

# Exploring the Wellness of Teachers in their First Five Years using Poetic Representation and Hermeneutical Phenomenology

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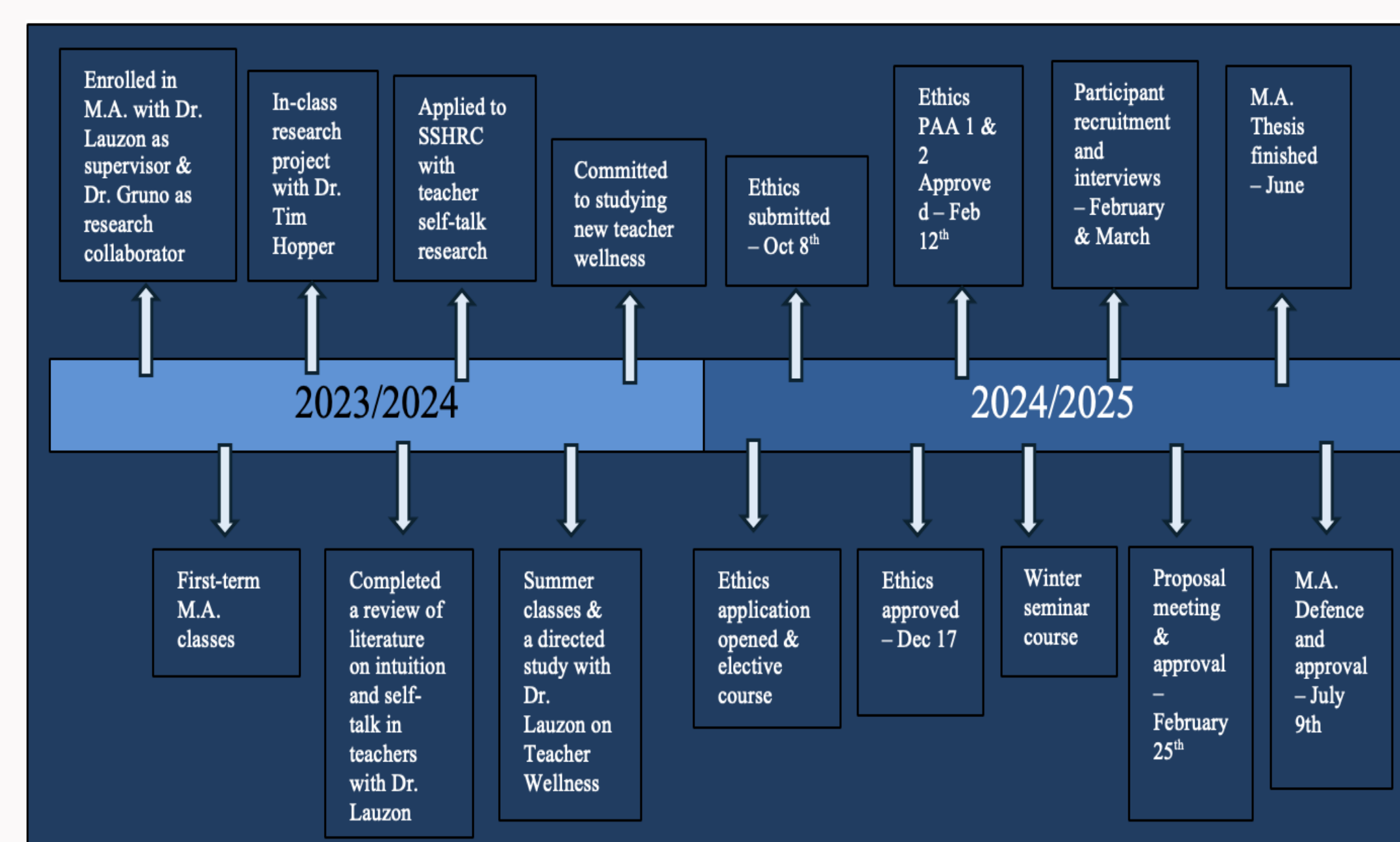
## Abstract

International pleas regarding proposals and plans to address the attrition of teachers have been continually documented by many organizations. One such organization is The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological and poetic representation-based thesis was to explore how new teachers conceptualized and have experienced teacher wellness. Ten new teachers, having five or fewer years of teaching experience were interviewed using one-to-one interviews following Patton's (2002) interview guides for sampling and size of sample. McMullin's (2023) framework on undertaking and reporting on transcription was also used. To report on findings, represent data, preserve participant voice, and promote meaning making, found poetry, a division of poetic representation, was used. Four themes emerged from the data: wellness as dimensions, wellness as balance, wellness as programs, and wellness as change. The third theme, wellness as programs, had an additional three sub-themes: wellness as programs for teacher support, wellness as program awareness for new teachers, and wellness as programs for community. This study was an important contribution as it provided an opportunity to add to the research on new teacher wellness through hermeneutical phenomenology and poetic representation.

## Research Questions

1. What is new teacher wellness?
2. How do new teachers define wellness?
3. How do new teachers define teacher wellness?
4. What new teacher wellness initiatives are offered and what is desired by teachers?

## Timeline



## Acknowledgements

I acknowledge my family, supervisor, Dr. Lara Lauzon, research collaborator, Dr. Jennifer Gruno, a course professor and support, Dr. Tim Hopper, my friends/colleagues, and of course, all ten of my new teacher participants.

## Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Hermeneutical Phenomenology is a qualitative tradition in which researchers explore the deeper meanings and essences of individual experiences (Miles, et al., 2013). Developed by Husserl in the mid twentieth century, it explores how individuals perceive the deeper meanings of life experiences (Husserl, 1931). Guillen (2019) says, the phenomenological method admits exploring in the person's consciousness, that is to say, to understand the essence itself, the way of perceiving life through experiences, the meanings around them, and are defined in the individual's psychic life (p. 218).

Hermeneutics, roughly meaning 'to interpret,' seeks to understand the meanings within an individual's consciousness and interpret them through written works (Guillen, 2019). Linguistic expression allows the meaning of experience to be enunciated through words. Further, the "hermeneutic circle," a continuum including present being, senses of the interpreter, and then the revelation by the interpreter adds to hermeneutical phenomenological practice. Hermeneutical Phenomenology describes and interprets the deeper aspects of individual lived experiences and lends to experiential observations and explanations.

## Poetic Representation

Poetry uses words, meaning, and rhythm to create imagery, raise awareness, and evoke emotional responses (Woods & Sikes, 2022). It includes lyrical, narrative, found forms, and uses unique and expressive forms such as, rhyme, rhythm, conciseness, imagery, juxtaposition of words, and layout (Woods & Sikes, 2022). Poetry often requires the author to be willing to submit to "a mind-set in which researchers expect and invite radically different ways of knowing to shift their projects" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 127). The experience of graduate school inspired me to think deeper about how I, as an expressive individual who has always been drawn to poetic forms, could represent research findings in a unique way. In reading an article serving as support to a class assignment on poetic representation, I discovered a form of poetry known to be 'found poetry'.

Found poetry provides the researcher with an effective technique to express the everyday reality of people (Sjollem et al., 2012). To create a found poem, participants' words and phrases are used to provide the written version of a collage (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Watson and Hamilton (2022) indicate that by using participant interview transcripts, documents related to the research, and from any text used or created in relation to a study, found poetry can be formed. According to Salas (2025); "A found poem is not a form, really. There are no precise rules about lines, syllable, or format on a page. Instead, the term describes a process for writing poems" (para. 4). Typically, a printout, hardcopy, or electronically based form of text is required. The author, or in this case, researcher, views and reads the verbatim transcripts and highlights words or phrases that seem important or strike meaning. Words and phrases are read and then usually written in poetic form; "usually free verse, meaning unrhymed and no particular line count, syllable count..." (Salas, 2025, para. 14).

## Procedures

- Gained ethical approval from UVic HERB.
- Contacted and recruited participants using Instagram, Microsoft Forms, and word-of-mouth.
- Information and consent form sent to the participants.
- One-to-one participant meetings.
- Transcription and analysis of audio and written transcripts.
- Identification of key themes.
- Creation of found poems for each participant.
- Categorization of found poem excerpts as related to each theme.
- Sought participant approval for found poems.
- Completed write-up of M.A. thesis.

## Interview Questions

Demographic Question One	How many years of teaching experience do you have?
Demographic Question Two	In what region of the South Island of Vancouver Island do you teach or work?
Data Collection Question One	What does wellness mean to you?
Data Collection Question Two	What does teacher wellness mean to you?
Data Collection Question Three	How is teacher wellness important to you?
Data Collection Question Four	How have you experienced wellness in your teaching experience?
Data Collection Question Five	Are you aware of any teacher wellness initiatives available to you as a new and developing teacher? If so, what are they?
Data Collection Question Six	Please elaborate on your engagement or participation in a teacher wellness experience.
Data Collection Question Seven	Are there other teacher wellness initiatives you would like to see come available for new and developing teachers?
Data Collection Question Eight	Do you have anything else you would like to add?

## Results

Through the interview process, four themes emerged: "wellness as dimensions", "wellness as balance", "wellness from programs", and "wellness as change". One theme, "wellness from programs", was revealed to be a cluster where sub-themes surfaced. All participants contributed to the creation of the "wellness from programs" theme, but within this theme, not all participants related their responses to a single form. Instead, three sub-themes were identified: "Wellness as Programs for Teacher Support", "Wellness as Program Awareness for New Teachers", and "Wellness as Programs for Community".

### Theme One – Wellness as Dimensions

In completing the interview process, wellness was viewed as having separate wellness dimensions, yet inter-linked between all dimensions each contributing to total wellness.

### Theme Two – Wellness as Balance

Balance emerged as a common theme throughout the interviews. Two aspects of balance were identified. The first was the notion of work-life balance. The other identified aspect of balance was balance as related to burnout.

### Theme Three – Wellness as Programs

Throughout the interview process, the theme wellness as programs was revealed in terms of different sub-themes and through the new teachers' suggested programs to support their wellbeing. The sub-themes identified included "Wellness as Programs for Teacher Support", "Wellness as Program Awareness for New Teachers", and "Wellness Programs for Community". For this research, a program is defined as any service offered or desired by new teachers to support their wellbeing in the profession.

### Theme Four – Wellness as Change

The theme, Wellness as Change was recognized through new teachers' direct and indirect references to changes needed in schools to make the job more sustainable.

## An Interpretive Summary

Reflecting and writing about the found poem excerpts as they connected to the participants, the themes, the research, and to me, proved to be an insightful process. I felt connected to my heart – to the internal emotions that arose as I experienced the truth within me as I prepared to discuss the findings of this research. Using hermeneutical phenomenology opened up the opportunity to contemplate the participants' interview transcripts and then in turn, interpret the found poems. I discovered deeper meanings of the participants' words and phrases, and I was moved and grateful for my participants comments and approvals of the found poems associated with their interview. Smith and Osborne (2015) present the impact and importance of using interpretation in research. "It is explicitly idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, prior to the move to more general claims" (para. 1). It was through this process of interpreting each found poem that allowed me to think, know, understand, and connect.

## Recommendations for Future Research

1. Continued research about new teachers' wellness in other school districts in British Columbia and Canada.
2. Based on the emergence of the themes, wellness as dimensions, wellness as balance, wellness as programs, and wellness as change, there is a possibility that a new teacher wellness model could be developed
3. It could be of significant impact to explore further, new teachers' opinions of their experiences with current teacher wellness programs as related to their new teaching practice. It would be of additional interest to explore what new programs or program structure that new teachers envision.
4. Based on my experience, the combination of hermeneutical phenomenology and poetic representation was both beneficial and meaningful. Future research combining both methodologies is encouraged.

## QR Codes for References and Found Poems:

