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## How Interviews Shape Researchers: Lessons from a Longitudinal Reflexive Study

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### ABSTRACT

*In this study, our research team examines how dialogic and reflexive interviewing practices shape data collection within a longitudinal study. Grounded in empathetic listening and relational inquiry, we moved beyond viewing interviews as a tool for data collection and instead attended closely to the interviewer's experience. Findings suggest that principles such as curiosity, care, and reciprocity create reflexive spaces that support the interviewer's professional growth while also deepening their understanding of teaching and learning. Analysis highlights the importance of ethical reflexivity and relational practice as central components of qualitative research. This work is situated within three strands of scholarship: relationship-based research practices; dialogic and reflexive interviewing; and interviewing as a site of researcher development. Together, these perspectives position qualitative interviewing not as a neutral technique, but as an evolving relational process through which knowledge and researcher understanding are co-constructed over time. Through sustained, dialogic engagement, these approaches strengthened both the methodological rigor and ethical sensitivity of our work. Findings point to the humanizing potential of dialogic inquiry for both researchers and participants, offering meaningful implications for supporting new teachers and advancing relationship-based qualitative research.*

**KEYWORDS:** relation-based research practices; dialogic interviewing; reflexive interviewing; longitudinal research; qualitative research

This project is part of a larger longitudinal qualitative investigation designed to examine how novice teachers experienced support, or the lack of it, during their early years in the teaching profession. While the broader project generated numerous insights about teachers' professional

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trajectories, we also observed a parallel process unfolding within the interviews themselves. Patterns in the transcripts, along with ongoing conversations between the research team and the interviewer, revealed shifts in the interviewer's questioning, interpretations, and relationships with participants. Recognizing the methodological significance of these changes, we initiated a methodological examination of the interviewer's evolving role within the research process. Our guiding research question was: How did the practice of dialogic, reflexive, and relationship-based interviewing over six years influence the development of the interviewer?

Longitudinal qualitative research often rests on the implicit assumption that the research instrument remains stable over time. In interview-based studies, however, the primary instrument is a person whose understandings, relational stance, and interviewing practices develop across waves of data collection. Failing to account for this evolution presents a threat to the validity of longitudinal claims, as observed changes in participants' narratives may also reflect shifts in the interviewer's approach, skill, or relationship with them.

Prior work in qualitative longitudinal and narrative inquiry demonstrates that researchers' interpretations are revised over time and that evolving rapport and power dynamics shape what participants feel able to share (Barrington et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2006; Macqueen & Patterson, 2021; McKibben & Breheny, 2023). However, there is still limited research that directly focuses on how interviewers change and grow during a study. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to trace and theorize the interviewer's developmental trajectory across multiple waves of long-term, relationship-based interviews, clarifying how interviewer change influences both the generation and interpretation of longitudinal qualitative data.

## Literature Review

Relational approaches to qualitative research emphasize that knowledge is shaped through connection. Understanding how interviewers develop over time requires attention to the relational, dialogic, and reflexive foundations of qualitative inquiry. Although qualitative longitudinal and narrative research has shown that researchers' interpretations shift and that evolving rapport and power dynamics shape what participants share, less attention has been paid to the interviewer as a developing methodological instrument. To help address this gap, in this literature review we look at three connected areas of research that show how interviewing works as both a relational and developmental practice. The upcoming sections of the literature review include (a) relationship-based research practices, (b) dialogic and reflexive interviewing, and (c) interviewing as a site of researcher development. Together, these bodies of work position qualitative interviewing not as a neutral technique, but as an evolving relational process through which knowledge and researcher understanding are co-constructed over time.

### *Relationship-Based Research Practices*

Feminist critiques (e.g., Oakley, 1981) repositioned interviews around reciprocity and care, while narrative approaches treat knowledge as co-constructed through story and dialogue (Caparrós Martín et al., 2021). Rouse (2024) echoed this stance arguing that researchers bring multiple selves into the field and must practice relational reflexivity, while Sidorkin (2024) emphasized that knowledge emerges from many voices rather than a single authority. Together, these perspectives frame qualitative research as more than a technique and as a relational practice where understanding is forged through ethical and dialogic encounters.

Across relational pedagogy, care ethics, and dialogic theory, scholars emphasized practices that sustain humanizing inquiry. Buber (1970) and Sidorkin (2000) underscored the significance of dialogue and authentic encounters. Noddings (1984) and Hinsdale (2023) extended this with an ethic of care that pushed back against the isolation created by accountability-driven reforms. Narrative inquiry showed how collaboration and listening as a stance orients researchers toward participants as partners in meaning-making (Caparrós Martín et al., 2021). Read together, these concepts underscored three shared commitments: trust, which builds safety and honors participants' purposes; reciprocity, which ensures that value flows back to participants and communities; and reflexivity, which examines how researchers' histories, emotions, and positionalities shape the encounter.

In summary, relationship-based research began with the idea that knowledge grows through connections and values of accountability to communities and shared understanding. Gerlach (2018) showed that building relationships is the foundation for decolonizing research. Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) described this approach as one that values reflection, mutual respect, and honoring different ways of knowing. Warr (2004) reminded us that research interactions are emotional and personal, requiring care and ethical attention beyond simply obtaining consent. Taken together, these contributions move relational research from a set of interpersonal skills to a methodological and ethical framework that actively redistributes power and responsibility.

Newer work on community-engaged and vulnerable-population research showed that trust and reciprocity must be carried out in everyday practice. Tran et al. (2025) posited that creating trust with underserved communities meant being transparent, partnering with community champions, and making research feel like something done “with” people rather than “on” them. Moriña (2021) also reminded us that consent and ethics are not one-time steps but rolling conversations that need to respond to participants' situations and vulnerabilities. Von Benzon and van Blerk (2017) and Gaitis (2023) explained that vulnerability is shaped by context and power, and they recommended participant-led approaches or, in some cases, having a familiar or trusted individual conduct the interview. Both strategies give participants a more active role and help prevent unfair use of their experiences. Taken together, these studies underscored that relationship-based research is about ethics in practice, requiring researchers to continually practice trust, care, and accountability in ways that share power and affirm participants' voices.

### *Dialogic and Reflexive Interviewing*

Dialogic and reflexive interviewing are important in relationship-based research because they help create more human and caring conversations. This also helps improve both the quality of what is learned and the respect shown to everyone involved. These approaches demonstrate how interviews can move beyond simple data collection to become collaborative, co-constructed, and grounded in responsibility. The paragraphs below begin with exploring dialogic stance, framing the interview as shared work, and then continuing to explore a reflexive approach of interviewing, which emphasizes the researchers' awareness of influence and responsibility.

Dialogic interviews emphasize collaboration and position the participants as partners rather than subjects. Way et al. (2015) suggested that curiosity rather than contention allows interviewers to treat participants as allies whose perspectives enrich understanding. Similarly, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) described the “active interview” as an interactive exchange allowing participants to co-create knowledge alongside researchers. In this dialogic approach, conversation is both the

way we learn and the way we show respect. It treats participants as active partners who help create understanding, not just people who give answers.

Reflexivity adds depth to interviewing by helping researchers see how their own choices and perspectives shape both the process and the results. Instead of being a single step, reflexivity is an ongoing habit of thinking about how who we are affects what we learn (Roulston, 2010). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) pointed out that interviews are always a shared process that requires reflection about context, power, and ethics. Finlay (2002) added that when researchers stay aware of their subjectivity, they can turn it from a limitation into a strength that deepens honesty and trust in qualitative research. Alhazmi (2023) further emphasized that researchers' identities and understandings continue to shift throughout the research process, particularly in work that requires sustained reflexivity and attention to positionality.

Recent research offers practical ways to apply reflexivity as a collaborative process. Pessoa et al. (2019) explained that conducting reflexive interviews involves ongoing engagement across multiple sessions, giving participants opportunities to validate, question, and refine interpretations. This approach helps prevent misrepresentation while fostering rapport and encouraging participants to share deeper insights into their experiences. Goldspink et al. (2024) extended this perspective through the concept of reflexive advocacy, in which the interviewer supports the researcher in recognizing and articulating their own assumptions while withholding interpretation or judgment. Collectively, these studies emphasized that reflexivity is not a single step but an ongoing practice that enhances both the trustworthiness and the humanity of qualitative inquiry.

Taken together, dialogic and reflexive approaches show that interviewing in qualitative research goes beyond collecting data. It builds relationships that shape meaning and care. Campbell et al. (2009) found that participants often experienced interviews as "helpful [and] cathartic" (p. 70). This finding illustrated how interviews create spaces for validation and reflection while generating knowledge. Dialogic practices ensure that researchers listen to participants as collaborators, while reflexive practices call on researchers to stay transparent and accountable as they construct knowledge. When combined, these approaches make interviewing a humanizing practice that values reciprocity, fosters trust, and encourages shared understanding between participants and researchers.

### *Interviewing as a Site of Researcher Development*

Qualitative interviewing is more than a method. The process has the potential to change both the researcher and the participant in lasting ways. Scholars have shown that sustained interview practice not only generates knowledge but also fosters professional growth, empathy, and reflexivity for researchers. McClelland (2017) described "vulnerable listening" as a practice where researchers pay close attention to their own physical and emotional responses during interviews. This form of listening demands active engagement, self-awareness, and ethical care. Similarly, Prout et al. (2020) showed that narrative interviewing can transform both interviewers and participants. Through empathy and nonverbal communication, researchers reflect on their assumptions and strengthen their interviewing skills.

Empathy and mutuality also stand out as core commitments that guide researchers' methods and interactions. Kocyba et al. (2022) argued that researchers must temporarily suspend their own perspective to step into participants' frames of reference, deepening their ability to empathize. This aligns with Roulston's (2010) call for reflective interviewing as an ongoing process of negotiation and meaning making. Over time, these practices help interviewers learn to care for

participants while also staying aware of their own perspectives. In this way, personal growth and ethical awareness develop side by side.

Carefully facilitated interviews can foster personal meaning, emotional processing, and a sense of contribution. Participants are also shaped by interviews, especially when research is carried out with a relational and dialogic orientation. Campbell et al. (2009) found that rape survivors often described interviews as “helpful [and] cathartic” (p. 70), showing that disclosure can bring validation and emotional relief. Harper and Cole (2012) noted that member checking sometimes carried therapeutic-like benefits, with participants finding meaning and affirmation in revisiting their stories. The role of the interviewer is therefore essential in fostering the trust and openness that make such meaning-making possible.

Sustained interviewing can create change beyond the research itself. Procter and Padfield (1998) found that participants clarified their thinking and sometimes changed their behavior after reflecting during interviews. Wolgemuth et al. (2014) showed that the impact of interviews depends on reflection time, topic sensitivity, and how long participants and researchers stay in contact. Nardon et al. (2021) explained that interviews can act as interventions, giving participants chances to see new perspectives and find solutions.

However, interviews also carry risks. Husband (2020) warned that interviews can bring up unexpected emotions. Harper and Cole (2012) noted that revisiting personal stories may reopen painful memories or lead participants to compare their experiences with others. These studies remind researchers to create caring, reflective spaces, and to stay alert to signs of participant distress.

Interviews are not simply tools for gathering data; they are interactions that shape both sides of the relationship in lasting ways. For participants, interviews can involve some risk; they can also offer validation, spark reflection, and even lead to transformation. The synthesis of studies in this literature review shows that interviewing is a relational practice with mutual impact. For researchers, it builds reflexivity, empathy, and ethical awareness. Ultimately, interviewing deepens understanding and creates lasting connections that extend far beyond the research itself.

Taken together, these strands of scholarship show that interviewing is a relational, dialogic, and ethically grounded practice that shapes everyone involved (Caparrós Martín et al., 2021; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Pessoa et al., 2019). Relationship-based research highlights trust, reciprocity, and accountability; dialogic and reflexive interviewing shows how knowledge is built through conversation and researcher self-awareness; and work on interviewing as a site of researcher development points to how sustained engagement can support growth in empathy, reflexivity, and ethical responsibility for researchers (Caparrós Martín et al., 2021; Moriña, 2021; Prout et al., 2020; Way et al., 2015). Although prior research recognizes that interviewers are influenced by these processes, few studies have closely examined how this development unfolds across multiple years of long-term inquiry. Building on these foundations, the present study focuses on the interviewer’s evolving role within a six-year program of relationship-based interviews, making a methodological contribution by showing how interviewer development influences the generation, interpretation, and credibility of longitudinal qualitative knowledge.

## Methods

This study is grounded in a view of qualitative research as relational, reflexive, and ethically engaged. Informed by dialogic and reflexive interviewing traditions, we approached interviews as co-constructed conversations shaped by trust, familiarity, and shared reflection rather than as

neutral tools for extracting information. We prioritized empathetic listening, curiosity, and reciprocity, approaching interviews as shared spaces where meaning developed through conversation and teachers' experiences were explored with care for both their professional and emotional realities.

Because this project followed teachers over multiple years, our design was intentionally longitudinal and relational. Sustained engagement allowed the interviewer to deepen her understanding of each teacher's context, revisit earlier conversations, and trace shifts in identity and professional purpose over time. At the same time, ongoing reflexive dialogue within the research team made researcher development an integral part of the methodological process.

The research team complied with all research requirements of the Ball State University Institutional Review Board. All members of the research team completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course training. This study was approved by the Ball State University IRB (approval no. 1759537) on June 1, 2021.

The sections that follow outline the research design, participants, data sources, and analytic procedures, with attention to how dialogic and reflexive principles were enacted in practice and how knowledge was co constructed across time and context.

### ***Research Design***

The larger longitudinal study grew from our shared concerns about the early professional experiences of recent graduates entering the teaching profession. As teacher educators in different elementary education programs, we wanted to better understand the kinds of support, especially mentoring, that novice teachers received during their first years in the classroom. We designed a collective case study to follow the evolving experiences of a group of novice teachers over time (Merriam, 1998). Data sources included in-depth interviews and brief questionnaires that captured participants' perspectives between interview cycles.

The present study represents a focused strand within that broader project. As the study progressed, we noticed something distinctive about the interactions between the interviewer and participants. Maeve, the interviewer, was a doctoral student and research assistant whose prior experience was mainly in quantitative research, which made her growth as a qualitative interviewer especially visible over time.

In 2022, we presented early findings from the longitudinal study at a conference and acknowledged Maeve's contributions, noting the depth and richness of the conversations she facilitated. During the discussion, an audience member commented that the interviews seemed to function as more than data collection, describing them as "empathetic interventions." This observation resonated with us and prompted a closer look at the relational and reflexive dimensions of the interviewing process.

This study therefore takes a reflexive qualitative approach to examining the interviewing process itself within a longitudinal context, viewing interviews not only as sources of data but also as spaces of relational and ethical practice.

### ***Participants***

This paper draws on two focused interviews with Maeve, the interviewer, as well as data from a subset of teacher participants in the larger longitudinal study. Before student teaching, participants from each institution were invited to take part in interviews about their experiences of

becoming teachers. Although we could not have anticipated the onset of a global pandemic during their student teaching semester, that event unfolded just as the research began and became an important part of participants' early professional contexts. The initial cohort included sixteen novice teachers. Most of these participants have remained involved in the study across six years, contributing to an unusually sustained view of early career development.

Participants represented multiple teacher preparation programs and entered a range of school contexts, allowing the study to capture varied pathways into the profession while maintaining the depth of a collective case design.

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected under an Institutional Review Board approved protocol. Collection for the longitudinal study began during participants' student teaching semester and now extends into their fifth year after graduation. All participants were compensated for their time.

Across the larger project, data sources included in-depth interviews and brief questionnaires that captured participants' perspectives between interview cycles. Although the study spans multiple years of data collection, this article focuses on the subset of interviews and questionnaires that included questions designed to explore the relational and reflexive dimensions of the interviewing process.

The data presented here center primarily on two interviews with Maeve, conducted by a graduate student member of the research team. These interviews focused on reflecting on the series of interviews conducted across the larger study and on how those interviews were experienced by both Maeve and the teacher participants. To situate Maeve's reflections within the broader study context, we also drew upon interviews with teacher participants conducted at key points in the longitudinal project. Table 1 provides a timeline of the interviews examined in this article.

**Table 1**  
*Timeline of Interviews Included in This Study*

| <b>Date</b>        | <b>Interview</b>                                        |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| June – August 2023 | Maeve interviewed teachers – eighth interview           |
| July 2023          | Graduate student interviewed Maeve – Interview 1        |
| June 2025          | Maeve interviewed teachers – 12 <sup>th</sup> interview |
| July 2025          | Graduate student interviewed Maeve – Interview 2        |

### ***Data Analysis***

All data were transcribed verbatim and initially coded using an iterative, inductive process (Patton, 2001). The aim of this phase was to identify patterns in how both the teacher participants and Maeve experienced and described the interview process over time. In the next stage of analysis, we grouped codes according to thematic similarities across the two data sets (Saldana, 2009).

As a research team, we then reviewed these coded segments and identified the most frequently recurring ideas, which were developed into broader themes. Ongoing dialogue among team members supported trustworthiness in the analytic process (Smagorinsky, 2008) and helped us reach agreement on the most salient themes.

## Findings

We identified three major themes that illustrate Maeve's experiences and perspectives throughout the study. The first theme, Expanded Maeve's Professional Identity and Career Trajectory, incorporated growth that furthered Maeve's professional opportunities, including transitions between workplaces. The second theme, Deepened Maeve's Contextual and System-Level Understanding of Teaching, included how Maeve made sense of the dynamics and infrastructures of K–6 education. The third theme, Maeve Learned to Build Relational Trust Through Dialogic Interviewing comprised study design elements that fostered rapport within the interview environment.

### *Expanded Maeve's Professional Identity and Career Trajectory*

Over the course of the longitudinal study, Maeve experienced sustained professional growth that shaped her trajectory from graduate student to institutional expert in qualitative methodology. Early in the project, she began refining foundational skills—such as empathetic listening, rapport-building, and environmental awareness—that not only enhanced her research practice but also laid out the groundwork for broader career advancement. Maeve learned how we, as researchers, managed some of the typically invisible-to-students tasks and processes. Maeve stated,

I find myself reflecting back on how certain things were navigated within that team and outside of the project. [I see] how that behind-the-scenes administration has unfolded and that has also helped me to understand different areas in my professional career (Interview 2).

Participants frequently commented on Maeve's capacity for care and listening, which made for easy conversations. For example, Bailey (Interview 8) noted, "We talk for an hour like I talk with some of my best friends for an hour and it can fly by...I never feel shy or anxious." Maeve found facilitating the interviews helped her grow as a qualitative researcher. Her increasing expertise enabled her to apply qualitative methods in her position, where she transformed survey data into actionable insights. She stated, "This work has helped me to build a robust qualitative foundation" (Interview 2). By designing and leading focus groups and training a team to support this work, Maeve demonstrated the practical value of qualitative inquiry in organizational settings. These experiences became a launchpad for her current role, where she serves as the content expert in qualitative methodology.

Throughout the study, Maeve engaged in a range of scholarly activities—including grant writing, conference presentations, and manuscript development—that deepened her academic skill set. Maeve stated, "Having the opportunity to write, publish, and present at conferences was a really big piece that I had not anticipated and had not experienced previously" (Interview 1). The collaborative nature of the research team provided mentorship and space to articulate her professional mission, advocate for the value of her work, and explore new methodological directions. These experiences helped her cultivate a more balanced and intentional approach to academic life.

Ultimately, the longitudinal study served as a professional incubator, equipping Maeve with the confidence, clarity, and expertise to pursue roles aligned with her values and strengths. Maeve stated, collaboration with the research team aided in her "learning about the structure in which grants are being applied for and the rotation of [conference] proposals and what the writing process looked like for the specific research team" (Interview 1). The combination of applied practice,

institutional impact, and scholarly growth was instrumental in shaping her identity as a researcher, educator, and leader in qualitative inquiry. Participants' sense of trust in Maeve paralleled her own growth as a relational interviewer and researcher. Kathleen, for instance, shared, "I don't feel like I have to not say things. I feel very comfortable sharing [with Maeve]" (Interview 12). For Maeve, continuous engagement helped to clarify her research identity and reinforce her commitment to ethical and relational methodology that supported both interviewer and participant wellbeing. Reflecting on her work, she shared "this [project] has really helped me to identify the work that I'm most interested in" (Interview 2).

### *Deepened Maeve's Contextual and System-Level Understanding of Teaching*

Maeve came to this project with an interesting understanding of education. In addition to her experiences as a student, she had unique insight because both her parents were educators, her father served as an elementary teacher and an administrator, and her mother was a middle school teacher and director of technology. As the daughter of two educators, Maeve got a more nuanced understanding of the educational field since she was "there for any volunteer opportunity" (Interview 2) such as board meetings, PTO activities, and field days. By extension, this background knowledge paired with the interviews fostered a deeper, educational understanding. Maeve stated, [It] helped me to understand some of the language and some of the structure. But certainly not to the extent of 'what does a literacy coach do?' or 'what does be pulled out of the classroom mean?' or district specific kind of foundations (Interview 2).

Maeve's familiarity with education meant she understood the teachers' experiences differently. However, she added to her understanding during the six years of interviews with the teachers. For example, she learned more about how the participating teachers handled classroom management and teacher evaluations. Maeve stated,

That has helped me ... have some context into what they're sharing... I have some background information, but it varies from district to district and school to school. My limited knowledge is enough for me to prompt further questions [and] has helped [me] gain some of those insights (Interview 2).

Maeve explained how her developing knowledge of education enabled her to understand the gist of what the teachers were discussing in the interviews and to ask follow-up questions that fostered her understanding of the teachers' contexts. She was able to ask questions, such as, "Yes, classroom management is important, but what does that look like for your class this year?" (Interview 2). Maeve highlighted her understanding of how the teachers she interviewed felt about and experienced classroom management. She further noted, "I think it helps me to understand the pieces of K through 12, kind of behind the scenes outside of the teaching, all these boxes that teachers need to check" (Interview 2).

Finally, the interviews helped Maeve foster her understanding of the emotional energy the participating teachers expended. The teachers in this study were student teachers in Spring 2020 and first-year teachers during the 2020-2021 academic year. Since this was the beginning of the study, Maeve had a limited understanding of K-12 education. During the first few interviews, she relied only on her time as a student and her experiences with her parents as teachers. Therefore, she had a hard time understanding when the teachers discussed their unique contexts due to mandates relating to the COVID-19 pandemic (See Daley et al. 2023). Maeve stated,

I can't imagine being in a classroom and having a never-ending to-do list...not being able to have certain students sit together because of COVID [protocols] and needing to have two curricula, one virtual and one in person. And the constant switching [of teaching modalities] and needing to boil down this really different experience, like suicide, and making those age-appropriate, but also recognizing that those are really emotionally-taxing and trying to offer what support I could in those conversations, even if it was just sitting and listening (Interview 1).

In interview two, which took place during year five of the study, Maeve demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of education. For example, she stated,

During COVID, veteran teachers were trying to learn how to use technology in a way they had not before, and new teachers [were] trying to navigate technology. But also [participants were] entering the workforce for the first time during a pandemic. I think the timing of this [study] captured that piece as well (Interview 2).

Maeve showed how her understanding of education was fostered in the years of interviewing the teachers as she highlighted specific areas of concern to the teachers in our study. Because Maeve heard multiple teachers' experiences about beginning their career during a pandemic, she gained a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by the participants. Several participants acknowledged Maeve's growing familiarity with their contexts and education in general, explaining, "[it's great] being able to talk about this stuff with somebody that gets it and knows and understands a world of education has been really helpful" (Kathleen, Interview 8). In the following section, we will demonstrate how the study design supported the building of rapport between Maeve and the participants.

#### ***Maeve Learned to Build Relational Trust Through Dialogic Interviewing***

As we analyzed the data from Maeve's two interviews, we also identified elements of the study design that supported the building of rapport between Maeve and the teachers. The elements included, the longitudinal nature of this project, the varied methods of data collection, participant retention, and interviewing techniques, including Maeve's approach and the process of building rapport.

#### ***Longitudinal Nature of and Participant Retention in the Study***

Throughout the five-and-a-half-year study, Maeve had two opportunities to reflect on her interviewing experiences (Table 1). During these interviews, Maeve emphasized the study's longevity, thoughtful design, and her strong rapport with teachers as key contributors to its success.

Across data from both interviews, Maeve reflected on the extensive number of interviews conducted and the many hours spent with participants over the years. She noted that the depth of these interactions helped build meaningful relationships, which in turn enhanced the quality and consistency of the data. Maeve stated, "the buy in [from the teachers] and the ... rapport building and being that it's longitudinal ... it's all come together in a really lovely way" (Interview 2). The rapport developed between Maeve and the participants was a central factor in sustaining engagement throughout the study. Participants confirmed this sense of connection, one sharing, "I

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think it's been a good way to feel that you get to state how things are...talking to a third party [Maeve]...I feel like it's been a totally honest experience" (Lindsay, Interview 8).

Maeve observed that the study provided an opportunity for participants to return annually and share their evolving experiences. She stated, "...we are getting these snapshots of teachers in their early years, and how beneficial that was to...understand their stories and lived experiences" (Interview 2). The longitudinal design not only deepened the conversations but also affirmed the value of capturing professional growth over time. For example, Maeve shared "[the interviews are] an annual opportunity for me to sit down and think about 'what did go well and what didn't go well', and 'what do I hope happens in the future?' and 'what changes would I like to make?' I think that's really unique to the project as well" (Interview 2). It is important to note the challenges within education that the teachers navigated. Maeve stated, "despite very clear burnout and teaching crisis that currently exists, there is still this incredible level of investment that they [the participants] have in wanting to enhance their practices, despite all of the challenges they've faced" (Interview 1). While navigating these challenges, general burnout, the COVID pandemic, and the teaching crisis, the teachers remained invested in the project.

Overall, the study design was a foundational element of building connections and investment for this project. Participants' comments about Maeve's consistency reflected this same investment, one noting, "It's nice when you can reference things from a couple of years ago...you remember that...so I can just keep going with my thoughts, which is nice" (Kathleen, Interview 12). Kathleen had previously noted Maeve had "learned a lot about me over these [interviews]," adding that the interviews "felt like a safe space...kind of like a therapy session" (Kathleen, Interview 8).

### *Maeve's Interviewing Skills and Techniques*

Interviewing skills and techniques Maeve employed were another topic she consistently discussed. In her first interview, she emphasized the importance of intentionally creating a safe space for the participants during their conversations. She worked to create an environment that encouraged honest dialogue and allowed participants to share their challenges and experiences. Maeve noted the interviews were "...where they felt comfortable to disclose things they likely wouldn't have been [able to share] in their school" (Interview 1). The participants directly affirmed this, sharing, "I don't feel like I don't have to say things ... I feel very comfortable sharing" (Kathleen, Interview 12). Lindsay described how she felt safe sharing in interviews when she stated, "I feel like things would be a little different if I knew that my principal was sitting in on this meeting" (Interview 8).

Maeve noted that the structure of the interviews supported this openness, fostering a sense of being heard and enabling difficult conversations to emerge. Maeve shared, "I am thankful for the research relationships that I have with the teachers that they do feel comfortable coming into a call and telling me what's been the most difficult thing that they've been experiencing" (Interview 1). Despite the virtual nature of the interviews and the absence of physical connectedness, Maeve was able to build a strong rapport with the participants. This rapport was an outcome supported by the design of the study and Maeve's skills as an interviewer. Over time, Maeve shared that she had "...become confident that I am capable of [having] really meaningful connections with these teachers" (Interview 1).

Maeve attributed the development of this safe space to several factors: consistent teacher retention and her own intentional interviewing strategies. From a retention perspective, Maeve continued to see buy-in from the participants, sharing "...they [participants] want to continue

participating, and they really feel like they're an active member of this research" (Interview 1). This investment continues to refine and strengthen the interviewing strategies that are being utilized. Maeve also shared an insight into quality rapport building. She noticed "how much information you can get from a conversation once you build that rapport, and everyone feels like it's a safe space to communicate concerns and successes" (Interview 1).

Maeve prepped thoroughly before interview sessions, often revisiting notes from previous interviews to maintain continuity and connection. She highlighted the importance of remembering small, meaningful details shared by participants, which allowed for thoughtful check-ins and the development of deeper relational ties. Maeve stated,

The long-term nature of the longitudinal study has also helped to develop that rapport, in ...connecting with an academic colleague that you haven't seen in a year, and you're just kind of learning about their work, and then that closes until the next year (Interview 2).

Maeve also described how she regulated her own emotions and was mindful of her nonverbal cues, reinforcing her belief that teachers are the experts of their own experiences. For example, Maeve shared, "if I do react emotionally, I tried to mirror and [tried] to be as empathetic as possible" (Interview 1). She explained that these practices were essential to fostering a dialogic and reflexive interview process. Participants' words underscored this dynamic; one teacher described that "[with Maeve], it's kind of nice...I don't feel like I have to justify myself or explain myself" (Kathleen, Interview 12).

## Discussion

By exploring Maeve's growth and experiences as an interviewer, we were able to identify how dialogic and reflexive interviewing transformed research relationships and shaped the interviewer. We posit that relationship-based research practices, specifically reflexive and dialogic interviewing and designing longitudinal studies, enables researchers to benefit from reciprocity, trust and reflexivity, as well as uphold our commitments to methodological choices and ethical concerns. We determined the impact dialogic and reflexive interviewing had on Maeve, the participants, and the quality of the data collected in the interviews.

### *Reciprocity, Trust, and Reflexivity*

Dialogic and reflexive interviewing transforms research relationships. Cornerstones of dialogic and reflexive interviewing are reciprocity, trust, and reflexivity (Campbell et al., 2009). Reciprocity is evident in our study by Maeve's growth and career opportunities and the retention of many of the participants across the five-year study. The humanizing practice of relational approaches to qualitative research allowed Maeve to develop and hone research skills that she then parlayed into future research positions. The participants were able to access a safe space to process and reflect on their teaching careers in often unprecedented and difficult situations.

The trust Maeve built with the participants was a result of her capacity as an interviewer. Maeve came to the role of researcher in this study with skills and characteristics paramount to dialogic and reflexive interviewing. Maeve's commitment to practicing her craft as an interviewer benefited her professional growth and fostered her understanding of the educational systems in which the teachers worked. During her time as part of the research team, Maeve secured positions in which she was responsible for designing and engaging in qualitative research projects.

By fostering her understanding of the educational system, Maeve gained a deeper sense of empathy for the teachers. This reflexively built her own development as a researcher and her ethical growth. Maeve strengthened her empathetic capacity throughout the study, building relationships with the participants by considering their needs beyond the purpose of the interview to gather data. What began as semi-structured interviews developed into dynamic, authentic exchanges that moved beyond data collection, evolving into rolling conversations responsive to the participants' shifting contexts and emotional realities.

### ***Methodological and Ethical Commitments***

By employing relationship-oriented research approaches, particularly dialogic and reflexive interviewing, we added to and extended the work on the conceptualization interviews not as one-way data-gathering techniques but as reciprocal, relational processes that actively shape the experiences and understandings of all participants (Caparros Martin et al., 2021; Oakley, 1981). In designing this longitudinal study, we employed methods aligned with dialogic and reflexive interviewing. Maeve's interviewing skills were central to the success of each conversation. Her approach reflected what Goldspink et al. (2024) describe as reflexive advocacy, where the interviewer helps researchers recognize their assumptions while withholding interpretation. As a reflexive advocate, Maeve fostered awareness rather than offered answers, showing that rigor in qualitative research depends on both responsible engagement with participants' data and awareness of one's own positionality.

Interviews can be simultaneously rigorous, ethical, and humanizing. Our methodological and ethical commitments shaped both the design of the study and our stance as researchers. We approached interviews as ongoing, dialogic conversations rather than one-time data collection, positioning novice teachers as co-interpreters rather than subjects. In practice, this involved careful attention to listening and timing (Caparrós Martín et al., 2021), maintaining reflexivity as researchers (Rouse, 2024), recognizing multiple voices in analysis (Sidorkin, 2024), and upholding reciprocity and accountability consistent with decolonizing approaches (Gerlach, 2018; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Grounded in trust, reciprocity, and reflexivity, our design aimed to make the research relationship a space of ethical care and shared meaning-making, not merely a means of collecting data.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Our work includes implications for qualitative methodology and research training. Within the field of qualitative methodology, our work shows that the dialogic and reflexive interviews shaped Maeve not just the datasets. Therefore, when designing future studies, we will consciously employ methods that allow us to collect data and contribute to the development of our interviewer and the participants by enhancing depth and ethics within our work. Additionally, in future studies, we will purposefully support and train other interviewers to develop and grow their skills to create interview spaces in which the interviewer and the participants encounter reciprocity, trust, and reflexivity.

Maeve's ability and willingness to grow as a researcher, foster her understanding of the teachers' contexts, and engage in dialogic and reflexive practices allowed us, as a research team, to do more than simply gather data. Her skills at dialogic and reflexive interviewing encouraged

the participants to share the full spectrum of their experiences, including the many challenges they faced.

Our findings show that dialogic and reflexive interviewing expanded Maeve's professional identity, deepened her understanding of teaching contexts, and strengthened her ability to build relational trust. As prior research suggests, interpretations shift over time and evolving rapport influences what participants feel able to share (Barrington et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2006). Yet limited research directly examines how interviewers themselves change across long term studies. By tracing Maeve's development across multiple waves of relationship-based interviews, this study demonstrates how interviewer growth shapes both the depth of participant responses and the meaning made from longitudinal qualitative data.

As a result of this work, we can highlight the importance of embedding relationship-based research practices into qualitative research design and methodology affirming that participants often experience interviews as "helpful [and] cathartic" (Campbell et al., 2009, p. 70). Providing opportunities for researchers to practice dialogic and reflexive interviewing in longitudinal studies improves the quality of data gathered and employs the ethics necessary for relationship-based research. By utilizing these methods, researchers can realize the humanizing potential of relationship-based inquiry in support of teachers and those who study them.

Building on these findings, our future work will focus on intentionally preparing graduate assistants to engage in dialogic and reflexive interviewing practices within longitudinal qualitative research. We will design and study a structured training model that emphasizes mentorship, reflection, and supervised practice. We also intend to systematically study this training process itself, examining how it shapes interviewer development over time. By doing so, we aim to better understand how intentional preparation can strengthen qualitative methodology and enhance the depth and quality of data collected by scholars.

### Author Contributions

Dr. Sharon Daley: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Writing – Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing. Dr. Tammi R. Davis: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing. Dr. Jackie Sydnor: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Writing – Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing. Dr. Margaret Ascolani: Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing.

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### **Ethical Considerations**

The research team complied with all research requirements of the Ball State University Institutional Review Board. All members of the research team completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course training. This study was approved by the Ball State University IRB (approval no. 1759537) on June 1, 2021.

### **Informed Consent Form**

As required by the Ball State Institutional Review Board, participants who contributed data for the study received, reviewed, and signed an informed consent document. This form is available by email request to the corresponding author (Daley, shdaley@iu.edu).

### **Data Availability Statement**

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available given the privacy and/or safety of research participants would be compromised and place them at greater risk of re-identification or suffering harm, and protective measures such as de-identification and Certificates of Confidentiality would be insufficient. Upon project completion, de-identified verbatim transcripts will be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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