Using Self-Compassion and Teacher Identity to Examine the Transition from Teacher to Teacher Educator

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Abstract

There has been considerable research regarding teacher identity and the challenges involved with the transition from teacher to teacher educator, yet there is little existing literature that addresses how to manage or mitigate these challenges. In my research, I describe the influences on my identification process and use the concept of self-compassion as a tool to support the transition from teacher to teacher educator. Self-compassion "involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience" (Neff, 2003b, p. 87). Data gathering and analysis were informed by self-study methodology and consisted of personal reflections and conversations with a critical friend. From the ensuing analysis, I developed three themes. First, the challenges I faced included differentiating pedagogy, returning to academia, and my perspectives of others' perceptions. Each of these factors influenced my identification process during my transition. Second, through conversations with a critical friend, we came to see my product over process mindset, which prompted a new way of conceptualizing and acting upon these challenges. Lastly, supportive others and engaging with self-study provided a means to better understand how I practiced self-compassion and shift my mindset about challenges in new ways. Implications for this research may resonate with others who undergo similar transitions; the findings may also be informative to others making personal and professional transitions in a broader context.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Situating the Research

As a secondary school physical education (PE) teacher, I was exposed to many day-to-day norms and routines one might expect to experience in that role over five years. From writing lesson plans to grading assignments and interacting with students and colleagues, these experiences provided me with personally situated knowledge about many of the inner workings of the profession. I taught internationally, first as a full-time permanent classroom teacher in Stockholm, Sweden for a private international education company, then in Queensland, Australia, where I was a contract teacher for a public secondary school. While my experiences as a physical education teacher during that time were guided by my teaching philosophy and knowledge of teaching that I learned through my degree, there were aspects of the profession that I found challenging to navigate. Arguably, many of these things could not be taught in a typical university class. These challenges included identifying my undescribed role(s) within a new school environment; contrasting my philosophy on physical education to that of my private education employer, and; challenging interactions with students, parents, administrators, and colleagues. Over several years, my initial eagerness to take on each day's challenge turned into anxiety around what the day might have in store. Many of these unforeseen challenges led me to question my decision to become a teacher.

After five years of classroom teaching, I began to experience increased moments of disappointment, frustration, or unhappiness due to some of the daily challenges described. As a supply teacher, I found navigating negative student behaviour to be especially difficult, partly due to the lack of rapport I was able to build with students with whom I was unfamiliar. As a result, much of my daily energy was directed toward building relationships with students to

mitigate their negative behaviour. Consequently, my role as a teacher to stimulate ideas and teach content became less apparent as I found that my perceived role transitioned between being a motivator, mediator, arbiter, and life coach. Moreover, I found that negative emotions began overpowering my positive emotions; this left me searching for ways to reduce the negative feelings I was experiencing. Due to allocating more energy to adopting new roles and managing my own emotions than I had initially anticipated, I felt my abilities as a teacher were suffering.

In contrast to my personal feelings, many students and colleagues provided me with positive feedback and highlighted my strengths in forming professional relationships with students and colleagues. For example, some students exhibited vulnerability by asking me for advice, which led me to believe they were comfortable with me and confident that I would listen to them. My colleagues highlighted my ability to find a balanced approach to learning where my classes could have fun while remaining on task. Of course, this is not to say that my classes always reflected this balance. The tension between others recognizing my strengths while navigating my perceived challenges of being a physical education teacher put me in a precarious position.

Unfortunately, the identity and role challenges I experienced as a novice teacher are common amongst those in their early years of the profession (Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2019). Although there are many individual factors to consider as to why a teacher may leave their position or role, in many cases attrition may be partly attributed to transitioning beyond a common phenomenon known as the ‘honeymoon phase’ (Cieśliński & Szum, 2014). The honeymoon phase is often referred to as the point in one’s transition filled with initial interest and energy; however, as the roles and the nuanced (and often sobering) realities of their position become more apparent, there is a period of ‘awakening.’ The consequences of awakening lead

many educators to reconsider their career path, question their identities, wrestle with tensions within the profession, and ultimately ask: 'can I keep doing this?' (Schaefer et al., 2020). These questions and their responses are based on contextual, situational, and individual matters, thus highlighting the complex nature of the transition to becoming a classroom teacher. This may also extend beyond early career classroom teachers to specific populations of teachers, such as physical education teachers (Cieśliński & Szum, 2014). When highlighting attrition rates among physical education teachers specifically, it is essential to understand the influences that led to their decision to leave their positions. For example, classroom experience (novice or experienced teachers) and the necessity of adopting multiple roles within the umbrella role of "teacher" (e.g., public servant, a group leader, an arbiter, an organizer, an animator, and moral authority) are cited as common reasons for attrition (Macdonald, 1999). However, research suggests that teacher burnout is considered the main factor contributing to attrition rates amongst PE teachers (Cieśliński & Szum, 2014).

Burnout is described as the end-product of an emotional, mental, and often physical process of exhaustion. This process is typically brought on by prolonged or repeated stress where an individual's natural resources (i.e., stress responses, coping abilities, resiliency) are used in excess due to the occupational demands of their roles (Betoret & Artiga, 2010). Throughout this process, the effects of burnout can lead to a decline in well-being and decisions to depart from the negative stimulus. While the well-being of all teachers is essential, data suggests that early career teachers transitioning into their new roles face the most significant risk of burnout, leading to increased attrition rates (Betoret & Artiga, 2010). Therefore, the transition period becomes crucial upon which staying or leaving the profession might be determined.

While I was confident that I enjoyed aspects of my first few years of teaching, I explored other career options due to the challenges I was facing and their impact on me personally and professionally. By taking on new and unexpected roles as a teacher, receiving feedback from others, and exploring other career options, I came to see how my personal and professional identities were evolving. Jenkins (2008) describes identity as an ongoing process of becoming, highlighting that identities are multidimensional, ever-evolving, and constantly negotiated between the self and others in the community (e.g., students, peers, parents, and administrators). Bullough (2002) applies similar interpretations and implications of identity directly to teaching, suggesting that characteristics of the self and teaching practices are intertwined with identity processes, whereby the evolution of one's identity may affect day-to-day teaching actions and practices. The relationship between teacher identity and teacher practices has previously been explored and shows that characteristics of the self and the influences on a practitioner's biography may have implications on teacher practices (Bullock & Ritter, 2011). During my formative years as a teacher, while navigating the challenges of the profession and simultaneous change of roles and identity, I asked myself, "Who am I as a teacher? What is my role within this institution, and what can I do to improve my situation?" Notably, the responses to my questions influenced my decisions to remain as a teacher or leave my position.

During that time, I relied heavily on colleagues to vent my frustrations and used exercise to distract me outside school hours instead of dealing with the tensions I was feeling. I began to recognize that this situation was not sustainable, and burnout was a concrete prospect. As I searched for ways to address what I was dealing with, I found some comfort in the psychological concept of self-compassion (Neff, 2003b). Neff (2003b) states that self-compassion holds three core tenets: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. It involves "offering

nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience" (p. 87). Research on self-compassion has suggested that its practice may reduce stress and improve coping strategies during adverse events (Allen & Leary, 2010). Most notably, during times of personal change, self-compassion may also be a resource or tool for positive outcomes as it relates to motivation, decreasing self-handicapping, and striving for goal-mastery (Barutçu & Demir, 2020; Babenko & Oswald, 2019; Neff et al., 2007; Gunnell et al., 2017). In addition, individuals high in intrinsic motivation and increased role identity also score high in self-compassion. This association highlights the connection between the challenges I felt in my roles as a teacher and how they affected my teaching practices (Kotera et al., 2018).

This was a significant turning point for me as I began to draw on self-compassion as a means to reframe the adversities I was facing. My affinity for teaching and my identity as a teacher were still very much in bloom, but I concluded that regardless of my new knowledge of self-compassion, the context in which I was teaching needed to change. With a new understanding of self-compassion as a concept that proved valuable for me, I began planning the next steps of my career. I spoke with a friend about enrolling in a Master of Arts program for an opportunity to further my credentials and progress as a physical educator. I felt this career transition would allow me to change the context of my teaching environment and reestablish the joy and passion of teaching that was becoming a more central part of my personal and professional identity.

As I began my career, I transitioned from being a pre-service teacher (i.e., enrolled in a teaching degree) to a qualified teacher in charge of my classes. However, in retrospect, I can also see how I was making transitions in other parts of my life. For example, several significant

transitions occurred as I moved from Canada to Australia to Sweden. These experiences challenged me and contributed to how I was identifying and being identified personally and professionally. As I enrolled in the Master of Arts program, I also became aware that the idea and reality of making transitions would be front and centre in my life once again. Instead of transitioning from pre-service teacher to classroom teacher, I was undergoing the transition from classroom teacher to graduate student and teaching assistant/teacher educator. I was also transitioning from living in Australia to living in Canada once again, which necessitated many other shifts in my life. My awareness of these transitions and their impacts on my life led me to believe that the potential benefits of self-compassion (i.e., increased coping, resilience, and motivation) may also apply to this context and set of lived experiences. With this awareness, I felt that self-compassion may assist me with the challenges associated with transitioning from professional life back to "student life" (as a graduate student), such as completing coursework, being a teaching assistant, and learning to do research -- not to mention challenges related to changing from experienced teacher to inexperienced researcher/teaching assistant and teacher educator. It is perhaps some relief to learn I am not the only one interested in how these transitions shape the day-to-day practices of teachers and teacher educators, as they have been documented elsewhere (Casey & Fletcher, 2012; Hayler & Williams, 2020; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014; Ritter, 2007; Williams & Berry, 2016).

Several studies have shown that people who are in the process of "becoming" researchers and teacher educators experience a variety of challenges and tensions associated with transitioning to their new positions in higher education. They cite tensions between professional passion/interest and the priorities of the universities, tensions between past practices as school physical education teachers and the challenges associated with teaching adults, and negative

feelings (isolation and under-preparedness) in a new role and context (Casey & Fletcher, 2012; MacPhail, 2011; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014; Williamson, 1993;). In many ways, these challenges are similar to what I (and others) have faced in making a transition from university student to practicing teacher. While the context of these transitions may vary, these studies suggest that challenges and tensions associated with the process of significant transitions to a new position may lead to emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion (that is, burnout). Due to these strains, individuals may be left to question their career decisions and their own identity. Within the context of a transition to teacher educator, an individual's professional identity may be questioned to the extent that it may positively or negatively affect their teaching practices (i.e., little alignment between pedagogical belief and teacher practices) (Casey & Fletcher, 2012). Therefore, equipping teachers and teacher educators with resources/tools to manage adversity throughout their personal and professional transitions may be beneficial to improving teacher education practices, bolstering their professional identities, and decreasing rates of burnout and eventual attrition (Casey & Fletcher, 2012; Fletcher & Casey, 2014; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014).

It is clear that what I was experiencing in my many moments of transition were not isolated cases. My experiences and journey to becoming a PE teacher have informed and guided my research interests regarding teacher identity, adverse situations during transition periods, and how self-compassion may help mitigate burnout responses. Upon being thrust into two new but related roles -- graduate student and teacher educator (teaching assistant) -- I was involved in new transitions and processes of becoming. As I experience many new ways of identifying personally and professionally, I questioned whether I may face similar challenges as I did with my transition from pre-service teacher to a classroom teacher. Perhaps most importantly, I

wondered how I might deal with these challenges. Self-compassion offered one possibility for supporting my current transition.

Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

By understanding how I use and practice self-compassion during my transition from teacher to teacher educator-researcher, insights may be revealed into how and why my personal and professional identities shift in the higher education context (when compared to the school context) and how these shifts influence my teaching and research practices. Therefore, the purposes of this research are to:(a) describe how I engage in self-compassion during my transition from teacher to teacher educator-researcher, and; (b) describe the influences that self-compassion has on how I navigate changes in my personal and professional identities as I transition from teacher to teacher educator-researcher.

Self-Study in Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) is a methodology grounded in reflection and evaluation of one's practices to develop a deeper and more explicit understanding of one's self, one's teaching practice, and its effects on student learning (Loughran, 2004). Thus, S-STEP serves as an appropriate methodology to examine myself and my practices during the transition from teacher to teacher educator (and researcher). By sharing the outcomes of my S-STEP, others may learn from my experiences by applying my insights and understandings to their contexts and lived experiences. The questions guiding my research are:

1. *What challenges/factors influence my identification in the transition to becoming a teacher educator?*
2. *How do I practice self-compassion throughout the transition to becoming a teacher educator?*

Potential Significance

This research has potential implications for my own experiences and practices as a prospective teacher educator and researcher and for others undertaking the same journey. Due to my ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (see Chapter 3), I acknowledge that the value of this study lies with both the reader and me. Although some research outlines that the transition from teacher to teacher educator comes with challenges, we know little of tools and resources to manage these challenges. Therefore, this research may offer a significant contribution to the literature by identifying self-compassion as an appropriate tool/strategy while considering their limitations and challenges) to use during periods of personal and professional transition. At the same time, the opposite may hold, in that self-compassion may come to be seen as an appropriate tool for these purposes. Further, and as I explain in Chapter 2, there is a lack of existing literature concerning the interconnectedness between identity and self-compassion; my research is thus positioned within that gap.

For the reader, my findings may resonate with how they have constructed their knowledge via their experiences. As individuals are constantly in a state of *becoming* (Jenkins, 2008), the potential may reach far beyond the context of this study. While I am not aiming for generalizable outcomes from this research, the findings may have implications for others beyond the teaching community or that of graduate students and beginning teacher educators. In particular, the results from this study may resonate with those who experience adverse events during professional and personal transitions where identity may be called into question. Conversely, it may not. This research contributes to the existing literature on several fronts, particularly that which deals with shifts in personal and professional identity, the utility of

self-compassion during challenging or adverse events, and the experiences of beginning teacher educators.

Definition of Terms

This section highlights several specific terms that are used throughout this thesis project. They are listed in alphabetical order and based on existing topical research; *Classroom Teacher; Identification; Identity; Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE); Self-Compassion; Self-Study in Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP); Teacher Education; Teacher Educator; Teaching Assistant; and Transition:*

*Classroom Teacher***:** professional education staff and faculty in primary, junior, intermediate, or senior level education settings (primary, elementary, or high school) and others who work with students in a whole classroom or a small classroom such as a resource room. It may also include the head of departments whose partial duties are to teach students in a classroom. Omitted: pre-service teachers, teacher's aides, paraprofessionals (UNESCO, 2001).

Identification: the complex process of mechanisms humans use to distinguish themselves and others individually and collectively (Jenkins, 2008).

Identity is developed through social interaction, simultaneously influenced by internal and external dimensions (Jenkins, 2008).

Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE): Similar to the definition above, PETE refers to the specific teacher education training in universities that physical education teacher educators may receive to prepare prospective physical education teachers.

Self-compassion: **'**being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain,

inadequacies, and failures so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience' (Neff, p. 87, 2003b).

Self-Study in Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP): A qualitative methodology whereby individuals' overarching desire to better align theory and practice, to be more fully informed about the nature of knowledge of practice, and to explore and build on these "learnings" in public ways (Loughran, 2004).

Teacher Educator: commonly refers to both those who educate prospective teachers, e.g., educators of prospective teachers but do not provide professional development for practicing teachers *and* those who educate practicing teachers, e.g., educators who initiate, guide, and support teacher learning across their careers (Evan, 2012).

Teacher Education: Programs and training pertaining to policy, procedures, pedagogy, psychology, and development to prepare prospective teachers with the required skills and knowledge to undertake teaching-related activities in their respective educational institutions. Teacher education may take many forms, such as professional development or formal academic programs that prepare and qualify teachers in a university. For the context of this study, teacher education refers to the latter.

Teaching Assistant: an individual employed to help a university teacher in a classroom. In the current study, a graduate student assists department faculty in delivering content to undergraduate students and grade assignments.

Transition: a change from one form or type to another, or the process by which this happens. In the context of this study, the transition is from teacher to teacher educator.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This introductory chapter provides the background, purpose, definition of terms, and rationale for the research study. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of the pertinent literature relating to the theoretical underpinnings of the study, specifically self-compassion, identity transitions, and teacher education. Following this, chapter three examines the methodology and methods of this thesis, which is S-STEP. Chapter four illustrates the qualitative findings of the research and the themes within the results. Chapter five provides a discussion and conclusion based on the findings of the study as well as future directions of research and highlights limitations within the study.

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework & Review of Literature

Introduction

As explained in Chapter 1, the processes involved in making the transition to becoming a teacher educator bear significant influence over the development of an individual's personal and professional identities, which can, in turn, shape one's teacher education practice. Moreover, the transition from teacher to teacher educator is one that is often fraught with challenges; self-compassion may be a helpful tool to support individuals making this transition. The literature review is guided by the research questions specified in Chapter 1. I present two complementary theoretical frameworks that underpin this research project; (1) teacher identification and (2) self-compassion.

Teacher Educator Identification: *Influences, complexities, and links to teacher practice*

Research that uses the term *identity* has a rich history, full of debate, contention, and progress around its definition, conceptualization, and operationalization. Due to this history, scholars still struggle to communicate the meaning of the term (Lawler, 2008). Persistent contextual challenges of understanding identity vary across disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For example, Erikson (1959), a psychologist, presents the formation of one's identity as a linear progression and a fundamental element of personality development from one stage to the next over the course of one's life. In contrast, American social psychologist George H. Mead (1934) views identity as being largely a social construct that is malleable and ever changing with multiple influences.

For the scope of this paper, I attempt to conceptualize a general understanding of the term and explain its connection to the identities of teachers. In this section, I provide a conceptual understanding of identity and identification that I use in my thesis research. I then discuss the complex nature of teacher identification and the connection between identification and teacher

practices as well as the importance and challenges of trying to align the two. Last, the tensions and challenges that affect one's identity during the transition from teacher to teacher educator are explored. By focusing on the complex influences on teacher identity, I illustrate the necessity for individuals who are making the transition to becoming teacher educators to utilize tools, strategies, and resources to assist in that transition.

Identity and Identification

An individual's lived experiences shape how they construct meaning and explain how and why they make sense of the world as they do (Hamilton et al., 2020). Each experience and interaction gives new meaning, which is internalized and informs an identity uniquely situated within the context of the individual (Jenkins, 2008). The journey from one experience and interaction to the next depicts a metaphorical road map where identity represents one contextual point in time on the map. As individuals gain more lived experiences and interact with others to construct new meaning, identity undergoes a transition, shift, or change to another point on the map. Each moment builds upon the preceding point and so on (Keniston, 1968). The process of shifting from one point on the map to another is conceptualized as *identification* (Jenkins, 2008). Identification considers the connections between points, as well as the past and present internal and external influences on each point (i.e., the process). Jenkins (2008) provides a more precise definition:

> Identity is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know "who's who" (and hence "what's what"). This involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on: a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as

> members of collectivities. It is a process – identification – not a "thing." It is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does (p. 5).

The definition provided by Jenkins (2008) is constructive on several fronts. First, it illustrates that identity is multifaceted and considers many variables such as language, relationships, geopolitical contexts, and social constructions that shape who we are. Second, it acknowledges that identity is a verb, not a noun; someone must *do/perform* identity. This performative illustration of identity aligns Goffman (1959) who suggests that identity involves a presentation of the self to others. Third, identification is a process whereby identity is never stagnant, and it is in a constant state of transition and change; hence we are *becoming,* not *being* (Hutchinson et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2008). Although there is a definitional distinction between identity and identification, for this study, the two terms are used interchangeably as has been done in existing literature (for example, Jenkins, 2008).

As mentioned, identification considers separate parts as well as the entire story of an individual's lived experience. It captures the *who, how* and *why* of someone's identity. This definition suggests that identification is a complex process with multiple influences. Stryker and Burke (2000) argue that people have many distinct networks and distinct roles within each network (i.e., many points on the same map). Individuals recognize traits and qualities that help classify themselves and others based on similarities and differences within any network or role. These classifications reflect a set of larger social interactions with the broader community, suggesting that internal and external factors are at play in identification processes (Jenkins, 2008). An internal view of identity is how a person sees or identifies themselves, while an external view of identity is the individual's perception of how others identify them. Internal factors, such as knowledge, beliefs, and values, are constructed from experiences and

interactions with others within contextual environments. In contrast, external influences reflect larger social, political, economic, technological or environmental systems where individuals have little to no control over their effects (Witz, 2000).

While the external dimension is highly influential, individuals can "push back" against some external forms of identification. Mead (1934) explains this by stating that "we are not simply bound by the community. We are engaged in a conversation in which what we say is listened to by the community and its response is one which is affected by what we have to say" (p. 168). Therefore, a negotiation and mediation process moulds how we identify by assembling us into socially constructed categories based on similar or dissimilar qualities. Jenkins (2008) attributes these negotiations to the need for groups to label each other (and the individuals within the groups) to discover where someone fits or does not fit in based on inclusion or exclusion criteria.

Unfortunately, socially constructed categories may cause conflict between the individual and the perception/narrative of the community. As Jenkins (2008) writes, "who we are, and who we are seen to be, can matter enormously" (p.3). Mead (1934) illustrates the importance of considering the multi-dimensionality of one's identity when contrasting personal identities. This notion can also be applied to a contextual example from my research: one may identify as a teacher educator and identify in other ways in their personal lives, such as an athlete, a parent, a student, a coach, and/or a former classroom teacher. If there is a misalignment between several "sub-identities" one may experience internal conflict or increased challenge.

The alignment or disparity of sub-identities also arises in the negotiations with an individual's communities; for example, for a teacher, the community might consist of students, colleagues, and superiors (e.g., administrators). If the community values aspects (or

sub-identities) of your identity, you may be rewarded for those characteristics. Conversely, if they do not, you may be punished for it. The negotiations between the individual and the collective community have considerable implications for behaviour and how one manages these identities. Society's influences and perceptions involve classifying (un)like identities which become central to identity negotiations with the communities' norms and values.

Authority and power play an important role when considering the influences on identity formation. Although there are identity negotiations, Giddens (1991) argues that external influences almost entirely determine identity, and the external influences on identity are further compounded if one or more members of a particular community hold a position of power or authority over the individual. For example, a novice teacher educator may hold a different view of the role of a teacher educator than that of the Dean of their faculty. Consequently, interactions regarding differences in belief may lead to identity negotiations that are internalized and acted upon. This process may result in a change of behaviour that is contrary to how the individual initially identified themselves or was identified by others.

By gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that affect identity, we may also better understand how and why identity affects how we behave. As Jenkins (2008) states, identity matters because it can have concrete impacts on, and implications for, how we live our lives. This is particularly true for teachers and teacher educators, as it is illustrated throughout existing literature that identity has a strong influence on teaching practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Bullough, 2002; Loughran, 1997).

Linking Teachers' Identities, Beliefs, and Practices

Forming a professional identity involves different sources of knowledge (derived from experience and interactions), such as teaching, relationships, and subject matter (Antonek et al.,

1997). Developing a professional identity for teachers or teacher educators is also largely intertwined with other aspects of their identity (e.g., their identities outside of their working lives) (Beijaard et al., 2004; Knowles, 1992). With this acknowledgement, the position of teacher educator involves many complexities, including developing a pedagogy of teacher education, performing as a professional academic/researcher, and teaching pre-service teachers (Murray et al., 2008). The roles embedded within the position of teacher educator, along with the interactions and experiences of that position and the subsequent negotiations with the communities of teacher education (e.g., universities, schools, governments, families, etc.), all have the potential to enhance or inhibit any existing identities of individual teacher educators. Therefore, considering the complexities of becoming a teacher educator may provide insight into developing one's professional identity.

A statement offered by Sachs (2005) is particularly helpful in addressing the connections between a teacher's (or teacher educator's) identity and their teaching practices and offers clear connections to Jenkins' (2008) theory of identity:

> Teachers' professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience (p. 15).

Given Jenkins' (2008) argument that identity matters, it is crucial to consider how individual experiences and interactions shape teacher educators' personal and professional identities. As Pajares (1992) notes, the decisions, judgements, and perceptions teachers make are

the subsequent result of their developed beliefs. In other words, a teacher's or teacher educator's beliefs, experiences and ways of identifying can influence their practices and vice versa (i.e., practices emerge from principles, and in turn, principles emerge from practices (Bullough, 2002). This consideration may provide insight into how and why teacher educators teach as they do.

In addition to personal identities, the processes of becoming a teacher educator and the influences of one's goals, values, beliefs, and experiences of teacher training and professional development, might impact what is deemed important in their practice (Hayler et al., 2020). Previous research on teacher educator identity has discussed several important factors influencing its development (Izadinia, 2014). For example, the role of communities of practice/learning communities (Murray, 2008; Williams et al., 2012), reflective practices (Haamer, Lepp, and Reva, 2012), and educational and professional experiences (Hockings, Cooke, Yamashita, McGinty, & Bowl, 2009) have been suggested to play a large contributing factor in shaping teacher educators' identities. The wide and complex net of influences makes it easy to see how some teacher educators might find it difficult to align their beliefs, identities, and practices. Vanassche et al. (2015) reviewed literature that explored the intersection between teacher educators' beliefs, identities, and practices. They found that those who studied their own practices and contextual professional roles could get a clear sense of how their identity was being constructed. The process of aligning practices and beliefs is what Hayler et al. (2020) describes as "the essence of becoming" as a teacher educator (p. 53) but is also a process fraught with tensions (Berry, 2009; Murray et al., 2008; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). In the following section, I discuss the tensions and challenges associated with becoming a teacher educator.

Tensions and Challenges during Transition to Becoming a Teacher Educator

"Becoming a teacher educator involves examining beliefs and values grounded in personal biography and dealing with the inherent tensions that arise from overlapping and interrelated personal and professional identities" (Williams et al., 2012, p. 256–7). Recognizing and managing tensions related to personal and professional identities are paramount in a successful transition to teacher educators. Wood and Borg (2010) compared their journey of becoming teacher educators to a 'rocky road,' full of personal and professional peaks, troughs, and bumps, thus highlighting both the positive and negative experiences of becoming a teacher educator. While basking in the joy of the peaks of one's journey is important, it is also valuable to recognize, examine and learn from the troughs. The contextual tensions and challenges one experience while becoming a teacher educator largely depends on the individual, their relationships and experiences and the contextual norms and values of their communities (Beijaard et al., 2004). For this reason, the information drawn from one teacher educator's story is not meant to generalize to a broader audience; instead, discussing these stories provides context and highlights how others may experience these transitions. This assumption is informative for my thesis research.

Fletcher and Ovens (2020) conducted a literature review regarding S-STEP in physical education teacher education, examining three well-known transitions to becoming teacher educators and the tensions involved in these processes. These transitions include those experienced by former school teachers, doctoral students, and researchers who moved into teacher educators' roles. Fletcher and Ovens (2020) noted examples of tensions communicated by teacher educator-researchers throughout these transitions. The tensions were exacerbated by a subsequent shift in identity related to a new role of teacher educator. For instance, stemming

from their perceived lack of support from their employer, MacPhail (2011) reported feeling isolated and under-prepared in her transition. Hayler et al. (2020) reiterate this feeling by explaining their experience in the first years of becoming teacher educators, stating: "the School of Education had no system of induction or training for teacher educators. We learnt informally from others" (p. 55). The feeling of under-preparedness and isolation may have also been heightened by the assumed level of expertise in teaching that many teacher educators bring to their new role (Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). However, this grossly underestimates the very different set of pedagogical skills and knowledge needed for teacher education practice. Izadinia (2014) identified challenges teacher educators face on a daily basis and the emotional tensions that followed as a result. For example, external challenges include perceptions of having inadequate research skills or experience delivering lesson content. These challenges increased emotional tension and self-doubt in developing an identity as a researcher and academic. Importantly, in some cases, the result led to harsh negative self-views and feelings of being deskilled, exposed, vulnerable, and marginalized (Izadinia, 2014).

The doubts and questions regarding identity also affect the pedagogies used by teacher educators. Differentiating pedagogy, and therefore, teaching practices between old and new positions (classroom teacher to teacher educator), has also been highlighted as a challenge of teaching future physical education teachers (Fletcher & Casey, 2014). Illustrating the discrepancy of previous experience as a classroom teacher, Fletcher and Casey (2014) explain that classroom teaching experience may not necessarily prepare individuals to teach in higher education. Indeed, classroom teachers transitioning to become teacher educators require new knowledge and understanding about the pedagogy of teaching adults, particularly when the content being taught is teaching. Arguably, most beginning teacher educators may not have

gained this experience as classroom teachers and would need to upgrade their training to adequately prepare them to teach pre-service teachers (Murray et al., 2005). Further, if a novice teacher educator does not consider their former teaching practices and understanding of pedagogy, their teaching practices as teacher educators may not align with the best strategy to prepare future teachers to be effective classroom teachers (Berry, 2008). To compound this issue, Murray et al. (2005) suggest that it takes teacher educators roughly three years to establish professional identities throughout their transitions to becoming active researchers and developing their own pedagogies of teacher education.

The time needed to establish a professional identity underlines a distinct period of heightened challenge during times of transition. Forming and developing one's professional identity is also largely intertwined with personal identities, which, during intense and rapid change, can lead to discrepancies and challenges. Therefore, it is important and relevant to consider the relationship between personal and professional identities as they may conflict during moments of intense change or transition. As Beijaard et al. (2004) wrote, "such a conflict can lead to friction in teachers' professional identity in cases in which the 'personal' and the 'professional' are too far removed from each other" (p. 109). This sensitive period in a novice teacher educator's career coincides with the timeline and likelihood of burnout, which increases the risk of attrition (as outlined in Chapter one). This notion highlights the importance of addressing multidimensional influences and the timely nature affecting the transition from teacher to teacher educator *and* researcher.

Beijaard et al. (2004) offer the perspective of identities as part of and being formed by professional landscapes where "... 'relevant others' (researchers, policymakers, school administrators, teacher educators, etc.) who represent different aspects of the landscape..." all

contribute to the dialogue and formation of professional identities. An example of such a tension is offered by Williams (1993) who discusses tensions between a teacher educator's professional passions and interests and the priorities of the university, which has the potential to create conflict. Therefore, by examining the internal and external influences of personal identity on the development of my professional identity within my professional landscape, there may be possibilities to understand the influences on teacher practices better.

During the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator, there are well-documented experiences of challenge and tension that place strain on one's identity, which could, in turn, negatively affect a teacher educator's practices (Hayler et al., 2020; MacPhail, 2014). Thus, it is imperative to examine how to navigate these challenging waters to manage them better; not only to ease the transition to the position of teacher educator but also to avoid contradictions in teaching practices and thus, improve student learning. Hayler et al. (2020) suggest that many individuals share in the pain and triumph on the journey to becoming a teacher educator and indicate that we should draw on our inner resources to help navigate the journey to understand who we are and how to practice. Therefore, highlighting teacher identity in this thesis project is important as it illustrates the potential impact of describing the influences on one's identity as a teacher and/or teacher educator to improve teacher education practices. Moreover, if I do not consider personal and professional identities during my transition to becoming a teacher educator, I may risk experiencing more tensions and frictions between my beliefs and practices (Beijaard et al., 2004). At the same time, Whitehead (1989) explained that personal examination of the complex work of teacher educators often results in revealing oneself as a "living contradiction", whereby beliefs, actions, and identities do not always align. This may suggest that it is unlikely to form perfect alignment in these elements and therefore, it is

important that teacher educators come to terms with living with instances of tension and contradiction.

How one lives with tensions and contradictions during the transition from teacher educator remains a question without an answer. The following section provides an additional arm of my theoretical framework rooted in positive psychology to provide a resource for individuals to become more resilient and motivated and cope productively with tension and challenges during periods of transition in personal and professional lives.

Self-Compassion

Background

In one of the first examples of research explicitly focused on self-compassion, Neff (2003b) argues for the positive effects of turning kindness and compassion towards one's self. By contrasting the efficacy of both positive and negative psychological outcomes associated with self-esteem (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996), Neff's (2003b) research suggests that self-compassion may be an alternative to the status quo of adopting self-esteem as the golden standard of assessing mental well-being. Focusing her work on mitigating the adverse outcomes of self-esteem (i.e., increased levels of narcissism, self-absorption, self-centeredness, and a lack of concern for others (Damon, 1995)), Neff (2003b) highlights self-compassion as a potential avenue for individuals to tend to their mental health and well-being. Compassion is being in touch with others' suffering and allowing oneself to be open to and aware of the pain of others, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, and working towards alleviating their suffering (Wispe, 1991). Turning this concept inward, Neff (2003b) defines self-compassion as:

> being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with kindness.

> Self-compassion also involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one's pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one's experience is seen as part of the larger human experience. (p. 87)

With this understanding, Neff (2003b) outlined the three components within the overarching concept of self-compassion: (a) self-kindness - extending kindness and understanding to oneself rather than harsh judgment and self-criticism, (b) common humanity - seeing one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating, and (c) mindfulness - holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness, rather than over-identifying with them.

As the understanding of self-compassion developed, Neff sought to empirically measure how self-compassionate individuals were, if they were at all. Her research highlighted that self-compassionate individuals display three key characteristics (Neff, 2003a). First, self-compassionate individuals display *self-kindness versus self-judgment* by not getting down on themselves or not being overly harsh. Second, self-compassionate individuals display *common humanity versus self-isolation* which emphasizes the response not to withdraw and feel alone in their pain or struggle. Lastly, self-compassionate individuals exhibit *mindfulness versus over-identification*, keeping one's emotions in balance and not dwelling on negative thoughts. There is a wealth of literature regarding the concept of self-compassion relative to self-esteem and other psychological approaches that exist (i.e., self *in* relation, humanistic psychology, and emotional regulation). However, this literature review focuses primarily on three categories of research conducted with regards to self-compassion: (a) coping and resilience, (b) motivation and learning, and lastly (c) work and professional contexts. These categories display characteristics that align with the focus of my study, and evidence suggests that self-compassion

may be useful for teacher educators during significant transitions to manage challenging situations.

Coping and Resilience

Amongst the breadth of research regarding self-compassion, an individual's ability to cope with adverse situations and demonstrate resilience in different contexts by using self-compassionate practices has shown to be associated with increasing or maintaining mental health and well-being (Neff, 2009). In contrast to self-esteem, which requires a self-critical evaluation of one's performance to establish self-value relative to others, self-compassion is not dependent on comparing oneself and others. In turn, this decreases the need to be *better than average* to feel valued. As a result, ego-threatening moments, such as failure, set-back, and challenging situations, are less likely to affect self-compassionate individuals negatively as opposed to individuals high in self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Research in this field has primarily been conducted quantitatively involving different populations (i.e., athletes, students, and professionals). Studies illustrate that more self-compassionate people are also more likely to successfully overcome barriers such as significant change, failure, and setbacks throughout their lives (Miyagawa et al., 2020). The relationships between self-compassion, stress and positive and negative coping strategies illustrate that self-compassionate individuals exhibit the most significant connection with positive cognitive restructuring when faced with stressful situations (Allen et al., 2010). As a result, self-compassionate individuals appear to be more likely to change their attitudes towards stressful situations and take a more proactive approach to managing stressful events, enhancing their ability to cope constructively. Ying and Han (2009) discuss the association between self-compassion's relationship with reduced stress and higher resilience and coping when faced

with a professional stressor. They highlight that self-compassionate individuals are more likely to exhibit higher resilience and coping ability in stressful situations in their profession. In addition, the relationships between self-compassion and problem solving were not significant, suggesting that self-compassionate individuals may not attempt to fix their problems; instead, they may reshape their attitudes towards adverse situations (Ying & Han, 2009). Therefore, a self-compassionate mindset reinforces the notion that failures and setbacks are opportunities for learning and positive exploration rather than detrimental to personal or professional progress (Allen et al., 2010; Miyagawa et al., 2020; Bluth et al., 2018). This may indicate that individuals who practice self-compassion are more curious about understanding their response to adverse events they face, rather than engaging in rumination and self-pity during challenging situations.

In a study on university students, Gunnell, Mosewich, McEwen, Eklund, and Crocker (2017) found that by engaging in less harmful coping strategies, university students who practice self-compassion felt more competent, autonomous, and connected during personally challenging events, leading to overall greater psychological need satisfaction (PNS). Similarly, Mosewich et al. (2021) found evidence that, although conceptualizations of self-compassion did not present as beneficial for intercollegiate athletes in domain-specific grit and identity contexts, it did reinforce previous studies to show self-compassion as a general tool that is associated with perseverance (Ferguson et al., 2015; Neff & McGehee, 2010). Lastly, and related to my research, Kullman et al. (2021) conducted the only study I could locate that explicitly addressed identity and self-compassion. They found that self-compassionate women who experience postpartum identity adjustments related to decreased physical activity were negatively associated with shame, rumination and other correlates of unsuccessful adjustment. Alternatively,

self-compassionate women were positively associated with acceptance, correlates of successful identity adjustment, and exercise behavior.

By building greater resilience and increasing the ability to cope through practicing self-compassion during difficult situations, individuals may have greater motivation and increase their likelihood of learning. In the next section, I explore several influences of self-compassion on an individual's motivation and learning.

Motivation and Learning

Self-compassionate individuals are less likely to actively solve a problem; instead, they may possess greater motivation to improve in the future and correct past mistakes (Breines & Chen, 2012). This suggests a contrast between people who exhibit high levels of self-esteem and who may be more likely to be hindered by ego-threatening situations brought about by inflating self-evaluations. The result is likely related to less self-handicapping behaviours, such as procrastination, mastery avoidance, and achieving minimal competency to mitigate risks of challenging situations such as engaging in a difficult task. Instead, self-compassionate individuals adopt a mindset that embraces challenge as part of the process and rejects negative coping strategies (Barutçu and Demir, 2020). Neff et al. (2007) further highlight this, noting that, during ego-threatening situations such as test-taking, self-compassionate individuals may possess greater anxiety-buffering, which may lead to less self-handicapping behaviour. Thus, striving for goal-mastery, learning from past mistakes, and less goal avoidance behaviour are considered to align with a self-compassionate mindset (Babenko & Oswald, 2019).

Notably, the role of the "other" (e.g., coach, teacher, and/or supervisor) is essential when considering the environment in which the individual learns. This has implications for how teachers learn about and use self-compassion with themselves and their students. Moè and Katz

(2020) found that self-compassionate teachers are more likely to provide an autonomy-supportive, motivational learning environment for their students and less likely to become frustrated and burnt out when faced with challenging situations. They found that teachers with more experience are more likely to be self-compassionate in their practice and less self-deprecating than teachers with less experience (Moè & Katz, 2020). This is critical to understand as it may have implications for individual's identification processes and teacher education programs at large, and highlights the need to include content related to self-compassion to benefit early teachers in two ways: (1) mitigating the risk of teacher burnout due to institutional and interpersonal challenges involved with teaching, and (2) increasing the autonomy-supportive environments for students to experience self-efficacy likely leads to the development of beneficial mastery (approach) goals among medical students (Moè & Katz, 2020). Although the focus of Moè and Katz's (2020) study concerns medical students, the contexts may align with a similar transition for other graduate students, such as those who are studying to become teacher educators.

Work and Professional Contexts

In conjunction with Moè and Katz's (2020) study regarding a self-compassionate mindset and its implications, Jennings (2014) found that psychosocial characteristics in preschool teachers (i.e., poor mental health and well-being), may impact their ability to create a supportive learning environment and connect with challenging students. They assert that teacher education programs need to address and promote teacher wellness programs designed to support teachers' social and emotional competence and well-being. Doing so decreases the likelihood of early career teachers burning out due to stress and lack of support (Jennings, 2014). Egan et al. (2018) drew similar conclusions regarding nurses who constantly care for vulnerable and sometimes

challenging patients. In addition to needing support for authentic compassion from themselves and colleagues, they needed more emotional support from the health facilities where they were employed (Egan et al., 2018). Through semi-structured interviews, nurses explained they were not tired of being compassionate; instead, they were tired of overcoming organizational barriers to being compassionate and needed to adopt a "you before me" approach rather than a "you instead of me" mentality. This reiterates the effect organizational influences can have on employees who care for and nurture vulnerable populations and, although not specific to teacher educators, draws similar parallels.

Suppose a self-compassionate approach to mental health and well-being is adopted in teacher education institutions. In that case, the positive implications could be significant for both the individual and, in turn, essential for the people they teach. For example, Villancourt and Wasylkiw (2019) found a negative relationship between self-compassion and burnout while also finding a significant positive relationship between self-compassion, health outcomes, job satisfaction, and better sleep. The implication of positive health outcomes and a self-compassionate mindset suggests a 'knock-on' effect of benefits that extend beyond professional practice. Although this sample population is not specific to teachers or teacher educators, it highlights that working professionals may benefit from a self-compassionate mindset. Thus, if universities encourage self-compassion as a strategy or resource to assist transitioning faculty members, their transition may be less tenuous and more productive.

Research has shown that self-compassionate individuals may mitigate negative psychological responses to adverse situations, particularly during personal and professional change periods. The contextual significance of this study may present an opportunity to address and describe the challenges associated with shifts in identity during the transition from a

classroom teacher to a teacher educator, which could, in turn, influence teacher/teacher educator identity and teaching practices. In addition, practicing self-compassion while engaging in S-STEP may decrease the negative experiences of tensions and challenges present in the period of transition from teacher to teacher educator.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, two theoretical frameworks that underpin my study have been presented and examined; teacher identification and self-compassion. Well-documented challenges and tensions have been associated with transitions from teacher to teacher educator. More specifically, the identification process and internal and external influences on teacher identity may create significant barriers or challenges to a successful transition to becoming a teacher educator. For example, the pedagogical differences between classroom teaching practices and the transition to teaching adults how to teach may prove challenging (Casey & Fletcher, 2012). Overcoming these challenges constructively is essential to the success of a teacher who is making a transition to becoming a teacher educator. Conversely, the implications of this difficult transition may result in a lack of knowledge and understanding of one's identity and, along with their apparent connection to teacher practices, may impede student learning. Therefore, understanding my identification process during my transition is critical to aligning identity with practice. Further, internal and external factors such as personal context and more prominent social influences, such as interacting with people in positions of authority, political, social, and institutional norms all may exacerbate these issues if they are not appropriately managed.

Individuals who practice self-compassion have been suggested to be more resilient and better able to cope with stressful and adverse situations (Allen et al., 2010). Due to the

challenges associated with transitioning from teacher to teacher educator outlined in this chapter, particularly the identification process, there is an evident need for resources or strategies to manage said challenges. Self-compassion provides a framework whereby teacher educators can engage in transitions by being kind to themselves and mindfully recognizing that challenges are a part of the process (Neff, 2003b). By adopting a mindset of self-compassion, individuals may manage the challenges and tensions and hold the potential to overcome challenges constructively. As Hayler and Williams (2020) state, "becoming a teacher educator also involves the development of personal qualities such as resilience, problem-solving and critical reflection and reflexivity" (p. 53), thus, reinforcing the connection between becoming a teacher educator and practicing self-compassion as a way to promote the aforementioned personal qualities.

In conclusion, this literature review draws on teacher educators' experiences and identities and the concept of self-compassion to suggest that self-compassion may assist individuals transitioning to teacher educator to manage their transitions more constructively. Neff (2003a) states, "self-compassion can be viewed as a useful emotional regulation strategy, in which painful or distressing feelings are not avoided but are instead held in awareness with kindness, understanding, and a sense of shared humanity" (p. 225). This understanding of self-compassion and its benefits underpins the utility of its practice during my contextual transition to teacher educator. Currently, there is an abundance of existing quantitative research measuring participants' level of self-compassion using the mindful self-compassion scale (Neff & Germer, 2013) and other mental, physical and social factors. However, there are fewer qualitative approaches employed to address such issues. Further, research regarding identity and self-compassion is sparse at best and warrants further investigation. This presents an opportunity to address *how* people practice self-compassion rather than *if or how much* people are

self-compassionate. By employing a qualitative approach, this study focuses on *how* I describe self-compassion and focuses on the processes of practicing self-compassion during my transition. The process-oriented stance towards researching self-compassion, along with my contextual transition, addresses a gap in the literature that has not yet been previously studied/examined. Furthermore, examining the process of *how* I am self-compassionate throughout this journey also aligns with the processual nature of identification as a teacher educator, as they are both continual and ongoing. Lastly, by examining *how* I practice self-compassion, I may understand how the process of being self-compassionate during challenging situations may influence my teacher identity, and therefore, may address any discrepancies in teacher practices or other challenges during moments of transition. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological framework used to address the purpose of the study and research questions.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I present and justify the qualitative research methodology and methods used for my research. To accomplish this, I have organized this chapter into six sections. In the first two sections, I outline my social constructivist assumptions and describe self-study of teacher education practice (S-STEP) methodology, a relatively novel qualitative methodology, and provide a clear justification for its suitability for the research. In sections three and four, I outline the data collection and analysis methods, respectively. In the fifth section, I consider my role as a researcher and participant and lastly, I outline ethical considerations.

Assumptions

This qualitative research project is guided by an ontological stance rooted in relativism that is widely adopted by teacher educators who utilize a S-STEP approach to research (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2007). Relativist assumptions acknowledge that multiple socially constructed realities exist and that each person constructs knowledge based on their experiences within their unique contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996; Rescher, 2003). Further, relativists claim there are multiple versions of reality and that truth is shaped within context. More importantly to the context of my research, knowledge is constructed, but it also changes over time, in part due to the changing contexts in which it is held by the individual, their experiences, and their interactions (Killam, 2013).

Guided by this ontological stance, I take a social constructivist epistemological position. Social constructivists assert that an individual's reality is independent of another's and is constructed by experiences and relationships (Gray, 2009). This position is based on a broader

constructivist assumption that views all knowledge claims as situated, both culturally and throughout different times in history (Gergen & Gergen, 2011). Social constructivists, however, believe that learning occurs when individuals engage in and make sense of experiences through social activities (Kim, 2001). Thus, as meaning is constructed through past and present experiences and interactions, learning (constructing meaning) is ongoing and continuously evolving. This notion has very direct and clear implications for this study as it positions both me as a learner and my teaching identity as part of an ongoing process. As such, my ontological and epistemological assumptions guide the purpose of this study. In the next section, I discuss the methodological approach, S-STEP.

Methodological Approach to Research: S-STEP

S-STEP is a qualitative research methodology based on the reflection and evaluation of one's teaching and teacher education practices to develop a deeper and more explicit understanding of one's self, one's teaching practices, and the effects on student learning (Loughran, 2004). S-STEP rejects positivist notions of knowledge and validity while embracing individuality, fluidity, and progression (LaBoskey, 2004). It places the construction of personally situated knowledge as a constant process of *becoming* rather than *being* (Hamilton et al., 2020). Researchers and practitioners are required to commit to professional learning and challenge one's assumptions. Although S-STEP is not limited to educators, this methodology has a rich history in education, where teacher educators examine and discuss the interconnectedness of the self and their teacher education practice by closely examining the self-*in*-practice (Ovens & Fletcher, 2014a).

A central aim of S-STEP researchers is to explore their tacit knowledge of teaching through a rigorous and systematic investigation of their pedagogies. Articulating tacit

knowledge of practice allows for deeper and more explicit understandings that can be shared with the broader teacher education community, thus building knowledge of teacher education practice (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). However, as Polanyi (1966) stated, much of what we know is tacit and difficult to articulate. Therefore, the challenge for S-STEP researchers is to unearth tacit knowledge to share with others, thus forming a platform for inquiry and knowledge generation. In turn, this may create resonance with members of the S-STEP community, but it might also create debate. In either scenario, the contribution of one's research and experiences regarding self-*in*-practice and the subsequent implications on teacher practices pushes the contextual conversation forward and leads to knowledge generation in teacher education (Loughran, 2004).

The complexities and nuances of S-STEP (explored below) allow researchers to distinguish it from other qualitative methodologies such as autoethnography, which focuses on the self in culture, and action research, which has an explicit focus on practice (without necessarily considering the self) (Casey, Fletcher, Schaeffer, & Gleddie, 2017). Thus, S-STEP is uniquely positioned as an actionable self-inquiry methodology where the practitioner-researcher seeks to improve their practice by challenging assumptions and engaging with multiple perspectives. By aligning the goals of S-STEP and utilizing primarily qualitative research methods such as dialogue with a critical friend, reflective journaling, artifacts and text analysis, S-STEP possesses five main features. In the following sections, I discuss the main features of S-STEP and its intended purpose, challenges, links to identity, and alignment and suitability to the research questions.

Main Features of S-STEP

According to Samaras (2010), the five (5) main components of S-STEP are:

A. personal situated inquiry - directly draws from personal experience
B. critical collaborative inquiry - utilizes a critical friend to challenge assumptions and offer different perspectives,
C. improve learning - addresses the 'so what' of teacher practice and actively seeks to improve students' learning through professional practice progress,
D. transparent and systematic research process - necessitates openness, vulnerability and questioning of one's practice through rigorous methods and analysis,
E. knowledge generation and presentation - engages with and contributes to literature across related work.

Bullock and Peercy (2018) reiterate the notions of the abovementioned components in describing the affordances of S-STEP. They further highlight that S-STEP can enhance one's professional development and improve student learning by fostering positive change in one's professional practice by questioning the assumptions of one's practices, 'walking the talk' and working collaboratively with others.

The notion of "walking the talk" (Whitehead, 1993) is a pervasive message within the S-STEP community whereby teacher educators aim to "practice what they preach" or align their beliefs with their actions. Loughran (2007) expands on one's purpose for initiating S-STEP, stating,

> it is this overarching desire to align theory and practice better, to be more fully informed about the nature of knowledge of practice, and to explore and build on these "learnings" in public ways that appears to be an underlying common purpose in S-STEP—a tacit catalyst for S-STEP (p.14).

By conducting research that is personally relevant and grounded in the self, identity, and/or teacher education practices, researchers may acknowledge contradictions between practices versus beliefs. Therefore, the purpose for initiating S-STEP is to examine the connections between personal and professional, theory and practice, research and pedagogy, self and other, and determine how to better align theory and practice (Fletcher, 2020; LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2004). Although the benefits of conducting S-STEP research have been noted, challenges persist within and outside the S-STEP community. These challenges are explored, and guidelines are proposed to highlight the rigour of this study.

Challenges of S-STEP

Although S-STEP has been established as a powerful qualitative methodology (Zeichner, 1999), criticisms remain from sources both within and outside of the S-STEP community. For example, Bullock and Peercy (2018) offer three challenges to S-STEP. First, prevailing perceptions persist surrounding the efficacy of S-STEP as researchers who tend to represent positivist worldviews (e.g., claims about objectivity and generalization) do not consider it to be 'proper' research citing the lack of academic rigour and trustworthiness. This notion may reflect the criticism that the principles or tenets of S-STEP are often unclear. Loughran clarifies this position by suggesting that S-STEP has a less-than-clear set of *methods* but not necessarily an unclear *focus* (Loughran, 2004). Second, S-STEP often does not go beyond the researcher's own experiences. While S-STEP is focused on the self, criticism by novice S-STEP researchers and those unfamiliar with the methodology outline the lack of engagement with the broader literature. Thus, a potential consequence of S-STEP could lead to self-justification without looking outside one's experiences and challenging existing practices and beliefs (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004). Berry (2008) suggests that although S-STEP is self-focused, it should not be

self-centred nor self-validating. This can be achieved by the teacher educator-researcher exposing themselves to vulnerabilities through honest reflection, open discussion with a critical friend, and a clear audit trail of the research process. The third criticism rests in the contribution of S-STEP to the knowledge of teacher education. According to Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015), the tension between engaging in S-STEP to provide new knowledge to improve one's practice and produce a rigorous and generalizable academic contribution to the community is at the forefront of the challenges to this methodology. The balancing act between the two ends of the spectrum may lead to focusing on one to the detriment of the other. For example, satisfying traditional research paradigms in search of rigorous methods and generalizability may leave the researcher without any personal improvement to practice. Conversely, focusing solely on personal relevance may also impede the trustworthiness of the academic contribution (Vanassche & Keltchermans, 2015). The emphasis on the ability of researchers to demonstrate and articulate clear goals and objectives of S-STEP research while remaining true to their original purpose of initiating is paramount; otherwise, doubt and criticism regarding trustworthiness casts their shadow on each S-STEP project (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015).

Although social constructivist assumptions do not recognize generalizability as a measure of academic 'validity', criticisms of S-STEP have not been unfounded by its skeptics. Bullock and Peercy (2018) stress the issue of trustworthiness by stating critics' suggestions tend to identify S-STEP as "at best a collection of case studies that were not generalizable and at worst idiosyncratic and prone to egocentric writing" (p.23).

To address these concerns, S-STEP researchers have sought to develop clear guidelines for the methodology. Loughran (2007) suggests there is a need for scholarship in S-STEP that "demonstrates (at least) that it is a disciplined and systematic inquiry, values professional

learning as a research outcome—for students of teaching and teacher educators—and aims to develop and better articulate a knowledge of practice" (p.19). In the following section I consider LaBoskey's (2004) guidelines when considering or initiating S-STEP research, which provides a design for my thesis research.

Research Design

Guidelines for S-STEP

The initiation of my S-STEP research derives from my personal and professional contexts and my transition from teacher to educator. In the section below, I outline and explain how I adhered to the five guidelines to S-STEP as set out by LaBoskey (2004).

1. *S-STEP of practice is self-initiated and self-focused*.

In alignment with Samaras' (2010) articulation of 'what S-STEP is,' this guideline suggests that the researcher selects the issue or challenge in their practice to focus their study. This topic must relate to the practitioner's personal experiences and consider how their teaching practice is shaped and influenced by their assumptions, values, beliefs, and identities (Fletcher et al., 2017). My experiences and interactions guide the proposed thesis project as a physical education teacher, and my identity transitions involved with becoming a teacher educator. This follows a similar path to previous studies such as that conducted by Dinkelman, Margolis, and Sikkenga (2006), who initiated a S-STEP on their transitions from classroom teachers to university teacher educators. By describing my personal experiences of identity and the influence of self-compassion, in this study, I seek to examine and describe how I am self-compassionate through this transition, its impact on teaching practices and my own experiences therein.

2. *S-STEP is aimed towards the improvement of practice.*

While the notion of 'best practice' often varies by sociocultural and geographical context (Fletcher et al., 2017), the goal of this S-STEP aims to improve the understanding of one's self and how practice is affected by tools that support self-compassion throughout the transition from physical education teacher to teacher educator. Samaras (2010) discusses the 'so what' aspects regarding the purposes of engaging in S-STEP. She suggests that through S-STEP, the teacher educator is learning about what works or does not work, as well as the consequences of the changes they enact as a result of the iterative process embedded within S-STEP. These changes directly reflect the progressive nature of S-STEP as it relates to improving practice. As noted by Hamilton et al. (2020), those who engage in S-STEP "commit to an excavation and examination of practices for both understanding and improvement from the perspective of the person continually constructing self and practice" (p. 310). As mentioned, identity has been suggested to be inextricably linked to teaching practice (see Bullough, 2002); therefore, by seeking to describe and understand the self-*in*-practice and the influence of my description of self-compassion, in this study, I aim to improve my practice as a teacher educator by developing a better understanding of the self-in-practice.

3. *S-STEP of practice research is interactive.*

There are many ways that interactivity can be positioned in S-STEP. For example, interactivity between a teacher educator-researcher and a student would be more appropriate if the research question and purpose for initiating the research align with and involves students as a primary source of data, i.e., feedback interviews relating to the focus of the project (Fletcher, Chróinín, & O'Sullivan, 2016). Another common example of interactivity in S-STEP research, which was used in my study, involves a critical friend who is a practicing teacher educator (Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). Using a critical friend during the research process provides an

opportunity to gain multiple perspectives about the teacher educator's assertions of the foci of the project and 'challenge our assumptions and biases, reveal our inconsistencies, [and] expand our potential interpretations' (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 849). A critical friend may be a colleague who can provide feedback on practice or offer different perspectives on the researcher's interpretations. A critical friend may also be a student or another learner who has first-hand knowledge of the impact of the researcher's teaching practice (Baker, 2020). Although the amount of engagement with a critical friend is less clear, Samaras (2010) alludes to this engagement as an 'ongoing' dialogue that suggests a critical friend's continued involvement throughout the research process.

Fletcher (2020) notes that critical friendships work to establish academic rigour in the research community. However, one must approach this relationship with caution as vulnerabilities, trustworthiness, and honesty must be considered in choosing a critical friend. If performed with caution, a S-STEP inquiry may benefit both the researcher and the critical friend as they analyze, critique, and offer alternate interpretations of the researcher's descriptions throughout the research process. For this study, I engaged with Tim, who is a professor that is familiar with key ideas expressed in this research (e.g., self-compassion; teacher educator identity). By engaging with multiple perspectives during and throughout the research process, I am also aligning my epistemological assumptions with practice by considering the experiences and interactions of others. This may generate new or different meanings to the research by providing an alternative perspective on my constructions of knowledge from the data (LaBoskey, 2004).

4. *S-STEP of practice researchers should draw from multiple sources (usually qualitative) that build a variety of data sets that triangulate around the focus of the S-STEP inquiry.*

Researchers can "make use of more than one data collection method, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories … [as] a powerful strategy for increasing the credibility of internal validity of your research" (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 245, 2015). In S-STEP, researchers can and should generate data via journal entries, observations, lesson plans, recorded feedback/discussions with critical friends, and/or student/learner feedback about teaching. Throughout this S-STEP project, data collection is focused on three primary sources of data: discussions/feedback from two critical friends, data collected from personal journal entries, and artifacts from lesson plans throughout my employment as a teaching assistant. More detail is provided in the 'data collection methods' section of this chapter.

5. *The 'validation' of S-STEP research is based on trustworthiness.*

To improve trustworthiness in S-STEP, LaBoskey (2004) suggests that other members within the research community must benefit from it, thus requiring S-STEP researchers to a) be clear about the issues of practice being explored, b) provide rich descriptive details about the context in which the work is taking place, c) make themselves vulnerable by exposing uncertainties, contradictions, and shortcomings in one's practice, d) create an audit trail of the data analyzed to arrive at the insights gained, e) invite others to ask themselves about the extent to which the interpretation is trustworthy, and f) make sense to them given their understandings of practice. As mentioned within the critiques of S-STEP, trustworthiness, generalizability and unclear methods have been persistent criticisms of S-STEP. In this study, I sought to establish academic rigour by following the set of guidelines outlined by Laboskey (2004) to improve credibility to the reader. One method to accomplish this is by outlining a robust audit trail that accounts for turning points (Bullock & Ritter, 2011), highlighting meaningful interpretations of and honest representations of that data. This can result in new assumptions about practice, notes

in personal journals showing reflexivity during the research process, and a record of meetings/transcription for transparency.

Participants and Research Site.

The site and participants are essential aspects of the study's context and play a crucial role in constructing new knowledge generated from this study. These are foundational considerations within an S-STEP research project because they guide our interactions and shape teacher practices/actions as we develop an understanding of our beliefs and assumptions relative to our contexts (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Moreover, if the reader is to establish any resonance with what is reported, they must clearly understand the context in which the teacher educator is working. Therefore, as a researcher *and* participant, it is uniquely vital to position myself within the research as an individual, a teacher, learner, and researcher. In the next section, I reiterate my relation to the investigation as a former classroom physical education teacher (as outlined in chapter 1) and expand my position as a learner and researcher.

Participant: Situating myself within my S-STEP research.

Because of our personal histories and their influences on our perceptions, construction of knowledge, and biases, it is important to discuss my position as a researcher within this S-STEP research project. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I am a former physical education teacher who taught internationally for five years. Before my professional career, I had a history of excelling in sports and physical education during my high school years. I played on several varsity teams, including badminton, soccer, volleyball, and golf.

As sports became a part of my life, I enrolled and graduated from a Bachelor of Physical Education program in southwestern Ontario, where I learned about anatomy, physiology,

histories of sport in Canada, and of course, PE-specific content such as Teaching Games for Understanding and individual/team games. I took these experiences to earn a Teaching Diploma from a university in Queensland, Australia, and taught PE in Sweden and Australia.

During these formative years as a classroom teacher, my identity was challenged in different ways, as outlined in Chapter 1. Although some of my challenges led me to question my identity as a teacher, it did present an opportunity to reflect and consider furthering my credentials and passions.

The opportunity to be employed as a teacher educator via the title of teaching assistant (TA) allowed me access to some of the day-to-day tasks and duties one might experience as a teacher educator, such as enacting lesson plans, instructing and modifying tasks, assessing students' learning, and providing individualized and group feedback. Similarly, my past experiences as a classroom physical education teacher help to position me as both an insider and an outsider as I made the transition to this position. For instance, I completed my undergraduate degree in PE and have also taught PE for several years, thus I am aware of pedagogical models and structural elements of how to teach PE (e.g., aligning curriculum with lessons and activities). I am, however, an outsider as a teacher educator. Meaning that although I have knowledge of content and have experience with some of the nuances within the classroom teaching profession, I am a novice teacher educator and researcher and, at the outset of the research, was not privy to the nuances of the differences between a classroom teacher and a teacher educator.

I acknowledge that as a white male raised in a higher socioeconomic household in Southwestern Ontario, my experiences afford me some privileges others may not have received. Personally, I have been fortunate in my life to be educated and lead a healthy life. Professionally, I have been fortunate to have completed two degrees, one of which was in Australia and led to

me teaching in Europe. I have also been able to travel extensively, which represents some of the privileges I possess that others may not. I believe my experiences and relationships throughout my life have shaped how I see the world and may increase subjectivity in my study. Personal reflexivity and reflections on these privileges and engaging with a critical friend throughout the research process, helped me be more aware of these subjectivities and be sensitive to other ways of looking at issues embedded in the teaching and research processes I engaged in.

Critical Friends.

Throughout this study, I engaged with one critical friend. As previously mentioned, a critical friend can add multiple perspectives to S-STEP by questioning one's assumptions and providing alternative interpretations of the data (Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). It is important that my critical friend possessed similar and different characteristics to myself to increase the variety of perspectives, yet remain highly rigorous and trustworthy.

My critical friend, Tim, is a tenured associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and is well versed in S-STEP and physical education teacher education. He identifies as a white, heterosexual male who was brought up in a middle class household. He is primarily a qualitative researcher and provided critical insight into the role of a teacher educator, self-in-practice and the research process. It is important to note that due to relationships outside of the critical friendship (e.g., professor-student), power dynamics may have influenced the research process. For example, because of my critical friend's experiences as a teacher educator and researcher, I may have felt compelled to accept their suggestions in an uncritical way. While I cannot eradicate these dynamics, acknowledging these dynamics is important because it may bring to light further tensions and challenges in my experiences of becoming a teacher educator.

Research Site.

My employment as a teaching assistant for one or more courses in the Bachelor of Physical Education and Bachelor of Physical Education/Bachelor of Education (Concurrent) degree programs serves as the platform to gather data by journaling and writing reflections before and after seminars for which I am teaching about teaching. This position allowed me to gain experience as a learner and a teacher educator simultaneously and aligns with the transition into educating future teachers. As this is a S-STEP, the students in the lab/seminar were not research participants; instead, I use the reflections and journal notes of my experiences and interactions with my students and transcriptions from my discussions with critical friends as data. There are several ethical concerns I need to pay attention to here, and these are described later in this chapter. Public health measures permitted instructors and students to learn at the university, however social distancing and face masks were required.

Data Collection Methods

Generating Data

Collecting data in a S-STEP largely depends on the context of the inquiry. According to Hamilton et al. (2020), researchers must develop trustworthiness by clearly and comprehensively articulating two critical contexts of the study, a) the context of the teaching practice and b) the context of the research conversation. First, the teacher education practice context is thought of as the foundation upon which the study is being built (i.e., the teacher educator's experiences, background, beliefs, values, geopolitical location, and relationships, which led them to initiate the S-STEP inquiry). Second, the context of research conversations requires a detailed introduction, organization, and communication of the purposes and focus of the study (i.e., providing a robust conceptual framework) (Hamilton et al., 2020). To address the contextual

obligation described by (Hamilton et al., 2020), I have expressed my context (see chapter 1) as a former physical education teacher and the challenges I faced, and the transitions that led me to initiate this S-STEP project regarding the influence of self-compassion on descriptions of teacher identity during the transition to teacher educator. Second, I have presented and explained the connections of identification and the challenges associated with the transition to teacher educator (see chapter 2). By using self-compassion as a potential positive influence on my descriptions of identity, this study addresses a gap in the literature regarding *how* one might manage challenges during this transition.

I capitalized on my employment as a teaching assistant to generate data within the context of my S-STEP research project (see contextual overview above). Personal journal entries from my experiences and interactions with students during seminars, conversations with critical friends, and artifacts such as lesson plans were used as primary data sources. In addition, multiple perspectives on the interpretations of the data were triangulated by critical friends to offer alternative interpretations of the data.

Journaling.

Throughout the research process, I wrote personal reflections in a journal that accounts for my experiences and interactions as a teaching assistant and graduate student/future teacher educator. I wrote a reflection after every class/seminar I instructed as a teaching assistant (typically 1-2 times per week) as well as making specific notes of meaningful moments or "critical incidents" (Kosnik, 2001) that I observed of the professor teaching the course. My reflections tended to be approximately 1-2 pages, although there was substantial variance depending on the depth of the insights the reflection afforded. In total, I wrote sixteen (16) journal entries throughout the study. The journal entries focused on the purpose of the study (i.e.,

how I am self-compassionate and how transitions in teacher identity influence teacher practice) but may also consider other affective responses to my daily challenges. I did not make any references to specific people (i.e. peers, colleagues, students) other than my critical friend, as they have the right to privacy. Any moments that involve significant others required me to talk about them in general terms (e.g. "a student said…").

Critical Friend.

Discussions with my critical friend occurred continuously throughout the research process. As mentioned, there is little guidance as to how often this should happen. However, I believe that this should be continual and ongoing (Samaras, 2010) as this aligns with my epistemological assumptions about the generation of new knowledge as a process. In my study, my critical friend and I met formally two (2) times for 41 and 43 minutes respectively. It should also be noted that we were in close contact throughout the semester and study period. Informal conversations often served as prompts for written reflections I made or as stimuli for topics in our formal conversations. Each formal conversation was recorded and transcribed via the Microsoft Team transcription tool directly after each meeting. This was performed for the purposes of reflection and interpretation. Other interactions with the critical friend that serve as data include responses they had to my journal reflections.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

As previously stated, S-STEP is primarily thought to be an iterative process whereby one goal is to act on the interpretations of the data to improve teaching practice. Within qualitative research, methodologies are generally "characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). S-STEP researchers analyze data

throughout the research process rather than only once the generating of data is complete. Thematic analysis (TA) was performed throughout this study which follows the six phases (and fifteen steps) of TA as highlighted by Braun et al. (2016).

First, I immersed myself in the data to gain an *intimate familiarization* by reading and rereading all data and making notes of items that struck me as meaningful. The second phase is *coding,* a systematic and thorough process that builds a foundation for theme development to move beyond analysis. My coding process involved identifying and labeling data of particular relevance to my research questions. After each month (e.g., September, October, November, December), I assigned labels to data excerpts that I felt had meaning and were relevant to my study. Each label consisted of a letter to correspond to the month and a number to organize the codes. For example, '(S77)' represents the seventy-seventh code in my September journal reflections (S being the code for a September data entry).

Once each month's data was organized and labeled, I then engaged in coding. Codes were assigned to data excerpts that represented meaning units. For instance, consider the following data excerpt to illustrate the processes of my coding.

- Excerpt: *This (academic writing) has been difficult for me, and I sometimes worry that if I feel less motivated or less passionate, then I might be going down the wrong path. Pretty much just over-analyzing every situation and second-guessing myself and my choices. (S77)*
    - Label: S77 (seventy seventh excerpt from my September journal)
    - Code: Challenges prompt Uncertainty

In each month, there were dozens of codes which were both interpretive and descriptive. For example, the following excerpt represents a descriptive code, in that the code applied described the data excerpt in fairly plain terms:

- Excerpt: *I was more nervous and felt underprepared. I should have taken more time to read over the lesson plans and make myself more prepared. (S63)*
    - Label: S63 (sixty third code in my September reflection)
    - Code: Anxiousness about Tim observing my lesson

Others were interpretive in that I interpreted a particular type of meaning from the data excerpt:

- Excerpt: *I think I also put more pressure on myself to do well as a TA because of my experience as a PE teacher. It makes me think the level of instruction should be better than a normal TA who just came out of undergrad (asking myself) .... "If a student takes my class/lab, will they be a better teacher as a result?" (S34)*
    - Label: S34 (thirty forth code in my September journal)
    - Code: Tension: high expectation of myself and common humanity

This process was repeated each month and led into phase three of the analysis process.

The third phase involved *a search for preliminary themes* (Braun et al., 2016). Once the data collection period was complete and codes were developed and labelled, I reviewed each code and interpreted connections and patterns between the codes and their relevance to my research questions in order to generate initial themes. For example, in the following excerpt (which is repeated from previous), I show how the excerpt labelled S77 was coded and then given a broader thematic interpretation:

- Excerpt: *This (academic writing) has been difficult for me, and I sometimes worry that if I feel less motivated or less passionate, then I might be going down the wrong path.*

Pretty much just over-analyzing every situation and second-guessing myself and my choices. (S77)

- Label: S77 (seventy seventh excerpt from my September journal)
- Code: Challenges prompt Uncertainty
- Sub-Theme: Challenges about Return to Academia
- Theme: Influences on Identification

For this example, academic writing was interpreted as one of the many challenges that influenced my transition to becoming a teacher educator. As such, the challenge of returning to academia played a large factor in how I identified personally and professionally as it made me second guess my choices to pursue my goal of becoming a teacher educator. It was, however, different than other challenges I faced. I engaged in the same process with other codes whereby I interpreted patterns, similarities and differences and their relevance to my research questions and theoretical underpinnings of self-compassion, identity, and transitions to becoming a teacher educator, which are all discussed in Chapter 4.

Phases four and five of thematic analysis require *refinement* and *naming of themes,* which involved returning to the preliminary themes to consolidate patterns between them, and the removal of several codes that were either irrelevant to the research questions or that could be collapsed to come under a broader theme. This process was repeated until I reached a point where I was satisfied that all themes came to represent *higher-level" patterns* (i.e. themes) in relation to my research questions (Braun et al., 2016, p. 198).

In my study, I engaged in these five phases as an individual but also met with my critical friend to discuss and co-construct, name and revise themes constructed from the data to emphasize the importance of multiple perspectives. Lastly, phase six involves *writing up* where

the researcher(s) compiles, develops and edits existing analytic writing and situates it within the overall report, usually evenly distributed across all sections of the resort (i.e., introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion (Braun et al., 2016).

By using thematic analysis, I adhered to my assumptions about constructing knowledge from the data as it allows for a systematic approach to analysis. The themes were constructed from this analysis and provide insight into ways my teacher practices informed and or/or aligned, or did not align, with my evolving teacher identity. Hamilton et al. (2020) stresses the importance of the collaborative nature of S-STEP as it aligns with and engages multiple perspectives and interpretations of social constructivist assumptions of the 'knowledge' generation. Braun et al. (2016) demonstrate the appropriateness of thematic analysis to study personal experiences about a specific issue or people's reported practices or behaviours. This method of analysis has been used in previous self-studies, which utilize coding and thematic analysis; this serves as a guide for the current proposed study (Bullock & Sator, 2018). In Bullock and Sator's (2018) research, data were transcribed and then individually coded, followed by a meeting to discuss their common themes and understanding of the data. This process is crucial to S-STEP as it gives meaningful dialogue with a critical friend, provided an audit trail, and establishes academic rigour in my study.

Turning Points.

From a social constructivist perspective, it is vital to articulate the relationship between the interpretation of the data to the positionality of the researcher and critical friend. This acknowledgement does not discredit nor validate the data or interpretations; instead, it provides context and acknowledges the individualized 'new knowledge' within the socio-cultural and geographical contexts on which this study was built. Therefore, any codes, themes, or

interpretations from a researcher are influenced by their positionality and must be considered. However, they may also resonate with the audience and their experiences of teacher identity and transitions within education. Throughout the interpretation process, codes and themes were centred around the frameworks embedded with my research (i.e., self-compassion and identity transitions to becoming a teacher educator) and the idea of *turning points*. The turning point in my study is discussed in further detail in Chapter 4 and 5. Bullock and Ritter (2011) describe turning points as meaningful data and themes created throughout the research process and "characterized as a situation that challenged the authors' prior understandings of a particular context or situation; these situations turned our thinking toward new perspectives" (p. 175). Engaging with meaningful turning points throughout the research process allows for making tacit knowledge explicit and involves four key tenets to guide this process for researchers to be aware:

1. affective elements in the data - an emotional response to the data,
2. framing a problem of practice - identifying a problem/issue of practice,
3. seeking assistance from the critical friend - engagement in dialogue with a critical friend for support/alternative interpretations, and
4. acting on the interpretations - awareness of the turning point and ensuing action while there is still time to improve practice.

My key turning point is discussed in Chapter 4 and was indirectly related to the purpose of the study but was also derived from new knowledge generated from the analysis process. In turn, this turning point informs my teacher practices throughout the study.

This process shows the iterative nature of S-STEP, which differentiates it from similar methodologies and commits the researcher to improve their understanding of the complexities of teacher education practice. By utilizing turning points as an analytical tool alongside a more

formal analysis method (i.e. thematic analysis), data is systematically organized, analyzed, transcribed, coded, co-create themes, and constructed throughout the research process. Thus, outlining a systematic and transparent research process that provides a clear audit trail to highlight questions, assumptions, and interpretations of professional practice to increase research integrity and reader trust (Samaras, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

An application was made to the Brock University Research Ethics Board using the clearance form they require. Upon reading the application, I was notified that the project would not need formal ethics clearance because the data was only being generated by me and my critical friend (and no other participants). Despite not requiring formal clearance, it is worth acknowledging several ethical considerations that were kept in mind during the research.

There was a power dynamic that existed between me and my critical friend (i.e. Tim) because he was also my thesis supervisor. Although neither of us felt there was a risk of coercion to participate, it was possible that some interactions relating to the study of teaching practice may have brought forth issues related to the power dynamics in the relationship. Tim has acted as critical friend in many examples of this type of research, including writing a key methodological article on managing the critical friend relationship (Fletcher et al., 2016). And so, while there were risks, we felt these were minimized due to Tim's experience in these types of interactive relationships and sensitivity to the power dynamics inherent in them. At the same time, we made sure to be aware of and sensitive to these issues throughout data collection, and Tim encouraged me to write openly about issues of tension in our critical friendship whenever they arose. Further, both Tim and I respected each other's right to withdraw (at any time, and without loss of any benefits we were entitled to) from the project.

No written or audio recording of students were involved, thus students' voices or images were not captured in any way. Personal interactions I had with students were recorded in my reflective diaries, but I made sure that any interactions were documented in a very general sense, and no personal identifiers were recorded. An example of an entry in my reflective journal based on an interaction was: "They seem to appreciate when instructors admit faults and include them in the problem solving process."

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explored the ontological and epistemological assumptions that guide this proposed S-STEP research. Guided by these assumptions and my context, my research attempts to address the purpose of the study outlined in Chapter 1. Through the iterative, reflective, and action-based features of S-STEP and the guidelines outlined by LaBoskey (2004), this study seeks to examine and articulate deeper understandings and interconnectedness of teacher identity, teacher practices, and influence self-compassion during a transition to teacher educator. Adhering to the Laboskey (2004) guidelines provided a clear path for transparency (audit trail), vulnerability, and communication of findings which, in turn, increased research integrity and, therefore, increases reader trust. By using self-compassion as a framework and engaging with S-STEP as a methodology, and my own lived experience during transitions as context, this study provides an opportunity to contribute to existing academic literature and allow others to contrast or resonate their own experiences with my own. This research may add to several bodies of literature, including those that concern becoming a teacher educator, self-compassion, and the application of S-STEP methodology to inform understandings of teacher education practice.

CHAPTER 4: Analysis & Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of the analyzed data. The chapter consists of three main sections. In the first section, I provide contextual information about my experiences and interactions during the initial months of my Master's degree program, which led into my second year and the formal data collection period. The information provided about my experiences during this time highlights pertinent interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges I encountered as I transitioned from a full-time classroom teacher to an employed teaching assistant and Masters' student; ultimately, this was the beginning of how I formally began to focus on how I practiced self-compassion during periods of transition. The second section highlights internal and external influences on my identification processes and the challenges I faced during my return to higher education. Namely, differentiating pedagogy, my return to academia as a student and teaching assistant, and how I internalized my interactions and experiences throughout my transition. These challenges prompted a turning point in the study (Bullock & Ritter, 2011) and a key development during my ongoing transition to becoming a teacher educator; that of product versus process. This development became a conceptual tool throughout the study: acknowledging the prevalence and problematic nature of adopting a product oriented-mindset versus process-oriented mindset during the personal and professional transitions I was experiencing. Throughout the third section, I highlight *when* I needed to practice self-compassion, pinpointing personal challenges by engaging in reflective practice; and *how* I practiced self-compassion, self-talk, positive cognitive reframing, and engaging with supportive others. I also outlined the role of S-STEP in becoming self-compassionate during the ongoing transition of becoming a teacher educator.

Background

When I began my Master's program, I returned to the university where I completed my undergraduate degree. This came with the recognition of familiar sights and routines. However, I quickly began to see how these familiarities were being experienced through a different lens than before. I was still a student, but upon my return, I had several years of professional teaching experience and I was required to work as a teaching assistant while studying for my Master's degree. As outlined in Chapter 1, I taught physical education and science internationally for five years. During this time, I gained practical experience teaching children in a classroom, formed meaningful relationships with colleagues, and learned about the influence of different social and cultural perspectives on teaching and learning. My decision to stop teaching in schools meant that, in some ways, I sacrificed what I had learned and earned (in terms of experience and seniority) as a classroom teacher. Ultimately, my return to the role of a student meant that my identity was evolving once again. As a result, I was no longer a teacher who assigned work to students, I was becoming a student completing assessments that were assigned to me.

In the initial stages of my transition from being a classroom teacher to a Master's student, I felt both excitement and anxiousness. I was excited because I was undertaking a new adventure and challenge with the goal of becoming someone who teaches teachers how to teach. I felt anxious because of the length of the program, I questioned my capabilities to complete the program, and I was apprehensive because I was older than most of my peers.

Recognizing my emotional responses to these issues made me question how people might perceive my presence in the program. I wrote about such feelings in a reflective journal entry after reviewing all my data from the study: *"going from being a fully permanent teacher back to*

a student in the same university I did my undergraduate studies in…seemed like a step backwards" (J02). What stands out from this quote is that even though I had five years of professional experience, I struggled to reconcile the tension of once again becoming a student and living with this way of identifying. In particular, when I performed the roles associated with the position of teaching assistant that was a required component of the master's program, I had exactly the same label as those I was teaching: student. I had enrolled in the Master's program fully aware I was becoming a student again, but for some reason, this label seemed to take away from my teaching experience; that part of my professional identity that I had worked hard to develop in the five years prior to enrolling. Acknowledging the disparity between my roles and duties as a teaching assistant, many of which resembled a teacher educator, yet identifying with the title of teaching assistant and student, became tenuous and led to an initial understanding of when and why I may need to be self-compassionate.

My decision to teach in schools internationally led me to gain knowledge from my experiences and interactions throughout my teaching career. As a teaching assistant, I drew from these experiences and wanted to apply what I had learned from my time as a classroom teacher to my new position. In the school classroom, I was exposed to various situations with teachers, students, parents and administration, which gave me an insider perspective of different aspects of education. For example, I learned the value of forming positive professional relationships with students and colleagues and building community in our classroom. Similarly, I experienced difficulties within education systems that prioritize achieving high grades instead of development, progression and learning. Throughout the first few months of taking on a teaching assistant role, there were many times that I was unsure how to transfer my knowledge and experiences in a classroom setting where I taught young people to a higher education institution

where I would teach adults about teaching and learning in physical education. While my classroom teaching experience gave me some confidence knowing that I had a certain amount of credibility due to my professional experience, I acknowledged that teaching children in a classroom is different from teaching adults in universities. This acknowledgement ultimately led me to have an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty about the transferability of experiences in a classroom, and I questioned whether I would be knowledgeable and experienced enough to teach future teachers. Drawing from Sachs' (2005) argument that professional identities form the connection between the teacher and the teacher practices, my concern was that my practices may suffer or may not reflect my beliefs due to not having an established identity as a teacher educator.

What stands out to me as I reflect upon this section are the tensions I faced in the ways I identified personally and professionally during the transitions I was experiencing. Throughout my analysis, it was clear that the influences on my personal and professional identification stood out as salient factors that contributed to my understanding of when, why, and how to be self-compassionate. In the following sections, I discuss several influences on my identification, specifically: differentiating pedagogy, returning to academia, and how I perceived the ways that others perceived me.

Influences on Identification

Differentiating Pedagogy

As I transitioned to my role as a teaching assistant, where I was typically responsible for running at least one 2-hour class per week with undergraduate students, I was initially unsure how to adapt my pedagogy in ways that acknowledged the differences between young students in

a classroom and adults in higher education. My feelings were similar to those of Fletcher and Casey (2014), who identified challenges in their transitional experiences as they struggled to differentiate pedagogy between the children they once taught and the adults they were teaching in universities. The tension in how I wrestled with ways to differentiate the pedagogies of teaching children and teaching adults was evident throughout the data and proved salient enough for me to take notice of this as a particular source of stress. For the purposes of this research, how to differentiate pedagogy from that which is suitable for higher education prompted me to engage in self-compassion.

While attempting to identify how I was self-compassionate during the early part of my development as a teacher educator, I recognized that I tried to share my stressors with students. To do this, I was seeking to make explicit the notion of common humanity, framed as me learning alongside my students. In a September reflection, I wrote, *"I also tried to remind myself that this was the first lab, I'm going to make mistakes (I should explain this to them) and that we'll all get better together" (S35).* In his role as a critical friend, Tim responded to this comment where I described wanting to learn and grow with the students to help them get "better" at teaching PE. He wrote, *"What do you mean by better here? More effective? Or have a better understanding of teaching? Or something else? This could help you to think about what you're really trying to get them to do and become better at."* (September 20) Our dialogue prompted two acknowledgements. First, I was starting to show evidence of self-compassion by stating that I was not isolated in my experiences (common humanity). Second, I was still unsure how to bridge the gap between my experiences as a classroom teacher and my new roles as a novice teacher educator.

When teaching students in the university program, I felt prepared to offer my experiences as a classroom teacher as a point of reference for my students to consider but less confident about connecting my experiences with existing literature in physical education research. In other words, I struggled to connect my practices with theoretical justifications and/or explanations. For example, I was excited that my students asked me to talk about my experiences as an international teacher. However, I was constantly worried that students would not view me as a "qualified" instructor at the university level. Instead, I worried that they might regard me as someone who, for one reason or another, did not "make it" as a classroom teacher and thus had returned to university. I managed this insecurity by communicating the truth about my experiences and being honest about making mistakes. For example, midway through their semester, students completed partner teaching activities in our lab. As they were inexperienced in this role, I attempted to ease the pressure and anxiousness by communicating how, despite my teaching experiences, I was also nervous about being in front of students and that it is normal. In some informal feedback I had requested from students in our first lab, several expressed that, to my surprise, they appreciated my honesty and open approach to teaching and learning. Despite the positive feedback, I still questioned what they had learned about teaching physical education from this lesson.

> *...It still makes me feel like the way I instruct, or how I carry myself, or what they get out of the experience in my lab should be better. This seems to be one of the main areas I try to focus on when teaching students in university, [asking myself] "are they getting their money's worth" (S33)*

The excerpt above illustrates my desire for students to gain value from participating in my lesson but also highlights a tendency that I had to internalize external influences. That is, I

tended to take to heart my interpretation of others' opinions of me. While this may be a common and relatively innocent tendency, Jenkins (2008) suggests that when internal responses to external influences do not align, this can lead to tensions in the identification process. Although I had numerous years of classroom teaching experience that others seemed to value, *I* was still uncertain of my capabilities during my transition to becoming a teacher of teachers.

My return to in-person learning evoked positive and negative internal responses from external influence. While receiving positive reinforcement and beginning to develop rapport with students prompted a pleasant feeling of being in the university classroom and a sense of belonging as a teacher educator, I struggled in other aspects of my transition, particularly with academic writing and applying theoretical knowledge. For example, for the purposes of my thesis research, I was experiencing some uncertainty about applying self-compassion as the research topic. For instance, although I understood the concept of self-compassion through reviewing the research, I was still less aware of what self-compassionate practices worked for me during my transition and when I needed to practice self-compassion. In the next section, I outline my experiences of my return to academic writing, my responses to my challenges of identification, and how I began to identify trends in how I practiced self-compassion.

Returning to Academia

My struggles with how to apply theoretical knowledge of teaching to my teaching practices carried over to other aspects of academic work (or the work of teacher educators). Upon returning to academia, I learned very quickly that I was out of practice with the necessary detail and rigour of academic writing to achieve my academic goals. For example, as a result of scoring poorly on one of my first assignments, I became quite discouraged and frustrated at the pace and success (or lack thereof) of my transition back to the role of a student. Exacerbating

these frustrations, I was still not fully aware of how I practiced self-compassion. This was important for the research I was conducting and for how I dealt with challenges I faced in my daily life, including those related specifically to teaching practice. My lack of understanding of how to connect the theory of self-compassion with the practice of self-compassion left me repeating behaviours from my past. When I struggled to progress on assignments or received a poor grade, I overthought and overanalyzed each insecurity I experienced. According to Neff (2003b), mindfulness is to hold one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying those feelings. In this way, I was not engaging in the types of mindful actions that Neff (2003b) recognizes. It was clear that being challenged by academic writing during my transition left me to over-analyze each situation, which often resulted in constructing a 'worst-case scenario' in my mind. I was quite hard on myself if I fell short of my expectations. At points, I even started to question my decision to return to university to pursue my revised career goals. In September, I reflected in my journal:

> *This (academic writing) has been difficult for me and I sometimes worry that if I feel less motivated or less passionate, then I might be going down the wrong path. Pretty much just over-analyzing every situation and second-guessing myself and my choices. (S77)*

Although research and academic writing are not inherently required to take on the role or identify as a teacher educator, the notion of being challenged by new roles and tasks as a novice teacher educator has been well-documented in recent literature. For example, Izadinia (2014) expressed feelings of being deskilled, exposed, vulnerable, and marginalized due to the challenges she faced during her transition to becoming a teacher educator. By questioning my path, I wondered if my identity would ever evolve into that of a teacher educator. To combat my

negative feelings, I dedicated more time and effort to my studies. I believed that this behaviour would somehow be linked to a renewed sense of belonging in the program and with the position of teacher educator. Conversely, if I felt my effort was insufficient, my sense of belonging suffered. I reflected on this at the end of the data collection period:

> *I felt, and to some degree, still feel like I don't deserve to be where I am. Like I am an imposter amongst worthy peers. Even during my second year of my master's, I found it difficult to justify my position because I hear of people working incredibly hard to achieve their goals. (J01)*

The data excerpt above highlights that my identity and sense of belonging were, at the very least, related to my perceptions of the effort levels put forth by myself and others. Educational psychologists such as Nicholls (1989) might suggest that this feeling can be explained by the concept of ego-orientation, where success and ability are defined by comparison with others rather than success with the task itself. The journal entry also highlights my willingness to challenge my own decision to enroll in the program if I believed that others felt my efforts were insufficient (i.e. receiving what I felt was a poor grade) or if I did not exceed my perceptions of the efforts of my peers.

While taking courses in the first year of the program and trying to establish a sense of belonging within academia, I attempted to determine where I ranked academically within my cohort. Early in the semester, my perception was that I was the only one who did not do well, as many of us did not talk about the grades we achieved. In terms of being self-compassionate, my sense of common humanity did not appear to be present if I scored poorly on an assignment, nor did my ability to practice mindfulness by not over-identifying with negative thoughts. Common humanity and mindfulness are two practices that, according to self-compassion theory, could

have offered me the means to work through these situations and circumstances in ways that supported rather than hindered my development (Neff, 2003b). Instead, in the absence of these practices, I became frustrated and isolated in my feelings about my performance and sense of belonging. Only later did I discover that almost everyone in my seminar group scored poorly on the first assignments. This understanding provided a sense of relief that I was not isolated in my feelings, but also illustrated my tendency to take on a 'worst-case scenario' mindset.

Given my overwhelming sense of negative experiences and feelings that some of these situations generated, it was quite easy for me to conclude, at that time, that I did not practice self-compassion. However, through analyzing my data, I began to recognize patterns and came to see how I had previously practiced (or did not practice) self-compassion in tacit ways. For example, in my reflections, I could see how I was aware of certain feelings during challenging situations, such as the feeling of being exposed as an impostor in my return to academic writing. As illustrated in the excerpt below, small comments or personal reminders suggest that I used self-talk to mitigate my negative thoughts or harsh self-criticisms during adverse situations – self-talk being an essential practice in being self-compassionate. For example, when I discussed my challenges in academic writing with Tim:

> …I had to be a lot more kind to myself, [saying] *"you haven't done this in a long time. You can't be expected to be good at research and academic writing even though you have certain goals… like give yourself a break."* (October 1)

The analytic process helped me acknowledge several times when I was intentionally using self-compassion and in ways (and at times) that were appropriate. For instance, although the context of my stress varied, practicing audible positive self-talk became a means to be more

positive towards myself during adverse situations, particularly when I took on a negative perception of others' perceptions of me, the roles I carried out, and the title I held.

The idea of roles and titles was omnipresent throughout my data. Roles and titles (or labels) are strong influences on identification (Jenkins, 2008). In the next section, I explore roles and titles embedded within my transition that influenced my identification process. In particular, my early desire to attain the title of teacher educator led to a critical insight during my transition from teacher to teacher educator and represented a turning point in the study.

Roles and Titles

At the beginning of the first year of my program, I wrote an entry in my journal about the new direction my career was taking due to my decision to return to higher education. I wrote:

> *To me, going down this path (MA + Ph.D.) checks a lot of these boxes and I'm really enjoying working with the students in this setting. I think once I start looking/researching different areas within PE and sport, I may expand my interests that I don't currently have at the moment. Tim has also mentioned opportunities to potentially do a Ph.D. with him and work in the meaningful PE space.…this is an amazing opportunity that opens a lot of doors and helps me accomplish some of the goals I have for myself in a career (i.e., Positive impact, Meaningful contribution, Financially independent, Enjoyment/Happiness). (S79)*

While the entry above may be interpreted simply as someone sharing their professional goals, it also hints at my desire to, possibly, arrive at the destination before fully engaging with the journey necessary to get there. For me, the destination was obtaining the title of teacher educator, but this may omit the journey of *becoming a teacher educator.* In his role as a critical friend, it was Tim who made this observation. He read my reflective journal when I asked him

to and interpreted aspects of my September journal entry that refer to my desire to attain the title of teacher educator and/or arrive at tangible markers of success during the transition from classroom teacher to teacher educator. He commented:

> *I'm not sure whether I'm on the right track or not with this, so don't worry if it doesn't make sense or if I have it wrong. I am thinking about the product over process, or perhaps more specifically, journey vs destination. E.g., Do you find yourself wanting to get to the destination which might get in the way of enjoying the journey? Or am I off track? I find that the most enjoyable part of my job is still the journey; however, in many ways, I realize that I may have landed at the destination that I was journeying toward. And so now it is about exploring the destination (October 1).*

After reading this comment and contemplating its potential gravity, I revisited my previous journal entries. I saw many instances where I expressed the desire, want, or hope to arrive at an outcome without paying particular attention to the importance of the processes. For example, at the very start of the term in September, I reflected on my ability to build rapport with students, and, although I knew it would take time, I still expressed the desire to skip ahead to the moment when we already built that rapport:

> *I'm a bit nervous to meet the students and introduce myself because I worry sometimes about how I'm perceived by others, especially in an academic setting. I feel like audiences (students) are soaking in as much information about you as they can so making a good first impression is important to me. The other side of me is thinking that it sometimes takes time to build relationships with the students and gain their trust. I'm hoping this will come sooner rather than later because it helps*

me relax a bit and let the teaching/teaching about teaching come a bit more naturally. (S10)

During our critical friend meeting, Tim and I discussed this conceptual development – the idea of process-product and journey-destination. It denoted an important conceptual shift in my study, but also personally and professionally for me. Specifically, Tim noticed that my reflections noted an implicit focus on the products (e.g., obtaining a degree, gaining a new title) over the processes (the skills and experience engaged in and acquired) during my transition to becoming a teacher educator. The idea of product versus process also became an important conceptual tool in how I understood how I practiced self-compassion and my experiences during my transition to becoming a teacher educator. The process-product (or journey-destination) turning point also altered the focus of future journal entries after that critical incident as I began to discuss the challenges I experienced in my program and in my roles and title as a teaching assistant and novice teacher educator, and student.

As a result of our conversation about my process versus product mindset, the tension between titles and roles was a consistent theme that was interpreted from the analysis of my reflections. Although the title of teacher educator and teaching assistant is different, my desire to compare the roles of a teacher educator (particularly one who also has the title of professor) and the title of a teaching assistant who works alongside an established teacher educator was exacerbated by my focus on the product of my efforts over the processes of my experiences.

From my experience in the program to that point, I was fortunate to be a teaching assistant in multiple courses in the concurrent physical education program. My roles within this position allowed me to teach in a practical setting where students would learn about learning and learn about teaching (Loughran, 2006) in a physical education context. For example, in one

fourth-year course, we discussed content development, how to align content to curriculum, and classroom organization. In a third-year course, we explored movement activities and curriculum related to specific age groups (i.e., primary/junior, junior/intermediate, intermediate/ senior). Although my weekly duties did not involve designing lectures or labs, my roles in labs resembled what I consider a "typical" teacher educator in that I was responsible for enacting a lesson plan, instructing and modifying tasks, and assessing students' learning. Similarly, I was responsible for marking, grading and providing feedback to students on their presentations and assignments. Put simply, my role as a teaching assistant coincided with many of the teaching roles of a professor in this context. Further, the interpersonal aspects of being an instructor of these courses provided me with a similar experience to a professor: I was able to form professional relationships with students in my labs, students asked me for feedback and advice (career and personal), I was responsible for managing any debates or disagreements, and I collectively promoted critical dialogue between the students in the lab.

Although there were many similarities between my roles as a teaching assistant and a teacher educator who is also a professor, the titles highlight the differences (over the similarities). Moreover, my peers (in the graduate program) and I held the same title – teaching assistant – yet many communicated that their only role was to grade assignments. While this disparity was not always the case, when I found evidence of teaching assistants having different roles yet holding the same titles as me, I was concerned that I would be perceived as 'only' a teaching assistant; this may also mean the loss of my identity as a teacher, which I had worked hard to cultivate over five years. Furthermore, the title of a teaching assistant is also synonymous with the title of a student, further undermining the roles performed by some teaching assistants.

During a meeting, Tim and I discussed the differences between my roles as a teaching assistant and the title of a teaching assistant. His suggestion to personally redefine my title as a 'teacher of teachers' challenged my perception of the title I held and directed my attention to focus more on what I do as a teaching assistant. I wrote about this issue in my reflective journal:

> *Both Tim and I feel that this may lead me to feel differently about my role than other MA students straight out of their undergrads. It may also have a different reaction to the students that I teach. For example, students that I teach may feel differently about my role as a TA because of my experience as a teacher or being that I am older than most TAs. This may lead them to trust/value what I say more than others. Conversely, it may not. These labels and titles often hold weight or value for some teachers or perhaps not. Instead of focusing on titles, Tim suggested that I may try to refer to this position (TA) as being a teacher of (future) teachers rather than being 'just' a TA.* (S58)

I was able to contextualize my thoughts and gain multiple perspectives on this tension, and through the help of my critical friend, I was able to see past the title I held and focus on the process of becoming a teacher educator. By engaging with an adaptive coping strategy, I took a proactive approach to manage challenges rather than passively avoiding the stressor. Thus, aligning my coping practices with the conceptual underpinnings of self-compassion and shared humanity (Costa & Pinto-Gouveia, 2013).

The concept of product versus process and the tension between my roles and titles became an important tool in how to contextualize my experiences and interactions as it denoted an important shift in the study. However, the way I practiced self-compassion during challenging situations such as those that arose from recognizing the tensions I was experiencing was still less

explicit. In the next section, I outline how my product mindset was pervasive in how I believed others perceived me – particularly my peers, students, and those who already held the title of teacher educator. These external influences on identification further highlight a tension in my identification processes while becoming a teacher educator.

Others' Perceptions of Me

Without having explicit knowledge of my product-oriented mindset early on in my transitory experience, the discrepancy between the titles I held as teaching assistant and student and the roles I carried out within those titles became a source of tension in my transition. Although this tension manifested itself in a variety of situations, it influenced how I believed others perceived me as a novice teacher educator, teaching assistant and student.

In a reflection I made in September of the second year of my program (and the beginning of the formal part of my data collection), I wrote about speaking in front of students in person for the first time in two years. Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent public health measures, courses were conducted online via Microsoft Teams in the first year of my Master's program. In those moments of moving back to face-to-face instruction, I felt nervous and worried I would make mistakes and present a poor first impression to my students. I identified these feelings by recognizing my physiological responses to being in front of students again during the first lecture. I wrote:

> *I was reflecting on the nervous jitters I get before I start speaking with/to new students in a class. I get really nervous and worry I'll stutter or say something that doesn't make sense. I try really hard to calm my breathing… it's normal for me (and probably others) to get nervous before speaking in front of new people. Still, I can tell when I'm getting nervous (increased heart rate, sweaty palms). (S15)*

My response to speaking in front of students for the first time reflects my belief in the importance of making a good first impression and being viewed as someone worthy of holding the title of teacher educator. It also highlights how I perceived the importance of my role and the positive or negative impact my teaching practices may have on my student's future careers as teachers. Having completed a teacher education program and understanding the impact teacher educators can have on students, I put pressure on myself to bring more value to their experiences in my lab compared to other TAs:

> *I think I also put more pressure on myself to do well as a TA because of my experience as a PE teacher. It makes me think the level of instruction should be better than a normal TA who just came out of undergrad (asking myself) .... "If a student takes my class/lab, will they be a better teacher as a result?" (S34)*

Tim recognized that my journal entry reflected high expectations from within rather than from external sources. We discussed this topic in our critical friend meeting. Tim said:

> *When I was reading through, I must admit that I thought, well, you have been quite hard on yourself or…maybe not hard on yourself. You have very high expectations of yourself. There's nothing wrong with that, but when those expectations become problematic or challenging, then of course that becomes problematic…So what's interesting for me is that it's sort of a contrast between the expectations that you have on yourself and you are quite willing to beat yourself up a little bit, but as you just said, most of those feelings are coming from within rather than from the outside… (October 15)*

Tim recognized that I tended to 'beat myself up' from within when I faced challenges and that there seemed to be few instances where problems, criticism or adversity were being applied from

external influences. His observation also highlights my lack of self-kindness during these moments, and although I was able to recognize stressful or challenging situations via physiological responses, as mentioned above, practicing self-compassion (i.e., mindfulness, self-kindness and common humanity) was still difficult. However, this conversation unearthed an awareness of *when* I needed to be self-compassionate or when I could recognize triggers or responses that suggested that self-compassion might help me through adverse situations. Thus, recognizing when I tended to beat myself up became a priority to uncover and explore *how* I practiced self-compassion during these times. For example, due to my desire to compare myself with others, I became concerned with how gatekeepers, such as supervisors, committee members, and other teacher educators – people in positions of authority -- perceived me.

Perceptions of How People of Authority Perceived Me

In the initial phases of my study, my sense of belonging relied heavily on my interpretations of others' perceptions of me. Internally, when I doubted my abilities, particularly in academic writing, I questioned whether those in positions of authority in academic writing (i.e. my professors and supervisor) would also doubt me and reject my presence in the spaces they occupied. Further, because I had more teaching experience than other TAs, I felt I should be "better" at performing the duties under that title. For these reasons, understanding the views that people in positions of authority had of me as a Master's student, potential Ph.D. candidate, and a future teacher educator became important to me. During these times, my sense of belonging as a future teacher educator was challenged when I questioned how other authority figures might identify me: what were they thinking or saying about me, my abilities and my experiences? In one example, although I felt more confident when teaching in labs, I still felt nervous if Tim observed my teaching. My self-imposed pressure to gain acceptance from authorities led me to

feel nervous and underprepared in one lab. I wrote, "*I was more nervous and felt underprepared. I should have taken more time to read over the lesson plans and make myself more prepared."* (S63). Tim commented on this reflection by asking, "*Purely because I was in there? Or would you have felt as underprepared if I wasn't there?" (October 1)*. Tim acknowledged that, whether he likes it or not, his presence had the ability to influence me and others in my position by saying: *"Again, this relates to the external parts of identification and my authority (whether I like it or not) will influence how you identify yourself." (October 1)*

While someone in a position of authority has the potential to influence one's sense of belonging, it should be noted that their influence could be both positive and negative. Tim's presence made me feel pressured to perform and although the feeling he evoked from me was unintentional, it highlights the unintended influence that authority figures can have over how others identify themselves. Likewise, I also felt that Tim had a unique way of helping build my confidence as a novice teacher educator and building trust between supervisor and student. Tim became a positive external influence as a supervisor, mentor and critical friend during the transition. While I was aware that his authority might influence how I identified, equally, he played an important role in building my sense of belonging as a novice teacher educator. For example, Tim expressed confidence in my prior teaching experience and allowed me to instruct multiple labs in my role as a teaching assistant. He communicated that he felt comfortable that I would excel with this responsibility where he would typically only permit graduate students to grade assignments in their roles. I acknowledged this in the following journal entry:

> *He (Tim) has also been quite good for my confidence in myself when it comes to teaching. He's allowed me to teach his labs which shows me that he trusts in my ability and has confidence in me to do a good job. (S38)*

Tim also improved my sense of belonging by providing my name if opportunities arose (for example, to take on additional teaching assistant roles). Lastly, he was supportive of my desire to continue studying, and I applied for a doctoral degree with him as my supervisor.

> *Another great piece of news was that Tim asked if I would be interested in being an instructor for 3P00 (individual and dual games). Even though it might not happen, I was surprised that this opportunity may even be possible during my Master's and that he thought I would be suitable for the position. Tim is quite good at supporting me in my learning but I've been finding out more and more, he's quite good at supporting me through opportunities. I think seeing evidence of trust and confidence from someone else in my abilities also helps me feel more like I belong in this position. (O56)*

As a key gatekeeper and figure of authority (to me), having a thoughtful and considerate supervisor, mentor, and critical friend played a positive role that built trust and confidence between us and in turn, positively influenced my transition as a teacher educator and in my teaching identity.

Throughout the process of this study and during my transition, there were times when I doubted my capacity to successfully navigate the many challenges of becoming, and subsequently, doubted whether an authority figure would want to work with me in this context as well. At one particular moment in November, when I doubted some of my abilities as a teacher educator, I reflected on my inner conflict and found myself challenging the original perceptions that I had of some authority figures. During this scenario, I found myself intentionally practicing self-compassion by using self-talk:

> *I think using self-compassion in this situation means that I'm being less negative towards myself and telling myself that there is a reason why someone wanted to work with me, why I was accepted into the program, am given the chance to teach labs, and potentially do a Ph.D. afterwards. (N09)*

During such moments, I began to recognize how I practiced self-kindness. Specifically, I engaged in self-talk to remind myself that authority figures like Tim would not be willing to provide additional opportunities if they did not believe I was capable. Reframing my mindset positively helped mitigate the 'worst-case scenario' mindset described earlier in the Chapter. In addition to obvious gatekeepers such as supervisors holding positions of authority in influencing my identity, students also had some authority in shaping how I identified one way or another as a teacher educator.

Perceptions of How Students Perceived Me

My perceptions of how students perceived me were a consequential influence on my identification process. In particular, I often over-analyzed my interactions with students to assess their perceptions of me as a teacher educator. Neff (2003b) would suggest I was not being mindful in these situations. For example, although I held the title of teaching assistant and student, I wanted students to view me as an experienced and knowledgeable 'expert.' I felt that by making mistakes or not aligning my beliefs and teaching practices, my students would think less of me. I reflected on an example of a challenging encounter with a student during the first few weeks of being a teaching assistant in person:

> *One student in my lab appeared to laugh under their breath [in response to a comment I made], and it made me feel like I was getting laughed at. It took me a while to reflect on it and think if there might have been another reason for that.*

> *Either way, it didn't make me feel good. It made me feel like they didn't know what I was talking about, which is one of the things I dread as an educator. (O34)*

Pinpointing a contentious moment prompted me to engage in further reflection to contextualize and reframe the situation. This process promoted a more positive response rather than that of overthinking and dwelling. For example, the following excerpt describes how I used self-talk and attempted to positively reframe the situation when I had an unpleasant interaction with a student in class:

> *I had to use self-compassion in this experience by trying not to dwell on the experience and not letting it negatively affect me. I use self-talk (saying to myself) "it's fine, don't worry about it" or "it's not a big deal" and be more kind to myself rather than saying, "this student just doesn't like you." Positively reframing this situation sounded like me telling myself that it might not have been what I thought, and even if this student was laughing at you, so what? Does that change me as a person? Most likely not. (O43)*

Although this type of interpersonal challenge did not occur often, when it did happen, I felt my identification as a teacher educator – particularly one who might be considered a "good" teacher educator -- suffered. In these moments, I began to understand how I engaged in self-compassion and recognized the importance of the processes of my transition. I was able to contextualize different situations and mitigate a worst-case scenario that would have likely developed in my mind; or at least would have developed in the past. Allowing myself the time and space to identify when I need to be self-compassionate and applying my self-compassionate behaviours also allowed me to give myself the same allowances that I often provided to my students (i.e., to be kind to themselves during adversity, but also embrace challenges as a learning opportunity).

My experiences as a novice teacher educator varied due to the numerous roles within my titles and contexts, and consequently, the areas I attempted to understand where self-compassion was needed, also varied. Conversely, and as might be expected, when I experienced positive moments where I felt students appreciated a lesson, I felt more like I was embodying the qualities of a teacher educator both in terms of my identity and the tasks I was performing in the role. In November, I wrote:

> *The positive comments did make me feel like I was doing a good job (in their eyes) and reinforced my abilities as a TE and therefore, my evolving identity as a teacher educator. So for the less tangible outcomes involved with becoming a teacher educator or at least the title of a teacher educator, having small but palpable moments of reassurance (from students, professors, colleagues) helps solidify or helps me feel more like a teacher educator. (N15)*

When taken together, throughout this research, I came to see that my sense of belonging as a teacher educator relied heavily on how I felt others perceived and identified me as a teacher educator. What is important to acknowledge is that I was taking on an active role in these perceptions. That is, I had little to no evidence of people around me feeling one way or another, it was purely my interpretations of their perceptions and perspectives. Stryker et al. (2000) suggest that we desire to classify, categorize, and label people based on inclusion or exclusion criteria. In my situation, my age and professional experience set me apart from my peers, even though I was in the same program and held the same titles as my peers. I felt these differences should have put me on a different (and arguably more assured) path to success, but I questioned myself at every encounter. In turn, I expressed frustrations, doubts, nervousness, or disappointment during my transition. While being mindful of these feelings and emotions led

me to be more aware of their presence, understanding how I could and should become kind to myself took reflection and assistance from others. In essence, being self-compassionate was, for me, easier with others.

The Role of Others in Becoming a Teacher Educator and Becoming Self-compassionate

From the onset of my Master's program and throughout my S-STEP, the external influences on my identity of becoming a teacher educator and practicing self-compassion were critical to any perceptions of success or failure during the transition. For me, external influences were important in several ways and carried the potential to be a positive influence on my transition or to be detrimental to my sense of belonging. Such was the case with some negative interactions and misunderstandings with students. Conversely, others, particularly in the case of my supervisor, Tim, have helped to provide a positive sense of confidence and sense of belonging. Likewise, I have been quite fortunate that my partner has also been supportive throughout my transition by offering her perspective on my thoughts and feelings about what I experienced and my interactions through this transition.

The excerpt below highlights a challenging situation with a student that confronted me publicly about an oversight in our lab. I reflected on a conversation I had with my partner about this:

> *I was speaking with my partner [girlfriend] about what happened in the lab and she said I could have reacted a few different ways to this. One, how I reacted, and second, I could have used an approach that may have broken down relationships and broken some trust between me and the student. In the way I reacted to the student calling me out, I did two things. First, I emphasized that people make mistakes and that owning up to them is a good thing. Second, I showed them what*

> *an appropriate reaction to conflict between a teacher and a student might look like. Instead of preaching a 'student-centred' or 'holistic' approach to teaching and losing my mind on a student that challenged me, and therefore, not practicing what I preach, I feel like I aligned my practices with my views on teaching. None of this was easy because I definitely wanted to snap back at the student and call them out for being rude. Instead, calmly (or seemingly calm) addressing the mistake, making an apology for the oversight, and moving on (N62).*

This situation highlights an interaction that I had with my partner about an occurrence in my class with a student. In this situation, my support system positively influenced how I navigated this interpersonal challenge. By discussing this situation with a person whom I trust, this excerpt illustrates the benefit that seeking multiple perspectives on a challenging situation may serve for me to navigate and reframe those situations. In turn, engaging with others helped mitigate the risk of not practicing self-compassion and provided an avenue to promote self-compassionate behaviours, such as common humanity and positive reframing. In one reflection I made later in the data collection period, I observed that it was important to acknowledge the ways a support system helped avoid negative behaviours and reinforce good habits of self-compassion.

> *It does not seem like I would be able to be near as self-compassionate without a strong supportive supervisor or personal relationships that remind me every now and again (to be self-compassionate) Without these people, I worry that I would be left to my own devices where my mind and resilience may fade (D44)*

In the absence of a positive support network, I acknowledged that my self-compassion practices could deteriorate. Having supportive others during my transition helped me gain multiple

perspectives on my thoughts, concerns, and/or challenges. The following is a journal entry towards the end of my study:

> *I believe that there are times when being self-compassionate is easier than others. For instance, when I have a perceived safety net and support system in place, it keeps me on track. It does not seem like I would be able to be near as self-compassionate without a strong supportive supervisor or personal relationships that remind me (to be self-compassionate) every now and again. When I am challenged in a situation throughout my master's program, I rely a lot on positive self-talk, and a support system. (D43)*

Throughout the study, I relied quite heavily on two primary support systems to help me contextualize and gain multiple perspectives on situations and my reaction to them. First, Tim became quite important as someone to give professional advice and an avenue to compare our experiences and interactions with students throughout our journey of becoming a teacher educator. In our first critical friend meeting, Tim wrote, "*in reading through your reflections, my thoughts were like (saying to himself) 'when I was teaching in a Master's program none of this stuff was even on my radar*'" (October 15). Through engaging with Tim as a critical friend, I was able to gain an outside perspective on my experiences and progress in the program and reassure my processes of becoming. Second, my partner was also very supportive by providing a safe space to express my concerns or emotions when challenges arose, and by reminding me of self-compassion. I reflected on this in my journal. I wrote,

> *One way that I've found helpful is speaking to people (Tim, my GF, students, friends) about challenging times during my program so far. This allows me to vocalize my thoughts after thinking about what my worries or trepidations are. This*

> *almost seems like a bit of a check and balance on any rumination that may be occurring in my head. Therefore, the role of the 'other' in my processes of self-compassion seems quite valuable to me. (O11)*

For me, conversing with others was the second line of defence against challenging situations or when my perceptions of a situation led me to overthink or over-analyze the situation and in turn, be overly self-critical. Although it was not self-talk per se, it allowed me to speak with others to find balanced perspectives on what I deemed to be challenging situations. Conversely, my perceptions of others perceived me as a teaching assistant, peer and master's student became a recurring area of my identification process. Once I began to understand the processes of becoming (identification) and how I practiced self-compassion by recognizing my product over process mindset, I made several acknowledgements about the role of S-STEP that are outlined in the next section.

The Role of S-STEP in Becoming Self-Compassionate

Throughout this research, I have encountered many opportunities for personal and professional growth while simultaneously being challenged and experiencing successes. The challenges, such as differentiating pedagogy, returning to academia, and reconciling my perceptions of others' perceptions of me, elicited internal responses during my transition. These responses were brought forth as a result of the S-STEP process and in this way, the act of conducting a S-STEP was also central in supporting me through my transition from teacher to teacher educator.

S-STEP provided access to a variety of methodological tools to support how I reflected on difficult situations and provided space to contextualize and consider multiple perspectives of a challenging situation. By making vulnerabilities explicit, this process may be confronting, but it

may also reveal tacit knowledge of the self-in-practice. The process of S-STEP allowed me to become more aware of intrapersonal or interpersonal challenges and provided the space to explore those challenges. In November, I reflected on the benefit of S-STEP during the processes of becoming:

> *By engaging in self-study, being self-compassionate has become less challenging, meaning, I am able to recognize my emotional response to challenges via reflection, and I can use self-compassion to mitigate that emotional response from increasing or dwelling on them too much. (N35)*

As the study progressed, my ability to pinpoint challenges via S-STEP (particularly the systematic use of reflection) helped me recognize *when* to practice self-compassion. For me, this process is not performed in isolation; rather, it is optimized alongside others.

A key aspect of S-STEP is that of interactivity (LaBoskey, 2004). To this end, and as explained in the previous section, the role of the 'other' was quite important during personal adversity and transition. Although others may negatively impact one's transition, throughout my transition, figures, such as my partner or my supervisor, assisted me with remembering to practice self-compassion or helped interpret my tendency to prioritize the product over the process. I reflected on this influence on how I navigated my transition to becoming a teacher educator by making acknowledgements of the benefits others have been so far.

> *Recognizing that this journey was never going to be easy and that the process of the journey will have its ups and downs, focusing too much on the destination is a recipe for how I felt when I was landscaping and challenges occurred (i.e., frustrated, less motivated, jealous of others who catch on quicker, resentful of challenge etc).* (N31) *This assisted recognition (with the help of my supervisor)*

> *underscores a few different elements of my experiences in the Master's program so far. There are ebbs and flows of this experience. You will have good days and you will have bad days. Understanding why you are doing this can put the challenges into perspective. (N34)*

Although we all encounter and engage in interactions in our daily lives, the explicit focus on interactivity in the processes of S-STEP prompted me to intentionally seek out others who offered different lenses through which to consider and interpret my experiences.

Lastly, through S-STEP, I became more aware of the process and product of becoming a self-compassionate and a teacher educator. This realization occurred directly from interactions with my critical friend who provided a different perspective on my journal entries. In addition to providing professional expertise of teacher education, Tim also recognized my tendency to have high expectations of myself, acknowledge my experiences as a classroom teacher and note when I prioritized the destination without fully appreciating the journey. In the following excerpt, I reflected on the ways that the idea of process-product has been transformative in how I experienced the transition from teacher to teacher educator and left me in a space that was conducive to being self-compassionate at the same time:

> *Since recognizing the process (work) vs destination (goal), I have started to focus more on the work in order to achieve the goal. Even though the goal of becoming a teacher educator is fairly abstract and can take different forms (the goal can be blurry at times), the concrete title of professor or Ph.D. does not happen without the process of becoming. Therefore, using self-compassion amongst other strategies such as relationship building, speaking with authorities, pinpointing/reconciling tensions, the process is just as important as the destination. (N45)*

Summary

After Tim and I discussed my tendency to focus on the product of my journey instead of allowing for appreciation of the journey itself, and through reflection, I was able to recognize how adopting this mindset has influenced and challenged other aspects of my life and how I identify throughout the process of becoming. This turning point highlights the necessity and value of reflection and a critical friend that provides a space to explore your experiences and interactions and allows for multiple perspectives that may challenge your process. Through this chapter, the process versus product mindset highlighted an evolution in how I conceptualized and reflected on the intersections of my personal and professional lives and when I faced inter/intrapersonal challenges. The awareness of my product vs process mindset conceptually shifted my reflections, attitudes and awareness of different aspects of the study. Importantly, due to this shift, I began to see self-compassion as a process instead of a product as well. This recognition allowed me to also establish strategies to emphasize the process of becoming self-compassionate rather than simply obtain the title of *being* self-compassionate. Through the use of S-STEP as a methodology, I was able to identify a moment of contention, and by gaining multiple perspectives and writing reflections describing what happened and my affective response, I could begin to use self-talk and positive cognitive reframing to become self-compassionate in my own way.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion, Significance, and Implications

In this chapter, I discuss the results of my research in relation to the research questions. Following this, I state the significance of my research and identify several implications for novice teacher educators, teacher education programs, teachers' professional development (PD), and the potential transferability to other professional transitions. I also explore future directions for this line of research and provide a final reflection on the research process and offer a conclusion.

Addressing the Research Questions

The following research questions have underpinned the research process and provided me with the necessary foundations to analyze and make sense of the results. I engaged with research on identity theory and self-compassion to guide the design and analysis of my self-study. In the following sections I address each of the research questions.

Research Question #1

What challenges/factors influence my identification in the transition to becoming a teacher educator?

My findings in Chapter four highlight many challenges and factors that influenced my identification process during my transition to becoming a teacher educator. In particular, I found that external and internal influences were prominent. These influences are similar to those that others have previously noted, particularly those who have transitioned from being a classroom teacher to a teacher educator. In terms of external influences on identification, Casey and Fletcher (2012), Fletcher and Casey (2014), and Petrarca and Bullock (2014) identified the differentiation of pedagogy as an area that prompted tension during their transitions from

physical education teachers to teacher educators. In a similar way to Casey and Fletcher (2012), I was not fully aware of the nuances and details involved in the differences between teaching young people in classrooms and teaching adults about teaching physical education in a higher education setting. Early in the study, this tension left me feeling self-conscious and unsure if current teacher educators and my students would identify me as a teacher educator. These external sources of identification heavily influenced my sense of belonging as I questioned my presence in the program. Clance and Imes (1978) and those who have described their transitions (e.g. Berry, 2008; Bullock & Ritter, 2011; MacPhail, 2011; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014; Ritter 2007) may classify these affective reactions (e.g., self-doubt and under-preparedness) as indicative of imposter syndrome.

As I progressed in the program, and through engagement with my critical friend, I gained a more explicit understanding of how to interrogate the self-in-practice (particularly through considering process vs product and self-compassionate practices). In this way, my critical friend was a positive external influence on my identification, as feedback and encouragement supported my internal beliefs that I was able to succeed as a teacher educator. These acknowledgements also enabled me to become more aware of when I needed to practice self-compassion and take a more balanced approach to interpreting my experiences in the classroom. My progression as a teacher educator, however, was not linear. I experienced good days and bad days during my transition. A sentiment echoed by Wood and Borg's (2010) 'rocky road,' full of personal and professional peaks, troughs, and bumps.

My transition did not occur seamlessly during my return to academia as a student either. After failing to meet my own, admittedly high expectations on my first assignments, I felt deskilled and vulnerable. My transition from feeling like a highly accomplished teacher to now

being a novice graduate student and teacher educator was difficult. This sentiment is also echoed by others that have gone through similar transitions, including Izadinia, (2014), Murray et al., (2005), and Petrarca and Bullock (2014), all of whom showed that many experienced and accomplished teachers admit to feeling like novices when they made the transition to teacher educators. From an external perspective of identification, when I compared myself to my immediate peers, I over-analyzed each situation, and my perceptions were often negative. From an internal perspective, when I did not achieve my goals, my sense of belonging suffered as an academic. Smith and Flores (2019) also shared that many novice teacher educators struggle in their research requirements. Nicholls (1989) might suggest that my feelings were defined by an ego-orientation, in that I tended to have a desire to compare my successes and failures with others rather than base these on my abilities to accomplish the task itself. Thus, the external sources of identification were strong influences on my overall identity during my transition. In taking stock of the effects these influences had on me and my identity, Neff et al., (2007) would align this notion to that of attaining self-esteem, rather than practicing self-compassion.

My findings also suggest that how I scored on assignments as a student may not have reflected my beliefs, experiences and learning as a teaching assistant. That is, I often encouraged my own students to see beyond their scores or marks and focus on the tasks they were completing and what they had learned. In this way, my actions were not necessarily aligned with my beliefs and I embodied the 'living contradiction' that Whitehead (1989) suggests is commonplace amongst teacher educators once they begin to analyze their practices.

The recognition that my mindset focused heavily on the product (destination) rather than the process (journey) during my transition to teacher educator served as a turning point in my study and outlined a very clear delineation towards understanding self-in-practice. This

metaphor or phrasing of product vs process offered me the language to be able to articulate and make sense of some of my experiences during the transition, and to plan pathways for action. As Bullock (2009) suggests, one of the key developments in becoming a teacher educator is often the development of the syntactic structures – the language – of teaching. But this process is far more difficult than it would seem on the surface and is something confirmed in my analysis. As a result of recognizing and being able to describe this mindset, I was able to see how my own perceptions of failures and struggles hindered my progression, sense of belonging, and identity as a teacher educator. Due to the emphasis I placed on the product (destination), and how others perceived me as a teaching assistant, student, and novice teacher educator, I focused on the title I held as a token of identity rather than the roles I carried out. I worried if people viewed me as a 'good' teacher educator instead of focusing on my pedagogical decisions. Although I had many positive experiences and interactions with peers, colleagues, and students, I was initially less resilient when I encountered challenges. In this sense, my identification depended on what I assumed was others' opinions of me, which influenced my decisions as a teacher educator. Jenkins' (2008) identification theory would suggest that through the external sources of identification, the labels and assessment of similarities and differences to other teacher educators was a strong influence on how I was coming to identify as a teacher educator. My experience reaffirms Pajares' (1992) idea that the decisions, judgements, and perceptions teachers make are the subsequent result of the beliefs they have developed.

Self-study provided a platform to explore and unpack my experiences through reflection, self-compassion and engaging with others. The processes of self-study allowed me to interpret the idea of product vs process as a turning point in this study, which provided a conceptual tool that allowed me to become explicitly aware of my motivation to arrive at my desired destination.

This understanding also enabled me to pinpoint personal challenges during my transition where I could then practice self-compassion. The second research question addresses how I came to understand how I practiced self-compassion during my transition to teacher educator and in light of these challenges and influences.

Research Question #2

How do I practice self-compassion throughout the transition to becoming a teacher educator?

Neff (2003b) outlined three components within the overarching concept of self-compassion: (a) self-kindness - extending kindness and understanding to oneself rather than harsh judgment and self-criticism, (b) common humanity - seeing one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as separating and isolating, and (c) mindfulness - holding one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness, rather than over-identifying with them. During my research I aimed to interpret *how* I practiced self-compassion by reflecting on my experiences and interactions during my transition to becoming a teacher educator. I did not seek to measure whether I was self-compassionate quantitatively or to analyze how much self-compassion I practiced. Thus, there was a focus on how I engaged with the practices of self-compassion: how I did or did not enact self-kindness; how I did or did not acknowledge common humanity, and; how I was or was not being mindful. To accomplish the study's aims, I engaged in a self-study methodology by analyzing the self-in-practice during my transition from teacher to teacher educator and graduate student; times that are notably stressful and challenging (Murray & Male, 2005; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). My findings highlighted that merely having knowledge of self-compassion (theory) did not provide me with a complete picture of how to practice being self-compassionate, nor did it prepare me to

apply the principles of self-compassion theory in a real-world setting. The following three subsections highlight how I evolved to learn how I practice self-compassion. First, I discuss how I used reflection-in/on-action as a tool to engage in mindfulness and to pinpoint challenging moments. Second, I explain how I used positive self-talk and common humanity in an integrated way. Third, I found that by engaging with others, I was able to gain multiple perspectives and contextualize my interpretations of my experiences and interactions.

Reflection and Mindfulness.

Neff (2003b) suggests that self-compassionate individuals exhibit mindfulness by keeping their emotions in balance and not dwelling on negative thoughts. My findings indicate that early in the study, I adopted an approach that lacked mindfulness as I tended to have a negative, overly-harsh view of myself, my abilities and/or experiences, and my perceptions of how others identified me. Moreover, how I internalized the external influences on my identification meant that my perceptions of others' perspectives and their actual perception may not have aligned. Although I was aware of my feelings during adverse situations, for example, feeling stress or anxiousness, I did little to hold those feelings in balanced awareness and not dwell on them. In other words, I was not practicing mindfulness as outlined by Neff (2003b). The processes of self-study and engaging with a critical friend assisted in identifying this issue, and as a result, recognizing *when* I needed to be mindful became a priority of my study. This shows that simply being aware of the benefits of mindfulness and understanding its structures and concepts may not translate into practice.

Reviewing my journal entries allowed me to pinpoint the tendencies in my reflections as a response to challenges I faced. The data showed that, with time and support, I came to better understand and recognize when I would benefit from practicing self-compassion. I learned that I

came to be aware of contentious moments in two ways. First, recognizing my physiological response during challenging moments (e.g. increased heart rate), and second, through engaging in further and deeper reflection after challenging moments, particularly with the support of significant others in my life (for example, my partner or my supervisor). When I recognized a situation that might be challenging or could generate a negative emotional response via reflection-in-action, I could then analyze the situation to further dissect the problem by considering different influences. Schön (1987) would classify these two acts as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. For me, reflective practice became a medium to practice mindfulness and describe tacit knowledge of self-in-practice. Rather than engaging in more popular mindfulness techniques, such as meditation, reflective practice also allowed consideration of contextual variables to gain a more complete picture of personal and professional challenges.

My mindfulness process provided a structure and an opportunity to recognize challenges, to be mindful of my internal response to external adversity, and to find ways to mitigate my natural tendency to be overly harsh on myself. Below, I explore my findings of positive self-talk and common humanity.

Self-Kindness & Common Humanity: Self-Talk & Positive Reframing.

My reflective practices allowed for pinpointing adverse situations, but also promoted an acknowledgment of my tendency to have a product over process mindset; this prompted a turning point in the study (Bullock & Ritter, 2011). By developing this conceptual tool, I became more aware of the processes and challenges involved with the practice of self-compassion and my transition to becoming a teacher educator. In turn, I began to view practicing self-compassion as a process as well, which helped me recognize that becoming

self-compassionate would also be challenging. Like becoming a teacher educator, I would also have highs and lows in how I engaged with being self-compassionate. I began taking more time to reflect on a situation and gain more perspective on how I felt and why I was feeling that way. My findings suggest that through the processes of reflection and self-study, I began to recognize that I needed to be more kind to myself and do so through positive self-talk.

The situations in which I used self-talk varied, although practicing self-talk to be more kind to myself remained consistent throughout the remainder of the study. Similar to the findings from Ingstrup et al. (2017) I used small comments or personal reminders to mitigate how I dwelled on or adopted overly harsh self-criticisms during adverse situations. I also used these tools to pinpoint when I began to over-think others' opinions of me. Recognizing when I needed to be kind to myself through engaging with my critical friend and reflecting on and/or in practice provided the space to troubleshoot certain situations and be more kind to myself. Knowing when to be self-compassionate aligns with the practice of Mindful Self-compassion (MSC), which hinges upon mindfulness as a need to be aware of our suffering in order to bring kindness to ourselves (Germer & Neff, 2019). For example, I felt less confident in myself when I perceived others were critical of me during teaching or when I struggled in academic writing during the first year of my program. In response and through more attentiveness to engage in self-talk, my reflections focused on the challenges I faced but included more acts of self-kindness.

When I felt isolated in my feelings during a challenging or adverse situation, I also tried to remember that others had been in my position before and may have also felt as I did. I began to recognize that when I used self-talk, it also came with an acknowledgement of others who have been challenged in similar ways to me. Therefore, instead of practicing self-kindness and

common humanity in isolation, I also practiced them simultaneously and in an integrated manner. By taking a positive approach to reframing my perspective of the situation, I could acknowledge what was challenging about the circumstance and take steps to mitigate my response to it. This practice became an approach to navigating my perceptions about a situation.

Similarly, recognizing the connection between the external influences on my identification and my internal physiological responses allowed me to pinpoint when I may need to practice mindfulness so as not to dwell on a negative experience or interaction, or to be able to reframe a negative response in a more positive light. Allen et al. (2010) would characterize this as positive cognitive restructuring, whereby I took a more proactive approach to managing stressful events, thus increasing my likelihood of positively coping with the situation. Allen et al. (2010), Miyagawa et al. (2020) and Bluth et al. (2018) suggest that setbacks are opportunities for learning and positive exploration rather than detrimental to personal or professional progress. While practicing self-compassion as an individual assisted in mitigating negative responses to internal and external influences, engaging with others was the second line of defence in times of insurmountable challenge.

Engaging with Multiple Perspectives.

From the onset of my Master's program and throughout my self-study, the external influences on my identity of becoming a teacher educator and practicing self-compassion were critical to any perceptions of success or failure during the transition. This was discussed at length in response to the first research question. For me, external influences were significant in several ways and carried the potential to be a positive influence on my transition or to be detrimental to my sense of belonging. This was the case with some negative interactions and misunderstandings with students.

As discussed in Chapter 4, after a difficult situation with a student in one of my classes, my social support system positively influenced how I navigated this interpersonal challenge. By discussing this situation with my partner, I was able to see the situation in a different light, illustrating the benefit that seeking multiple perspectives on a challenging situation may serve for me to navigate and reframe those situations. Engaging with others helped mitigate the risk of not practicing self-compassion and provided me an avenue to promote self-compassionate behaviours, such as common humanity and positive reframing. In one reflection I made later in the data collection period, I observed that it was essential to acknowledge how a support system helped avoid negative behaviours and reinforce good habits of self-compassion. Without a positive support network, I acknowledged that my self-compassion practices could deteriorate. Having supportive others during my transition helped me gain multiple perspectives on my thoughts, concerns, and/or challenges.

Throughout the study, I relied quite heavily on two primary support systems to help me contextualize and gain multiple perspectives on situations and my reaction to them. First, as both, critical friend and graduate supervisor, Tim became quite important as someone to give professional advice and an avenue to compare our experiences and interactions with students throughout our journey of becoming teacher educators. Through engaging with Tim as a critical friend, I was able to gain an outside perspective on my experiences and progress in the program and reassure my processes of becoming. In a different context, my partner was also very supportive during my transition. By providing a safe space to express my concerns or emotions when challenges arose, she reminded me to practice self-compassion.

When taken together, engaging in dialogue with others was the second line of defence against challenging situations to gain perspective, learn from others and gain self-awareness.

This is a sentiment that coincides with work by Ingstrup et al. (2017), who provided insights into the ways in which self-compassion can be learned and taught alongside coaches, parents, and/or peers. Supportive others provided an opportunity to find balanced perspectives on what I deemed challenging situations. Through this process I began to understand the functions of becoming and my product over process mindset, I made several acknowledgements about the role of self-compassion on my journey to becoming a teacher educator.

Significance of the Findings

After conducting this research, my findings are significant in several ways. First, my findings echo previous research (Berry, 2009; Casey & Fletcher, 2012; Murray & Male, 2005; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014; Ritter, 2007) suggesting that the challenges during one's personal and professional transitions play a prominent role in the construction of one's identification as a teacher and/or teacher educator. Particularly, my research highlights that external factors, such as differentiating pedagogy, returning to academia, as well as internal and external influences enhanced or diminished my sense of belonging during my transition. My research builds on work done by others in several areas. For example, Murray (2008) described the benefits of working with others during changes in professional roles, showing specifically that social support, such as developing professional learning communities (PCL) or critical friendships, can support the development of professional identity. Although the communities I was engaging with are not PLCs per se (rather, they were critical friendships), they do point to the role of significant others and the primacy of learning as a social endeavour (Petrarca & Bullock, 2014). This notion coincides with Beijaard et al. (2004), who attribute identities as being part of and formed by personal and professional landscapes. Moreover, due to my professional learning environment, supportive others played a significant role in my ability to practice and remain

self-compassionate throughout my study. In turn, this influenced my perceptions of how I could support the learning of my own students. This is important, as Moè and Katz (2020) showed that self-compassionate teachers are more likely to provide an autonomy-supportive and motivational learning environment for their students. Although my research did not address autonomy-supportive and motivational learning environments specifically, my study addresses self-compassionate practices from the perspective of myself as the student *and* the educator rather than solely the educator.

Second, my findings are significant in illustrating that engaging with self-study provided me with a platform that enhanced practicing self-compassion during the transition to becoming a teacher educator. By engaging with self-study, I gained a better contextual understanding of my experiences, interactions and interpretations by challenging my assumptions and biases by including multiple perspectives during my transition (LaBoskey, 2004). Moreover, a core feature of self-study, reflective practice, optimized my professional learning and gave me a deeper, more explicit understanding of self-in-practice as I encountered personal and professional stressors (Casey et al., 2017; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015; Russell, 2008; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015; Ying et al., 2009). My findings also highlight that self-compassion may play a positive role in engaging with the primary purpose of self-study: to articulate tacit knowledge of the self-in-practice. In doing so, self-compassion may mitigate several of the challenges of self-study, for example, communicating vulnerabilities and inconsistencies of self in practice (Bullock & Peercy, 2018). Likewise, my findings suggest that engaging with elements of self-study, particularly reflective practices and engaging with a critical friend, as outlined by LaBoskey (2004) and Petrarca and Bullock (2014), may also positively influence how one practices self-compassion. Just as Seekis et al. (2017) highlight, the importance of writing-based

interventions within the processes of becoming self-compassionate in terms of body image, the reflective elements embedded within S-STEP suggest that it may also hold some value in professional practitioners engaging in self-compassion while conducting a self-study. In this sense, practicing self-compassion and engaging in self-study appear to be symbiotic as each has the potential to enhance the other. Practicing self-compassion during moments of adversity in self-study has not yet been a focus in existing research.

Lastly, my findings also highlight that having a theoretical knowledge of self-compassion did not prepare me to effectively apply the concept in a practical setting during my transition early in the study. From the onset of my study, ego-threatening moments, such as failure, set-back, and challenging situations affected my sense of belonging, which would have aligned more with self-esteem as outlined by Baumeister et al. (2003). Yet, as the study progressed and upon unearthing tacit knowledge of my processes of becoming self-compassionate, my identification processes were positively assisted by practicing self-compassion. By engaging with others, I became more aware of personal and professional challenges during transitions and gained a better understanding of my processes of practicing self-compassion. My findings expand on previous studies associated with self-compassion and identity (Mosewich, Dunn, Causgrove Dunn & Wright, 2021; Loy, Clemens, Reese & Gerhard, 2022; Kotera et al., 2018) by including identity during transitionary periods. By understanding my processes of becoming self-compassionate during my ongoing transition to becoming a teacher educator, I was able to engage with reflective practices, use self-talk to positively reframe my processes, and work with supportive others to contextualize my interactions and experiences to mitigate negative affective outcomes. My approach to describing self-compassion during transitions contributes to existing literature, particularly that conducted by Miyagawa et al. (2020) and Bluth et al. (2018), who

found that self-compassion assisted participants to view challenges as more positive. My research extends these studies by incorporating the identification processes during significant personal and professional transitions. Future qualitative and quantitative research may reference my research to build a larger, more extensive body of knowledge that addresses self-compassion and identity over the entirety of an individual's transitions.

Recommendations for Practice and Research

The following are my recommendations for practice and research.

Teacher Education and Induction programs

My findings add to existing research (Berry, Clemans, & Kostogritz, 2007) that suggest that the context of professional landscapes play an important role in the construction of one's teacher identity during significant professional transitions. Moreover, the perceptions of one's experiences and interactions during said transitions is also noteworthy. As such, induction programs in teacher education and higher education more broadly, should pay particular attention to the types of challenges their students or employees may experience to develop strategies on how to better support them. Specifically, induction programs may seek to establish a person-centred approach that guides their students or workers through the peaks and troughs of their journey by addressing ways that they can be more aware of the challenges they face and what strategies might be best suited to help them mitigate negative responses. These strategies may include but may not be limited to self-compassion and reflective practice. Moreover, induction programs in higher education should not discount the value a supportive other can play during significant transitions, such as mentors. Lastly, those in supervision and mentorship roles should become aware of the impact they have on the success or failure of their students during significant transitions.

Research

My findings suggest that practicing self-compassion, amongst other strategies, may have a positive influence and play a meaningful role in mitigating adverse effects during identification processes throughout professional transitions. Due to the internal and external challenges I faced during my ongoing transition to become a teacher educator, it is reasonable to expect others who make similar transitions may as well. Although my research was context specific and personally situated, my experience may resonate for a broader community of professionals undergoing transitions within their careers. Mixed method, longitudinal studies may serve to address how and why people experience challenges during professional transitions and what, if any, strategies may assist during those transitions.

Currently there are only a few studies regarding self-compassion and identity (Mosewich et al., 2021; Kotera, Green & Van Gordon, 2018; Kotera, Green & Sheffield, 2021), however, there is no research I could locate that addresses self-compassion and identity during significant personal and/or professional transitions. These transitions could include those that go beyond the world of teaching and learning, including transitions from school to work, transitions in family life, or transitions from work to retirement. This gap in literature necessitates attention. Due to the processes of understanding how I practice self-compassion, addressing the connection or disconnection between a theoretical understanding of self-compassion and the practical application of self-compassion should also be explored. Moreover, longitudinal studies addressing self-compassion, identity, and significant transitions may pay attention to the contextual nuances between participants to find common themes.

As supportive others became a positive influence during my study, future research may address the types of influences that supervisors, mentors and coaches have on the people who

work with them. Self-compassion research may include topics that explore and address how individual environments promote or diminish one's engagement with the practices of self-compassion, more broadly.

Lastly, research regarding identity and transitions from teacher to teacher educator is plentiful in the S-STEP and PETE communities (Bullock & Ritter, 2011; Casey & Fletcher, 2012; Petrarca & Bullock, 2014; Ressler & Richards, 2016; Ritter, 2007), yet there is currently no research that includes self-compassion or other coping/mitigation strategies to address the challenges outlined in past literature (Bullock & Peercy, 2018; Loughran, 2004; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015;). Due to many challenges that I and others have encountered during the self-study process, future research may seek to build on my study to address this gap in literature.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations. First, due to my social constructivist assumptions, the goal of this study is not to generalize its findings to other populations; however, I acknowledge that this may be a point of criticism from potential readers, particularly those with positivist worldviews. LaBoskey's (2004) guidelines for quality in self-study allowed me to follow a set of principles that allow for systematic and rigorous research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation and communication of the data. While not aiming for generalization, I am aiming for resonance in that my insights might resonate with readers' understandings of their own experiences during professional transitions relative to the contexts in which they work. Second, the timing and duration of my study is limited by the length of my Master's program and data collection period. The official data collection period is limited to one semester as a teaching assistant in the second year of the program, which may not be considered sufficient for prolonged engagement with the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, identity

transitions have been suggested to occur within six (6) months of a significant change in one's life (Ericsson, 1959) and may conflict with the timing of my study as it was completed during the second year of my program. Although my reflective journal entries related to my experiences in my first and second year in the program, readers may potentially view the timing as contentious. Lastly, my lack of experience as a novice researcher suggests that I may not be privy to the subtleties and nuances of a complex methodology such as self-study, as it has been challenged for its lack of clarity and structure (Bullock & Sator, 2018). Additionally, my critical friend was also my Master's supervisor, which may create a power imbalance or influence my decisions.

Conclusion

As I reflect on my research processes, I am motivated and humbled by my experiences in my Master's program and the interactions I have had with my supervisor, colleagues, peers and partner given the influence they have all had on my personal and professional identification and how I have come to practice self-compassion. Similar to others who have made comparable transitions, my experiences have encompassed ups and downs, been both positive and negative, and felt bitter and sweet. Now, I am able to see how the methodological approach of self-study I used to examine my transition from teacher to teacher educator has impacted me both personally and professionally. By unearthing tacit knowledge of self-in-practice (Loughran, 2004) and engaging with my critical friend, Tim, we searched beyond my assumptions and perspectives to bring this new knowledge to the reader.

Reflective practice and engagement with others through self-study prompted a turning point in my study that enabled me to think about my experiences in new ways. By addressing the challenges I faced as a part of the process, rather than an impediment on the product, I began to shift my perspective and become more aware of *when* I needed to practice self-compassion. For

me, pinpointing these challenges (e.g., differentiating pedagogy, returning to academia, and my perspectives of others) through self-study also allowed me to navigate *how* to practice self-compassion. Instead of being overly harsh on myself and lacking a sense of belonging, through thematic analysis I interpreted myself using positive self-talk, engaging with others and reframing my mindset about adverse situations which prompted a more positive outlook.

The results of this study illustrate some of the many personal and professional challenges I faced during my transition and journey of becoming, and offer potential resources or tools for others to learn from. Although my experiences are personally situated, self-compassion and common humanity suggests that throughout this transition, I have felt as others have in the past, and others may feel like me in the future (Neff, 2003b). Sharing the experiences, interactions, processes and results from my study may resonate with people within the PETE and S-STEP communities, and perhaps beyond these communities as well. Conversely, they may not and that is okay. What this research does offer is a contribution to the knowledge base on becoming a teacher educator, particularly in terms of the processes of using self-compassion as a strategy to support individuals facing the many challenges during this transition.

As I reflect on the process of my research, I am reminded of the transitions from being a student to moving abroad and becoming a classroom PE teacher in Sweden and Australia. Now, reflecting on my experiences as a graduate student, teaching assistant and novice teacher educator, it has been a process to say the least. I am excited to continue this process into my ongoing transition to becoming a teacher educator.

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