamming, page turning, pencil sharpening.
Coughing, sniffing, sneezing, sighing,
tongue-clicking, throat-clearing.
Hemming, hawing, humming,
whispering, giggling, "pssst",
inside voice out,
outside voice in.

Bell, alarm, alert,
Siren blaring, horn honking, tires screeching,
garbage truck backing up.
Chewing, sipping, slurping, gnawing.
“Sorry for the interruption...”
“Can you send _____ to the office?”
“Sir, I need to use the bathroom...”
“Sir, can I get a drink?”
“Sir, he’s bothering me.”
“Sir,” “Sir...,” “Sir!”

I once worked in a rural school where the entire K-12 student body added up to less than the number of pupils that I now have in a single classroom. The rural school teaching position was a foot in the door, and never a place that I imagined myself in the long term, but I admit that I sometimes long for the quiet, ponderous pace that I became familiar with in that place. In the weeks leading up to Christmas, lights were strung from one end of the corridor to the other (the entire school consisted of only one corridor) and the regular overhead lights were turned off, giving the interior of the school a warm and peaceful holiday atmosphere that replaced or at least subdued the customary feeling of overexcitement leading up to the Christmas break.

Still, there’s no way to avoid noise in a busy school. Like many teachers, I establish expectations in my classroom that are meant to manage volume and reduce unnecessary noise, but, for all the routine that reigns over the school day, interruptions are frequent and sometimes unpredictable. My mind often feels pulled in many directions at once and even a meticulously planned lesson feels derailed when my focus is fractured. On the other hand, I thrive in an environment with a low, unintrusive level of underlying noise. I find that a more subdued level of background discussion and activity can provide the right level of white noise to function productively. Under these conditions, little distractions suddenly become manageable vexations and autopilot kicks in.

Perhaps my preference for low-volume and minimal distraction has allowed me to more fully embrace the periods of online learning that have resulted from the pandemic. While the impact of Covid brought uncertainty and uprooted both teacher and student routines, I have found the adapting and adjusting less overwhelming than some. For me, I've found a balance in online teaching that is compatible with my personality. The ability to teach from home, work with smaller groups, and avoid noise and distraction are blessings. But acknowledging those blessings out loud is difficult, because I am acutely aware that others have struggled with the move to online and distance learning. At the same time, I don't feel a strong desire to be physically distant from my students. If I did, I am sure that others would question - why not choose a different profession? Or, maybe you should teach exclusively online/by distance? In truth, there are aspects of the physical classroom that I miss.

In the classroom, I embrace the role of facilitator, but I also relish the role of active observer. I feel that this role is crucial for uncovering a deeper layer of students' character, interests, and learning styles. I feel a sense of well-being in a learning-environment where I can monitor students' progress and gently induce student interest and engagement.

*In the garage
I feel safe
No one cares about my ways
In the garage
Where I belong
No one hears me sing this song
In the garage.*

— *Weezer, In the Garage*

Foxhole

The scratchy sound of
well-worn records
resonate amid panels
of espresso and English chestnut.

The early morning sun
radiates gently
through stained glass
and scatters prismatic light
over the floor
spilling
onto the walls
to expose imperfections
in the timber.

Drowsy dogs
with heads too heavy
to bark
at neighborhood cats
slumber soundly.

Here
in a tucked away place
the mind rests easy
and Monday can wait.

Interlude

Now in early December
hurrying the clock,
rushing the calendar
in a snow-flurry afternoon.

In my musings,
I conjure up a hungry fire,
crackling junks of birch
spitting mouthfuls of sparks,
basking in the selfishness
of my own merry devilment.

I've come to learn that schools were clearly not designed for teachers to hide. Not even staff washrooms can provide sanctuary when teachers have been obliged to 'hold it in' all morning and form line ups during their shared break time. A revolving door. During the best of times, there are

few places in a school that are not being used for academics or extracurriculars. The need for distancing during the pandemic has spread out the student body into any remaining space in the building, as classes are spread out to eat in cohorts and cafeteria seating spills into the lobby and the library.

At lunchtime, I grab my coat and hat and try to flee the classroom. Inevitably, some students call out, “Sir, are you going to Tim’s? Can you get me something?” They’d gladly follow me out of the building, if given a chance. I retreat to my car in the school parking lot and eat. Sitting in the driver’s seat, I awkwardly use my knees to hold a container of rice and leftover moose sausages. When a small clique of teachers heading out to lunch pass by I try my best to hunch down in my seat, conceal my lunch, and fashion an expression that doesn’t convey guilt and embarrassment. *I hope that they don’t notice me sitting eating. Please don’t extend a pity invite. Keep moving.*

To my surprise, I’m not the only one seeking solitude in their vehicle. Across the lot I spot one of the primary teachers in the driver seat of her car, talking to herself. Maybe she’s giving herself a pep talk, working up the will to push through the afternoon.

Somedays, I have duty at lunch or recess and other days I punish myself by planning extracurriculars for my students during the lunch break. In Covid times, teachers are encouraged to take students outside whenever the weather is agreeable, so I’ve created a schedule for the two grade 7 cohorts and take turns bringing each group outside. In many junior high schools, students are permitted to leave the premises at lunch and return for afternoon classes, but in our school the grade 7s are an anomaly and they’re only allowed off the premises during the school day when picked up by a parent or guardian. They are the most senior level in a primary/elementary school and, though I have gone to bat for them many times, the executive decision has been to keep them on school grounds under teacher supervision at lunch. Still, I can’t help feeling that the intermediate deserve

the added freedom of getting outside and working off some energy, so I voluntarily take them out during my lunch break whenever I can.

When the weekend rolls around, I need space. I crave it. I miss it. In recent years, my sanctuary has taken the form of an unfinished basement with all the “resources” that I require to relax. That’s where I escape and decompress in solitude, listening to records, tinkering with woodworking projects, or reading a book. Other weekends demand social activities; get-togethers, birthdays, celebrations, etc. However, past experience reminds me that if I don’t get an opportunity to recharge over the weekend, I pay a mental and emotional toll on Monday. I feel irritated and overwhelmed simply by the presence of others. Of course, I take steps to conceal this to the best of my ability, but it doesn’t change the feeling.

Extended breaks for Christmas, spring break, and even the summer holiday demand a more decisive plan for cutting out social activity wherever possible. Like most teachers, I count down the days when a holiday approaches. I feel as if I have a reserve or a bank of emotion that I can ration out until it depletes. When the holiday arrives, I need several days to recover and, even afterwards, my social output is scheduled sparingly. There was a time when I could attend a stretch of Christmas parties for nights on end and recover quickly, but over time work demands or perhaps age, have robbed me of that faculty.

Unflattering Images

I look for myself in films.
Rarely the hero,
but sometimes in the supporting cast.
An uncredited role.

The lonely entrepreneur in *Punch Drunk Love*,
the pitiable father and teacher in *The Virgin Suicides*,
the timid and reserved roommate in *Dead Poets Society*.

That's as close as it gets.

No one wants the crestfallen protagonist,
the careful creature
with downcast eyes,
mild-mannered Clark Kent
is just a shadow of the hero.

One of the challenges of being an introvert in the educational profession is that it can be difficult to know where to look for visible signs that there are other introverts who are successfully navigating extrovert territory. When there are no signs that they exist, you take your cues from teachers who seem to exhibit effectiveness and success. Then there's the balancing act of trying to behave in a manner that is not overly false or uncomfortable, but that imitates enough of the extroverted behaviour to come across as a "normal teacher." Still, it's difficult knowing how to behave, how to cope, and how to be yourself.

In the film, *Punch Drunk Love* (2002), when the protagonist, Barry Egan, is confronted by his brother in law, after his family's relentless goading causes him to throw a tantrum, he confesses, "I don't know if there is anything wrong, because I don't know how other people are." Though I don't have a history of outbursts or aggressive behavior like Egan, I can relate to the frustration of trying to fit in by needing to understand and imitate others' behaviour.

It's funny to think that even if a school was made up of entirely introverted teachers, it wouldn't suddenly make everybody want to come together and discuss the nuances of the disposition. Falling into the same personality classification as someone else doesn't automatically give you a list of commonalities to discuss.

I can't know for sure if my introversion was shaped by my shyness or vice versa. Though I have a "normal" human instinct to connect with others, I often prefer to spend time alone or with my

wife. That's when I feel most comfortable and at ease. When I do reach out to socialize or collaborate at work, I find it easier operating within a small group of teachers. I have been fortunate in the past to find coworkers who accept the fact that I am often reserved and awkward. In contrast, I find that working jointly with larger groups, participating in department meetings, and attending staff meetings always leave me feeling anxious, mind-boggled, and tongue-tied. Ideas and questions and comments take time to form in my mind. I must work through them and take time to scrutinize. However, this process is not conducive to large group meetings that often feel rushed and designed to offer quick fixes.

Collaboration and teamwork have become the standard for introducing and discussing ideas in meetings and professional learning sessions. A recent Professional Learning session on gender diversity left no room for solitary work. The session began and ended with a staff circle in which an item was passed from teacher to teacher with each individual rating their current feeling or mood. The morning session left me feeling so anxious and enervated that I had to excuse myself from the afternoon debriefing. At one point, participants were asked to express whether they were a waterfall or a forest fire. We sat and listened as participants explained which category they belonged to and why. I contemplated how I often feel like a forest fire of ideas is burning inside, but my external disposition shyly manifests as a waterfall. I did not want to express this idea out loud. Fortunately, I was not asked to verbalize my standpoint (and I didn't volunteer), but maintaining an expression of faux interest and engagement was exhausting. There's no question that the subject and message of the Professional Learning was both topical and important, but couldn't there be a different way to participate? I always give students the option to work independently when introducing an activity that permits groups. There are so many opportunities to work in teams and groups that forcing

students who prefer independence and solitude to work with others seems unnecessary. Yet, in the world of adults, the same consideration is not always given.

One Way of Knowing

This realm rarely sees the light of day,
a catacomb of
forgotten tombs and uncharted channels.
A cavern of imaginings,
preserved,
unspoiled.

Dim reveries illuminate
inscriptions
and engravings
of an inner life unlived.

Intentions dwell here,
but
they need coaxing
to scramble up to the surface.
And so
some ideas are destined to perish,
decay,
and vanish without a trace.

The school environment places so much value on certain capabilities that it sometimes reduces the potential to discern the capabilities of others. Therefore, I take time to recognize the potential in shy and introverted students. I don't hesitate to tell my students how painfully shy I was as a child and I let them know that there's nothing wrong with being or feeling that way. I don't want students to use anxiety or nerves as an excuse for avoiding challenges, but somewhere amongst the crowd there may be someone who needs to hear that it's okay to be quiet, shy, or reserved.

Last fall, I spoke to the parents of a reserved and imaginative child during parent-teacher conferences. These parents had spent the last 7 years being told by each of their child's teachers that

he “needs to come out of his shell,” “he’s too quiet,” “have you had him assessed?” I am not a medical professional and I don’t offer advice to parents that I am not qualified to give, but I didn’t hesitate to tell these parents about their child’s gift for writing and his desire to perform well. I told them that he was quiet and I told them that I was the same way when I was his age. These parents let down their guard and were relieved that they didn’t have to defend their child’s wellbeing for the eighth year in a row.

Over the last decade, I have worked hard to build trusting relationships with my students. During this time, a number of students have confided in me matters relating to their personal insecurities, sexual orientation, and personal struggles that they face outside the classroom. Initially, I felt uneasy about the degree of trust they placed in me. I couldn’t understand why these personal issues were being confided to me, sometimes in writing, and sometimes in conversation. Nowadays, I tend to attribute this disarming quality to my more reserved nature. I’m not a counselor or an expert in dealing with such problems, but I have come to accept that if I can serve as someone who is non-threatening to talk to and confide in, especially when no one else fits the part, then perhaps I’ve brought something to the table.

All in all, when considering the reflective journey of mining memories and shaping words into lines, poems, and narratives, this autoethnographic investigation has been both enlightening and empowering. The intended purpose was to expose the challenges that I have encountered (and continue to encounter) as an introverted teacher while investigating the impact that those challenges have on my overall wellbeing. Having drawn out these experiences and elaborated on them contextually through narrative, I am beginning to appreciate and contemplate how my experiences as an introverted teacher have led to both anticipated and unexpected discoveries. Within the bounds of these discoveries lie potential strengths and transparent weaknesses that merit scrutiny and

rumination over the complexities of living with a reserved personality in a highly social and stimulating profession.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

“Perhaps as you went along you did learn something. I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about.”

— *Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises*

Introduction

I open this chapter with an overview of the methodology and literature used to structure and inform this autoethnographic study of an introverted teacher’s lived experience. I discuss the three questions that guided my study by looking at the results of my investigation and illuminating what these findings have to add to the existing literature. Then, I evaluate the autoethnographic process and explore the challenges that I encountered throughout the study. Subsequently, I explore how the information gained from my findings can inform and direct recommendations and implications for teachers, administrators, and institutions. I hope to send the message that there is still much to learn about teachers with introverted personalities and the challenges that they encounter in the workplace. Meanwhile, self-study and reflection can help teachers better understand themselves and assist educational leaders in meeting the needs of all, as well as pointing the way to uncharted regions of study.

Overview of Methodology

The combination of autoethnography and poetic inquiry were adopted as an approach to this study to investigate my own unique introverted experience as a teacher and to interpret the place that introversion/introverted personality occupies in a teacher’s profession and practice. The research centered on an in-depth personal examination of the introverted-teacher experience by excavating

memories in order to capture those experiences in words, shaping those words into poetry, and then elaborating on the experiences using supporting narratives. The intended purpose was to expose the challenges that an introverted teacher is confronted with in their profession, investigate the impact that those challenges have on their wellbeing, and identify the potential strengths that can be unraveled from scrutinizing the complexities of living with a reserved personality in a highly social and stimulating profession. Ultimately, the characteristically introspective nature of the phenomenon of introversion led to the choice to use the highly personal and reflective methodological approaches of autoethnography and poetic inquiry.

The data collection was undertaken using memory recall and reflection in order to “retroactively and selectively” revisit and write about my lived experiences (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 275). Butler-Kisber’s (2010) scaffold for conducting poetic inquiry was adopted for composing the poems. This process involved the act of “visualizing” a “pivotal memory” (p. 29) of an event or phenomenon by casting one’s mind back to vivid imagery procured from the specific context(s) of the event. I was then able to “brainstorm and record concrete and evocative words or phrases and /or metaphors” (p. 29). The next step involved the shaping, constructing, and editing of the poem in order to “bring the memory to life” (p. 29). The poem was then “read aloud to fine-tune” and revisited once some time had passed (p. 29). Finally, narrative vignettes were composed to supplement and further clarify the experience.

I found my own meditative moments in the early mornings with a cup of coffee and also during quiet evenings when things settled down and I could contemplate and gather the thoughts and words needed to relay my experiences. These were also the moments that I felt I could be the most vulnerable and remain open to the thoughts that entered my mind. In Wiebe and Snowber’s (2012) collaborative autobiographical work, the authors use poetry as a means to both expose and embrace

the vulnerabilities that emerge from our personal lives and bleed into our professional ones. By doing so, they explore how acknowledging our limitations can ultimately help inform learning and sustain our imagination. Likewise, in a teaching and learning environment, introverted qualities are easily construed as limitations to teaching, learning, teacher-student connections, and collaborative practice. This opens up vulnerabilities in how a teacher sees themselves and how they are seen by others. I have endeavored to acknowledge those limitations here, while holding out hope that some of these “vulnerabilities” can, at once, be supported, defended, and reconceived as strengths.

Overview of Literature

The concept of introversion applied in this study is an expanded version of Jung’s original concept of the term “introversion” - inward directed energy - (Jung, 1921) that also embraces developments by modern personality theorists and can generally be recognized as the present day layperson rendering of the term (Cain, 2013). This expanded concept recognizes that the personality dimension of introversion is frequently assigned based on an individual’s preference or sensitivity to external stimulation (Skakoon, 2015) and that it can be identified by “patterns of behaviour” that “tend to go together within individuals” (Kaufman, 2014 para. 3).

A conscious effort was made to avoid the strict dichotomy of *introversion* and *extroversion* and to instead explore and highlight some of the characteristics that underscore my own unique introverted personality while recognizing that these attributes are often in contrast to the “the Extrovert Ideal” (Cain, 2013). The additional trait of “shyness” was taken into consideration in the experiences relayed in the autoethnographic poetry and prose, as the combination of introversion and shyness - “the fear of social disapproval or humiliation” - leave individuals considerably more vulnerable to the “Extrovert Ideal” (Cain, 2013, p. 12).

The literature revealed how “the Extrovert ideal” of celebrating and encouraging extroverted attributes in society has implications for introverts’ health and well-being, as it creates a misalliance between personality and cultural values that can impact mental health (Caldwell-Harris and Aycicegi, 2006; Walsh, 2012). Furthermore, the literature underscores the notion that introverts will often adapt to socially desired behaviour or disposition by acting “out-of-character” in an extroverted manner (Cain, 2013; Bloom). While this can be effective and even lead to some positive outcomes, this counter-dispositional behavior can also have lasting impacts on an introvert's overall well-being (Zelenski et al., 2012; Zelenski et al., 2013; Zelenski et al., 2014; Eve-Cahoon, 2003). In order to compensate for draining effects of extended periods of counter-dispositional behaviour, introverts will often seek out (and are encouraged to) use “restorative niches” (Little, 2008; Cain, 2013).

The literature review also revealed a need for organizations to create a more accommodating work environment for introverts by recognizing their work preferences and gaining an understanding of the type of contexts in which introverts work best (Skakoon, 2015). Many modern institutions, including schools, are designed as stimulating environments that encourage group work and collaboration (Cain, 2013) which also leads to increased noise. Introverts’ higher sensitivity to noise and vulnerability to distraction is ultimately detrimental to their performance of mental tasks (Belojevic et al., 2003).

Lastly, the cultural bias in favor of extraversion has resulted in a number of lingering misconceptions about introverts. One such misreading is that introverts are “disinterested or unengaged” in situations that require social interactions (Blanchard, 2020, p. 440). Another common misreading of introverts is the notion that their inward focus suggests that they are self-absorbed and uncaring (Eve-Cahoon, 2003, p. 192) or that their preference to work alone and avoid group projects suggests that they are “poor team players” (Nadel, 2008, p. 9). The perpetuation of these stereotypes

sometimes gets in the way of seeing introverted strengths, such as: a propensity for reflection (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019), a unique and intuitive brand of creativity (Dannar, 2016), a sensitivity to subtle cues and individual student needs in the classroom (Bloom, 2013), a methodical and decisive leadership style (Cain, 2013), and a more intimate and personal communication style (Bloom, 2013; Cain, 2013)

Overview of Data and Key Findings

I conducted this poetic inquiry and autoethnographic investigation of my personal experiences as an introverted teacher in order to expand on the existing body of knowledge concerning teachers with introverted personalities. I used the following questions to guide my research and I revisit them here in an effort to organize the data and extract key findings.

- How is introversion manifested in the context of one teacher's professional identity and practice? (What does introversion look like in a teacher's professional role?)
- What are the challenges an introverted teacher faces in a largely extroverted profession? How do these challenges impact their overall well-being?
- What feelings and emotions are experienced by this introverted teacher?

The Introverted Teacher

In contemplating the first question, I discovered that there were a number of ways that my unique introverted disposition manifested itself in my practice as a teacher. The first key finding that I unveiled from the data was the extent to which daily routines and rituals in my personal and professional life provide me with a sense of control and order that supports my feeling of well-being and prepares me to deal with upcoming social situations. Scheduling in solitary time in the morning has become an essential part of my daily routine. Likewise, this inclination for solitude and reflection corresponds to the literature which suggests that introverts prefer to “work more slowly and

deliberately” (Cain, 2013, p. 11) and they experience a personality that “confers on them a preference for the inner world of their own mind rather than the outer world of sociability. Depleted by too much external stimulation, we thrive on reflection and solitude” (Helgoe, 2010).

I inevitably feel more at ease when I have had the opportunity to think about and “rehearse” what I will do and say. I have always recognized that I am a “creature of habit,” but exploring how that particular idiosyncrasy relates to my personality was a new discovery for me. Furthermore, I can now recognize this behaviour as both a strength and a positive strategy for dealing with the ensuing stimulation from the students’ arrival and the work day beginning. Though I acknowledge in my narrative that I am not as dynamic of a teacher as I wish I could be, I was also able to recognize my strengths as a well-prepared and reflective teacher and I hope to continue to develop these talents. Reflecting back on my first year teaching in the poem and narrative, *The Skin of my Teeth*, helped to identify and reinforce the need for a strict routine in order to mentally prepare for the demands of the day. The pressure to go above and beyond in my involvement and participation in extracurricular activities accentuated the degree to which social activities are ingrained in the teaching profession. Over the years, I have learned to commit to extracurriculars that I can plan alone, that I am passionate about, that I feel comfortable being involved in, and that are usually one-on-one based.

The extended metaphor that evolved from the *Thrift Store Podium* poem and elaborative narrative helped to unravel findings in the form of the themes of barriers, space, performance, and public speaking. It was eye opening to see the efforts that I have taken to create physical and social barriers in my classroom in an attempt to give myself the kind of physical and mental space needed to cope with the social demands of work life. Furthermore, this poem and vignette shed some light on the painfully shy side of my nature that often causes me to avoid, limit, or slip away from social situations. Despite these insecurities, I have made a conscious effort to modify my behaviour in order

to appear more outgoing and to seek out ways to fit in. One such way was through the aid of self-help guides, which unfortunately did not pan out.

Since an overwhelming amount of the act of teaching and teacher responsibilities involves exercising extrovert qualities, an introvert working in the teaching profession has little choice but to turn on their extroverted self when the students walk in the door and then uphold that persona for the majority of the work day. Inevitably, there is “leakage” and glimpses of the natural introvert at times. This cannot be concealed from students and co-workers. In these moments, I have let down my guard. I am unmasked. I am vulnerable. But maybe this is okay. I hope to one day take comfort in Sean Wiebe’s assertion that “Living my vulnerabilities in the classroom must not be excluded from a theory of practice. The continuous struggle with the complexities of living are the complex vulnerabilities that I ought to bring with me into the classroom” (Wiebe & Snowber, 2012, p. 454).

Finally, those who are apt to observe the true dispositional introvert are often quick to underestimate the introvert’s ability to convincingly perform the role of an extrovert. The poetic inquiry and supporting narratives reveal how some of my friends and co-workers have found it difficult to imagine me performing some of the more gregarious teaching duties. This includes simply speaking in front of a classroom of students. Public speaking may not seem like a strength for an introvert, but in my experience, I feel comfortable speaking in front of an audience if I am well-rehearsed and mentally prepared. I still feel anxious at times, but generally, speaking in front of people can often be easier than speaking to people. Both Grant (2014) and Cain (2013) refer to the writer Malcolm Gladwell to highlight this ability to perform when engaged in public speaking. Gladwell is a journalist, author, and public speaker, who is rather candid about his introversion. He remarked that ‘Speaking is not an act of extroversion,...It’s a performance and many performers are hugely introverted’ (Grant, 2014, para. 14).

The Challenges

The second research question revealed the challenges that I have experienced as an introverted teacher and ways that it has impacted my overall well-being. The emotional and mental power that it takes to channel a personality that will conform to the expectations of co-workers, administration, students and parents in a school environment have caused stress and physical tension in my body for years. Cain (2013) refers to the term “emotional labor” as “the effort we make to control and change our own emotions” and emphasizes that exerting oneself in this way is “associated with stress, burnout, and even physical symptoms like an increase in cardiovascular disease” (p. 223).

The poem and supporting narrative under the title *Tin Can* address the toll that an average workday takes on my emotional and mental well-being and how compounding this with the inescapable social element of a carpool arrangement can result in a recipe for disaster. It may seem obvious to the reader that this was a bad choice on my part. However, we all have to make sacrifices and concessions in order to make living and working feasible. For me, I never thought about how the nature of my personality is so incompatible with a carpooling arrangement. While I came to recognize through my narrative that carpooling provided opportunities to air frustrations and discover commonalities between me and my coworkers, ultimately, the negative ramifications outweighed the positive. Forging a heightened (and perhaps unhealthy) awareness of my own behaviour, feeling guilty about not engaging in conversation, and giving in to the defeatism and negativity of gossip all became sources of social, emotional, and mental depletion.

The poetic and narrative account of my experience teaching ESL in South Korea was enlightening in revealing the impact that it had on my decision to become an educator. Though I have always identified that experience as the origin of my teaching experience, I had never fully

investigated the nuances of the experience that led me to believe that teaching was a viable career option. The inquiry into this experience also served to illuminate the cultural differences that perhaps made teaching more appealing to me and how my inexperience and naiveness concealed some of the early signs of stress that I dealt with in this type of work.

Another key finding was the realization that the pressure to collaborate with others can trigger a great deal of stress for someone whose preference is to plan and operate independently. The recognition of my need for independence and flexibility stems from the narrative of my teaching internship. Whether it was my inability to communicate effectively or the pace of trying to keep up with my cooperating teacher, I felt that my talents were overlooked and my creativity stifled. I truly believed that I was not cut out for teaching. This finding is inline with Lieberman and Rosenthal's (2001) suggestion that introverts experience difficulty when confronted with an environment that diverts and splinters their attention towards various tasks at once. The authors affirm that, when it comes to multitasking, introverts are left at a disadvantage and they are "impaired in their ability to extract relevant social, affective, and evaluative cues from their interpersonal environment, because most interactions involve multitasking" (p. 307). As a result, introverts often withdraw during conversation in an effort to focus on nonverbal decoding. While this strategy can help level the playing field to match the decoding skills of extraverts, it can ultimately have a negative impact on self-esteem and overall happiness as introverts are likely to evaluate these interactions as "sub-par" (p. 307). It was only when I received positive feedback from a visiting supervisor that I began to see my capacity for engaging students and building relationships with them.

The extent of my sensitivity to noise and distraction were findings that led me to question my decision to enter the teaching profession. Belojevic et al. (2001) concluded their study by deducing that "introversion may be regarded as a risk factor for work in noisy environments where mental

performance is dominant” (p. 212). I have always accepted that classrooms can be noisy environments, but I had never truly considered the impact that my work environment has on my teaching effectiveness and well-being. On the other hand, I did come to recognize that low-level noise can actually serve as appropriate conditions for productivity. Susan Cain (2013) deliberated about her writing process and the need to get out of the house to spur ideas and stimulation. She did some of her writing in coffee shops. I can relate to the need for a low, unintrusive level of underlying noise. Background discussion and activity can be comforting. I feel a sense of well-being amongst a social scene where I can play the observer or even just go unnoticed and unbothered so that I can perform my duties.

The increased emphasis on collaboration, team-building exercises, brainstorming sessions, group projects and discussions in many workplaces (Cain, 2013; Godsey, 2015; Walsh, 2012; Taylor, 2020) in combination with limited opportunities to recharge have been cited as reasons for some introverted teachers leaving the profession (Godsey, 2015). A classroom is a stimulating environment and the daily demands of engaging in social interactions, often with large and varied groups of students and colleagues, can be exhausting. The increased emphasis on collaboration in the workplace is especially challenging for teachers. As Godsey (2015) articulates:

The difference for teachers in many cases is that they don’t get any down time; they finish various meetings with various adults and go straight to the classroom, where they feel increased pressure to facilitate social learning activities and promote the current trend of collaborative education. (para. 8)

How It Feels To Be An Introverted Teacher

As to the third question, the recurring feelings of inadequacy and guilt conveyed in my autoethnography are supported by Lawn et al.’s (2019) discovery that introverts often surrender to

extraversion-deficit beliefs - a desire to become more extraverted. The authors' interpretation of these findings prompted them to suggest that introverts in Western cultures could achieve greater dispositional authenticity, and thus improve their well-being, by changing their *extraversion-deficit beliefs* and becoming more accepting of their introversion.

I have long been able to recognize the escalating feeling that I need to escape and take a break after too much time spent in a highly stimulating situation. It is not uncommon for introverts who work in an environment with few opportunities to recharge to seek out their own quiet place to retreat (Cain, 2013; Walsh, 2012; Bloom, 2013; Blanchard, 2020). Brian Little refers to these moments of escape as “restorative niches” (Bloom, 2013). Only through my reflection and inquiry was I able to recognize that hiding in my vehicle to eat lunch in solitude was an attempt to find my own restorative niche. I had always accepted that it was an awkward, antisocial behaviour that I had picked up somewhere along the way. I have often felt guilty about this behaviour and hence my narrative ruminates on my desire to hide this from others. Little insists that restorative niches are a necessary defense for teachers to avoid burning out from extended periods of pseudo-extroversion. Even if it means hiding in a washroom or going for a short walk to escape from an over stimulating environment (Bloom, 2013). For introverts, solitary breaks are indispensable after experiencing intense social activity (Walsh, 2012). Likewise, for me, the accretion of stress and anxiety throughout the week and the drain from giving up my break time to plan and supervise student activities often results in an increased need for solitary time over the weekend and during holidays.

A final finding relates to the extent to which I feel the need to imitate extroverted behaviour in order to fit in and feel accepted by others. This feeling also feeds into the stress around collaboration with large groups, attending meetings and participating in professional learning. Reflecting on the section, *Unflattering Images*, I have also come to recognize just how self-aware of

and self-focused I am on my behaviour and unique idiosyncrasies in these social situations. Unlike individuals with exceptionalities that may leave them unaware of their need to work on social skills, introverts are fully aware of their social unease and how it may come across to others (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000). Similarly, Walsh (2012) points out that “the fact that introverts are more sensitive to their environment often means they’re fully aware that they appear out of step with the expectations of others, and they can easily internalize criticism” (para. 17).

Unexpected Results

The first unexpected result to surface in both my poetic inquiry and autoethnographic investigation was the role that daydreaming plays in my reflective processes as a teacher and how this meditation inevitably contributes to my overall well-being. The poem, *Come Around From You Daydream*, captures an experience that I had as a student in grade 3 in which I used daydreaming to escape from a mundane lesson. However, the embarrassment of the teacher and s other students seeing me “zoned out” and needing to be “woke up” in the middle of class, was a reminder that my mind had wandered too far away from reality. As an adult, I now recognize that daydreaming allows me to decompress and calm my mind before and after periods of intense socializing. It serves as a tranquil escape from situations in which I feel disengaged. This purposeful act of daydreaming is compatible with Giambra (1978)’s elucidation, in which he concludes that “daydreaming seems to be useful and of a problem solving nature focusing on our day-to-day life and puzzles which express our ‘current concerns’ and not simply a manifestation of wish fulfillment of repressed neurotic tendencies” (p. 225). Likewise, McMillan, Kaufman, and Singer (2013) draw on Singer’s body of work on daydreaming to highlight one pragmatic style coined “*positive constructive daydreaming*” which is “characterized by playful, wishful imagery, and planful, creative thought” (para. 3).

Another unanticipated finding was the recognition of a discordance between the nature of an introverted personality and the expectation of male teachers to be gregarious and animated. Having always taught in schools with significantly fewer male teachers than female, I have noticed that an introverted personality does not always fit the image and role that schools, students, and parents expect from a male teacher. The contention between the reality of an introverted personality and the more outgoing characteristics demanded of a male teacher were not identified in the initial literature review. Mills, Haase, and Charlton (2008) describe some of the attributes associated with the “imaginary male teacher” and explore the consequences for “those men whose gendered performances do not closely align with the construct” (p. 71). For many schools, the ideal male teacher is “often constructed as a saviour who will rescue school sport and will act as a disciplinarian with unruly students, in particular boys” (p. 80). While the authors are quick to point out that they are not attempting to paint male teachers as victims (and male teachers as a group can certainly hold privilege), they suggest that expectations of male teachers can have “normalising effects that pressure male teachers to conform to traditional or hegemonized, forms of masculinity” (pp. 71-72). I have found myself playing into elements of this construct since beginning my teaching career, but these behaviours have always manifested as a counter-dispositional act. I used to find myself assisting coaches with sports that I knew nothing about. Moreover, on more than one occasion, I was encouraged to begin making moves towards a leadership position because the administration in my school felt that I was such an effective disciplinarian in the classroom.

Though neither the purpose or focus of this study was to investigate student personality, my experiences revealed that learning to recognize and value introverted personality types may have reverberations that permit teachers to consider how they deal with students who exhibit introverted behaviour. Reflecting on my own narrative allowed me to see that the voices of shy students were

able to come through both my memories of being a shy student and my present-day sensitivity to the challenges that shy students face in the classroom. This finding is supported by the literature which points to characteristics of an introverted teaching style which includes a preference for one-to-one interaction and getting to know students as individuals (Bloom, 2013). Likewise, my experience reveals that I have been able to pick up on subtle cues from my students that may suggest a sensitivity and awareness of their preferred learning style and personality preferences (Bloom, 2013). Ultimately, these characteristics can be unraveled from my desire to remove some of the pressure or limitations on introverted students, such as forcing them to work in groups or perpetuating the idea that there is something “wrong” with them for being quiet. I believe that conducting this study has resulted in an increased sensitivity to shy students’ needs and a desire to draw out their strengths.

Sometimes a deeper understanding and awareness of oneself as a teacher can open the door to recognizing how we interact with students. While SEL is a field “born out of a desire to ensure all young people have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to succeed in school and in life,” CASEL also emphasizes the role of adults and the relationships that they build with children as part of their overarching vision (CASEL, 2021). This requires that adults who engage with students take the time to develop self-awareness, gain an understanding of their own biases and expectations, and reflect on and express their different viewpoints and experiences (CASEL, 2021).

Methodological Challenges and Limitations

In the initial stages of this self-study, I endeavored to attain Wall’s (2016) proposed “middle ground” that recognizes “the unique value of personal experience, while maintaining the scholarly potential of autoethnography” (p. 1). At times, it was a challenging balancing act. As both the subject and researcher, I found the more analytical and academic part of my brain intruding and impeding the creative and reflective process of writing. My researcher “self” needed to be placed on the

backburner in order to fully and wholeheartedly submit to the conscientious chronicling of my experiences.

Relying on memory to evoke meaningful experiences was also a challenge at times. Austin and Hickey (2007) acknowledge that this exercise in recollection can cause frustration when events do not appear relevant or significant in the broader scheme of things, but they insist that these events can indeed be evocative and worthy of examination in order to determine how they influence our lives and identities (p. 5). The authors see this revelation as a crucial moment in the autoethnographic process and insist that “it is only when participants come to understand that it is largely what passes as the *mundane* (and, thereby, the generally unnoticed) that is in fact the *significant* that the evocative memories flow” (p. 5). This observation rang true for me throughout the writing process. It took some time for me to recognize that a mundane or routine event for some people may be a genuinely challenging situation for an introvert and worthy of investigation. For example, eating lunch in a busy staffroom, attending a meeting, or visiting the school office can be stressful situations that play havoc on an introvert's feeling of well-being, self-assuredness and belonging. Likewise, I discovered that the instinctive and systematic desire to look for links, connections, and chronologies amongst collected memories had to be abandoned in order to harvest memories first and then later evaluate their significance.

Another limitation of autoethnographic research stems from the notion of “truth”. The bearing of the “truth” is of particular consequence in autoethnographic research and the singular viewpoint of this study of “Self” calls into question the reliability of the approach. Ellis et al. (2011) highlight the challenges of capturing the “truth” through memory recall as it may pose difficulties in conjuring up the exact feelings and experience of the event and, undoubtedly, one’s understanding of the events can change over time. In both the poems and narratives, it is me, the researcher, whose

voice and “truth” take precedence and, therefore, the words reflect an expression of my reality as I have experienced it and understood it. However, there are glimpses of the voices of shy students and hints of others experiencing similar anxieties that come through. Though I cannot know with any degree of certainty that readers of this autoethnography will come to new understanding or discoveries, I do feel that I have achieved this goal for myself, which Ricci (2003) contends is a significant result in and of itself. Ultimately, however, I anticipate that the poems and narratives carved out in this self-study will shake a reader up in two ways: 1) Those who have never thought of this before will be surprised; 2) Those who have similar experiences will relate and perhaps feel encouraged.

Recommendations and Implications

The results of this study have revealed several implications for change in the way that some introverts deal with the challenges surrounding their personality in a teaching environment and the way that schools accommodate introverts. While the recommendations and implications articulated in this section may be applicable to many introverted individuals, it is important to note that unique individuals, both introverted and extroverted, have complex personality compositions and further investigation into individuals’ distinctive personality preferences may be required in order to unearth more encompassing findings.

Many of the experiences communicated in my autoethnography support the notion that there is a need for creating a more inclusive and approachable workplace setting for teachers with introverted personalities. Since introverts routinely direct their energy inwards and detach from the outside (Jung, 1921), their personality and inner thoughts are less accessible and comprehensible to extroverts (Myers & Myers, 2010). This may create a challenge for administrators and other teachers

who are unaware of the challenges that introverts face. Nevertheless, Rashtchi and Sanayi Mashhour (2019) contend that “being aware of personality traits and their impact on teachers’ way of teaching can contribute to the relations they have with the administrators and staff at the workplace.” (p. 83). Likewise, despite the influence of more popular writings on the topic of introversion in drawing attention to stigma around the personality type (Cain, 2013; Helgoe, 2010), there is still room for improved understanding of the type and its preferences.

One suggestion that Godsey (2015) advocated, which he drew from a former middle-school teacher who struggled with their own introverted nature, was to consider allowing teachers to use personal learning as credit for professional development. In other words, teachers could engage in online workshops rather than attending an in-person professional development session. He felt that this idea could help schools accommodate different personality types and reduce burnout. This would be a beneficial option for teachers who feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed by group work and the pressure to participate in a highly stimulating environment. Ultimately the focus should be on establishing a workplace environment that aims for a healthier balance between introvert and extravert propensities. As things currently stand, introverted teachers often “lack the required support and capacity to create a positive learning environment” (Rashtchi & Sanayi Mashhour, 2019, p. 74).

In order for introverts to overcome the feelings of inadequacy and guilt that lead to a strong desire to behave in a more extroverted way (*extraversion-deficit beliefs*), they need to become more accepting of their introversion (Lawn, Slemp, & Vella-Brodrick, 2019). From the early stages of this study, I recognized the need to achieve a greater sense of dispositional authenticity in my actions and focus on improving my overall well-being, and the journey has been empowering. I now know that the road towards accepting one’s personality preferences begins with a certain level of awareness surrounding personality types and an appreciation that others may be experiencing the same feelings.

However, there still exists the challenge of being your introverted self in a society that upholds an extrovert ideal and, therefore gives preference to attributes associated with extraversion (Helgoe, 2010; Cain, 2013; Lawn, Slemp, & Vella-Brodrick, 2019; Taylor, 2020). Perhaps this begins with a change in mindset that interrupts the ongoing interpretation of introversion as a deficit and therefore removes the nagging feeling that we “need to explain, apologize, or feel guilty about what works best” for us (Helgoe, 2010, p. 58).

Another implication derived from this study relates to the need for introverts to seek out positive ways to deal with the highly stimulating and social inevitabilities of their workplace. In some cases, this may mean reconsidering life and work choices. Cain (2013) encourages people to make life choices that align with their temperament, no matter where they fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. Though she acknowledges that there are times when we have to behave in ways that do not come naturally, this behaviour should not make up the majority of our daily lives or the time that we spend at work. Cain (2013) draws on research in the area of “person-environment fit” to propose that people will thrive in occupations that are in agreement with their personalities (p. 253-54). However, for those whose passion and commitment to teaching keeps them immersed in the profession, strategies and outlets are needed in order to deal with the challenges that go hand in hand with their personality. Seeking out restorative niches for opportunities to recharge, committing to extracurriculars that permit more one-on-one interactions, and incorporating more technology as a mode of communication with parents, student, and co-workers are some of the ways that I have started curbing the feelings of exhaustion and inundation at the end of the day.

Finally, Lawn et al. (2019) emphasized the need for further research into how living in an extrovert-centric context can impact introverts’ well-being and how introverts may find ways to improve their overall well-being. While I have offered one such study here, I believe that other

introverts need to make their voices heard and to unbridle their own unique experiences and strategies that could potentially be beneficial for them and others.

Conclusion and Contributions

Overall, I feel that the decision to use a combination of autoethnography and poetic inquiry as a methodological approach for this study was a valuable exercise in reflection and rumination on the lived-experience of an introverted teacher. Adhering to a hermeneutic phenomenology framework was ultimately a compatible choice to guide the combination of methodological approaches and it served to expose the relationship between my personal experiences and the cultural interactions in a teaching environment (Ricci, 2003; Pitard, 2016).

Using self-study to explore my experiences with introversion helped to unfetter my own unique voice and convey distinctive, personal thoughts and emotions that led to findings that contribute to the knowledge base of the introverted experience as a sociological phenomenon.

I believe that this study reaches out to those teachers who identify as introverted and to those who may not be aware of this dimension of their personality. This study was specifically about me, an introverted middle school teacher. However, the ramifications extend to any teacher wanting to explore how their personality manifests in their daily work life. Poetic inquiry, critical reflection, and personality investigation could prove to be a valuable empowerment tool for teachers to improve their understanding of self, their professional practice, and their relationship with their students.

I relate to Walsh's (2012) succinct summary of Brian Little's conundrum of struggling to carry on as an introvert teacher - "he pushes through the constraints of his temperament because the social value of lecturing and speaking - of truly connecting with his students - trumps the discomfort his introversion can cause him" (para. 31). I recognize the same tension in myself. While I like being around people, I often find it exhausting, and while I love teaching, it can sometimes be anxiety

producing. For now, I resolve to continue teaching, but, having come to recognize the potential to be worn down and burnt out, I hope to explore teaching roles that may be more suited to my disposition (teacher librarian, resource teacher, or adult education teacher). Though I often feel alone in dealing with my internal conflict around introversion and suitability as a teacher, this deep exploration into the complexities of introversion leads me to believe that there are many other teachers facing similar challenges and perhaps their voices can further illuminate ideas and suggestions for improving our overall well-being.

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