

# A Fall from (Someone Else's) Certainty: Recovering Practical Wisdom in Teacher Education

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Inquiry-based teacher education promotes an exploration of concrete particulars as the route to wise practice. The case study presented illustrates one teacher candidate's struggle to let go of a conception of knowledge as generalizable formulae that can be readily applied in practice and to become more open to practice itself as a site of learning. Teacher educators can nurture such openness by helping aspiring teachers to appreciate the fragility of knowledge, the epistemological value of feeling, and the priority of the particular, in teaching. In so doing, educators recover practical wisdom as the beginning and end-in-view of teacher education.

Key words: practical wisdom, preservice teacher education, inquiry

La formation à l'enseignement axée sur la recherche favorise la prise en compte des conditions particulières et, de ce fait, une pratique éclairée. L'étude de cas présentée dans cet article illustre les efforts d'une candidate à l'enseignement en vue de se départir d'une conception de la connaissance définie comme une formule généralisable, facilement applicable dans la pratique, et de mieux accueillir la pratique elle-même comme un lieu d'apprentissage. Les responsables de la formation à l'enseignement peuvent contribuer à cette ouverture en aidant les futurs enseignants à saisir la fragilité de la connaissance, la valeur épistémologique des sentiments et l'importance des conditions particulières dans l'enseignement. Ce faisant, les éducateurs redécouvrent la sagesse comme le début et l'objectif à atteindre dans la formation à l'enseignement.

Mots clés : sagesse pratique, formation à l'enseignement, recherche.

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We didn't have a lot of time for physical education today so we went to the park . . . for a little while so the students could move around. On the way . . . we were walking 2X2 with Rhonda at the front and myself at the back. I was walking with a new boy, Julian, and all of a sudden, he just decided to stop walking.

Me, confused: "What's the matter, Julian?"

Julian, angry: "I'm not going!"

Me, panic stricken: "What do you mean you're not going?!"

Julian: "I'm not going. I hate gym."

Me, confused, scared + panic stricken!/: "You're going to stay here – in the street?!"

Julian: "Yup."

Not sounding too confident: "Well, I'm going to play in the park with everybody else. I like to play outside."

I took a few steps thinking to myself, "Oh, God, *please* follow me, please follow me!" He did and we quickly caught up with the rest of the gang but it took some time for my heart to stop pounding. . . . (Lily's Field Journal)

Lily was a student in a two-year, post-degree, inquiry-based, teacher-education program.<sup>1</sup> Bewildered by the concrete particulars of experience — an assertive boy called Julian, and Morgana, a child "who cannot sit still for longer than 1 minute 33 seconds," or the sequencing of a lesson on subtraction — her field experiences were wrought with anxiety. Punctuated by question after question, her field journals read like litanies: "What do I need to know? Does [the assignment] go by grade, age, or individual student? How do you assess something like this? How much spelling do you correct? Or is the emphasis on content and demonstrating an understanding of the story? How do you teach students to write? Spell? Read? AAAAGGH!" The questions in Lily's field journal made her an ideal student for her inquiry-based program or so it seemed.

The intent of inquiry-based teacher education is to make learning to teach, and teaching itself, a complex and uncertain enterprise that demands ongoing, thoughtful inquiry and discernment. Teacher educators invite teacher candidates to participate in action research projects, to become critical consumers of the research literature in light of practice, and to develop a reflective approach to decisionmaking (Gitlin, Barlow, Burbank, Kauchak, & Stevens, 1999). The understanding is that "what is known and worth knowing about teaching is related to the practical knowledge possessed by teachers of how and when to act in actual teaching situations" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 141). One underlying premise of inquiry-based teacher education is the value of a different type of knowledge base, one that views teachers not only as consumers of knowledge but also "as architects of study and generators of knowledge" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, pp. 1–2).

Inquiry-based teacher education differs from the applied-science

model of teacher education that has predominated in universities during the twentieth century (Schon, 1983). In this model, practice has often been seen as “merely an expression of embarrassment at the deplorable but soon overcome condition of incomplete theory” (Bubner, 1981, p. 204). As such, there has been a strong tendency to disembed knowledge from the immediacy and idiosyncrasy of particular teaching situations and from the experience of teachers (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002).

Through this disembedding it is supposed that what is essential in the knowledge and skill can be encapsulated in explicit, generalizable formulae, procedures, or rules. The latter then are to be applied to the various situations and circumstances that arise in the practice so as to meet the problems that they present. These problems are supposed to have nothing in them that has not been anticipated in the analysis that yielded the general formulae, and hence to be soluble by a straightforward application of the latter, without need for insight or discernment in the actual situation itself. (p. 197)

In this “practitioner-proof” view (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002, p. 197), teacher education is premised on the understanding that the sources of teacher excellence lie in certain knowledge systems that have been sedimented from the research literature (Van Manen, 1994). There are the studies of effective teacher behaviour reviewed by Brophy and Good (1986), or the categories of the knowledge base of teaching outlined by Shulman (1987).

In summary, although an applied science model emphasizes mastery of an extant knowledge base as the route towards excellence in teaching, the inquiry-based model promotes ongoing exploration of the concrete particulars of practice in specific situations as the route to wise decisions about how to act. If inquiry-based teacher education were successful, one would expect prospective teachers to hold a particular conception of what counts as useful knowledge and concomitantly what counts as teaching (Sutton, Cafarelli, Lund, Schurdell, & Bichsel, 1996; Gitlin, Barlow, Burbank, Kauchak, & Stevens, 1999; Tillema, 2000).

In this article, I explore how one teacher candidate’s understanding of knowledge and teaching evolved during the course of an inquiry-based program. Lily’s experience illustrates how some prospective teachers struggle to let go of a conception of knowledge as generalizable formulae

that can be readily applied in practice. I conclude that teacher educators may need to help prospective teachers reconsider their relationship to knowledge and to appreciate the role of experience and emotion in teaching and learning to teach through inquiry.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A PHRONETIC APPROACH TO INQUIRY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Teaching is a normative pedagogical activity: teachers are required to operate in ever-changing situations and to be discerning in their interactions with children about what is appropriate and what is not and what is good and what is not (Van Manen, 1994). Phronesis is, according to Aristotle, that intellectual activity that “focuses on what is variable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules, on specific cases; it requires consideration, judgement and choice” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 57). Most of all, perhaps, it requires experience. Aristotle writes that phronesis

is not concerned with universals only; it must also take cognizance of particulars, because it is concerned with conduct, and conduct has its sphere in particular circumstances. That is why some people who do not possess theoretical knowledge are more effective in action (especially if they are experienced) than others who do possess it. For example, suppose that someone knows that light flesh foods are digestible and wholesome, but does not know what kinds are light; he will be less likely to produce health than one who knows that chicken is wholesome. But prudence is practical, and therefore it must have both kinds of knowledge, or especially the latter. (Aristotle in Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 58)

In keeping with the notion of phronesis and in contrast to applied science models of teacher education, inquiry-based teacher education rejects the notion of a predetermined set of competencies or a discrete set of teaching strategies that can be delivered to prospective teachers in anticipation of practice. In keeping with a strong hermeneutic conception of practice represented by such philosophers as Jurgen Habermas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor (McEwan, 1995), inquiry-based teacher education embraces the importance of experience and its interpretation.

Inquiry, as a reconstruction of experience (Dewey, 1934), is central to

the development of the capacity for discernment. The reconstruction process requires prospective teachers to first learn how to make intelligent reports of what happens to them as they prepare for and engage in teaching (Nussbaum, 1990). Creating reports of experience involves prioritizing the particular by writing narratives of experience, just like Lily's story about Julian in her field journal. Teacher candidates must then engage in a continual search and re-search for the significance of the experience in light of prior experience, reading, and in the context of conversations with one's self and others. As Ricoeur (1991) tells us, "All verbal significance must be constructed; but there is no construction without choice, and no choice without a norm" (in Nielsen, 1995, p. 10). The construction of significance, and the subsequent judgment about how one ought to act, invites teacher candidates to pose value rational questions in each situation: What am I doing? Is it desirable in the short-term and in the long-term? Who gains? Who loses? By what mechanisms of power? (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Although formulated knowledge or theory contributes to teacher candidates' reconstruction of each concrete situation or experience, their seeing is always in particular and cannot be determined in advance of encountering the situation. Each reconstruction of experience in field journals or seminar discussions provides opportunities to revise understanding of particular experiences. Inquiry, then, is potentially transformational, an endowment of meaning with significance rather than a manipulation of predetermined meaning.

However, it is not that inquiry has no generalizable power for the teacher candidates. The hope is that each experience that undergoes reconsideration and reconstruction has an epiphanic power: it not only discloses an exemplary significance in the original setting but it also illuminates other similar settings (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002). The process of reconstruction is a cyclical one because it has no beginning and no final end. "New understandings impinge on old practices and become, to varying degrees, part of the language that constitutes the new practice" of the teacher candidate (McEwan, 1995, p. 179).

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CONCEPTION AND ENGAGEMENT OF STUDY: A PHRONETIC APPROACH  
TO RESEARCH

A case study design, with its emphasis on the particular and the contextual, fits well with the theoretical frame of phronesis (Flyvbjerg, 2001). As an instance of phronetic inquiry, this article<sup>1</sup> prioritizes the particular experiences of one prospective teacher in a two-year, inquiry-based, teacher-education program. Lily was a major in elementary education and had recently graduated with an undergraduate academic degree.

*Generating Data*

Through observation, conversation and interpretation, I tried to reach an understanding of Lily's<sup>2</sup> experiences. In as far as possible, program activities (naturally occurring) shaped data collection and took place chronologically over four semesters.

For this article, I have drawn on three sources of data: documents (assignments and instructor-generated narrative evaluations collected and photocopied at the end of each semester); three interviews with Lily (one at the outset, one midway, and one at the end of the study following a classroom observation of the participant); classroom observations (one each semester with Lily and recorded in field notes). Lily's assignments included field journals, case reports, biographies of learning (five-page essays on what she was learning and on who she was becoming as a teacher), and self-selected independent studies (30-page papers on such topics as "developmentally appropriate practice" or action research reports).

Although assignments provided some concrete evidence of Lily's inquiry process, interviews allowed her to explain the sense she was making of her inquiries and of her experiences of learning to teach. During the first interview, I asked Lily to share her life history, her experiences of schooling, and her reasons for selecting teaching as a profession. Later interviews focused on her experiences of both campus and field-based components of the program. An interview that followed a two-hour classroom observation provided Lily with an opportunity to reflect on the lessons taught. Interviews were open-ended. Lily's

responses were instrumental in helping me to locate her assumptions about teaching, learning, knowledge, and teacher education.

#### *Interpreting Data*

Central to my approach to interpretation is the notion that “narrative unities underscore the coherence and continuity of an individual’s experience” (Carter, 1993, p. 8). As I identified “images, rituals, habits, cycles, routines and rhythms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p. 195) embedded within the stories told to me by prospective teachers during the two-year period, I searched for a plot or story line that could endow that array of experiences/stories with coherence. For example, Lily habitually generated lists of questions about practice that she subsequently tried to answer by reading avidly. The habit persisted when she began teaching during her extended practicum in a grade-1 classroom. A cycle developed: She initiated a lesson and then encountered a child who was experiencing difficulty. She became very anxious and at a loss about how to act. She decided not to act until she had time to study. She read late into the evening to find out answers and felt diminished when the answers continued to evade her. Lily used the image of “working myself into a spin” to describe her response to teaching practice. Lily’s story line became learning to let go of her faith in the viability of abstract knowledge as a source of teaching excellence.

Through a series of events, it became evident to Lily that the ever expanding representational world of ideas (both methodological and conceptual) although significant and useful, was in danger of closing her off to children, and preventing her from yielding responsively to them (Nussbaum, 1990). In the process of coming to realize this, her “natural attitude became undone; [she was] left to survey the chaos, the deconstruction” (Caputo, 1987, p. 287). She found herself having to sort out how she could think and act well in the presence of children and to dwell alongside, rather than contain, the questions that teaching evoked. In her own way, Lily had to learn to fall.

## LILY'S STORY OF LEARNING TO FALL

*A Knowing Desire*

Having completed one year of a two-year, after-degree, teacher-education program, Lily transferred to the inquiry-based program, stating that although she "didn't have a problem with the course work and textbooks . . . [she] felt like [she] hadn't been taught how to be a teacher." Opting for a different program meant that she had to start again thereby adding a year to her time in university; however, "[she] felt that [she] needed another year of something."

Lily loved to learn. More specifically, Lily loved to read.

[T]o me reading is a very important thing. And I've just grown up feeling that. I love to read and I try to push it on other people. I just do it all the time. I think I value that because my mother always read to me...because we were always alone...and because she didn't have a lot of money. (Interview, Semester 1)

Lily, as an only child of a single parent, had many warm and secure associations with the practice of reading.

This experience was echoed in her four-year degree program in Marketing and French, where Lily developed an easy alliance between reading, good grades, and a sense of security.

I feel that in terms of my education, maybe because it was imposed on us, you had to have above . . . 3.4 [Grade Point Average], but I always felt like I needed to be way above that so I wouldn't have to worry. (Interview, Semester 1)

Her teacher-education program with its emphasis on collaborative inquiry posed a challenge to that alliance.

Usually when you go to university, it's a very independent thing. And allowing yourself to become dependent on other people for me has been very difficult, because...I'm used to the way I learn, and I've figured out how to be successful in a university setting, and that's kind of all been taken away from me. (Interview, Semester 1)

Lily struggled to trust what others could teach her and insisted on studying all the material herself. "I'm so afraid," she wrote in her field



journal in the first year of the program, "I won't even leave this building; I'll just sit in here looking for knowledge and I'll never go outside."

Lily's fellow students commented on Lily's avid reader approach. Her close friend and collaborator in the program was Victoria:

You know Lily and I are so different in our approach to learning. I'm very comfortable with my thoughts and ideas to the point where sometimes I don't want to hear other people's. But Lily, she sort of needs other voices. She tries to find someone who supports it, that's legitimate in a textbook before she feels confident enough to express it. She's really into textbooks. When we were both at the same Community Workplace site, the woman there said that she thought one of Lily's strongest qualities was her love of learning, because she absorbed all these books. (Victoria, Interview, Semester 2)

Lily's field experiences led to litanies of questions. After a drama group presentation at her school, she wrote:

How do you find out about these different groups? How much \$? Where does it come from? Do you have information before that allows you to familiarize students with certain terms and concepts that arise during a presentation like this one? Or do you do that after? How do you connect this with what is going on in class with the students? How do you assess these presentations? (Field Journal, Semester 2)

Although books could not answer many of her questions, they were the source that she trusted most. Although her field experience reinforced her preoccupation with abstract knowledge, case tutorial provided her with reading lists and fuelled her desire to understand "every little tidbit" as if each new insight or item of knowledge would prepare her for teaching. She explained,

But it's important to see it all and to try and figure out how it works. So that you can find your place in there. It's like when you have a bunch of theories. You pick one that you like. Like say I want to be a constructivist. I still need to be able to understand behaviourism so that I can reject it. (Interview, Semester 2)

Positioning herself in the student role to which she had become accustomed, Lily approached every case tutorial and independent study as a means of amassing new knowledge. At the end of the first year of the program, Lily's case tutor noted in her narrative evaluation of Lily's

case inquiries that her casebook “contained evidence of extensive research,” and that there were “few integrative responses and few reflections.” She went on to state that Lily “seldom answered the positioning questions” that invited a response to the particulars of each case. In her end of year narrative assessments, the fact that Lily “read extensively” was well noted by her professors. Soon enough, however, Lily recognized that her reading was having little impact on her classroom practice.

*Knowing in Advance*

Lily’s field journal continued to be wrought with tension. Lily expected herself to have all the necessary answers. She wrote, “I have so much to learn. I need to know more.” During classroom discussions, she struggled to create space for students’ diverse responses. In her field journal during semester 3, she described herself as “working myself into a spin every time I teach a lesson. Right after I can think of 40 other ways I could have taught it better.” Wisely, her partner teacher noted and responded to Lily’s anxiety by explaining that “One of the hardest things about being a teacher is that you have to act in the moment.” However, rather than calm Lily, the knowledge that one cannot know in advance or in general how one ought to respond in the particular fuelled her anxiety further!

Of course when you go away, you can always think about what happened and what you did...so if the same situation comes up again, that you might know how to handle it better. But, I’m just afraid of what happens to all those people who are there when I handle it really poorly the first time. And then they go to grade two and then they have to deal with all my mistakes. . . . I’d be letting them down. (Interview, Semester 3)

Lily’s understanding of the consequences of poor practice and the inadequacy of her academic learning in classroom moments generated more uncertainty. Her uncertainty translated into teacher talk in the classroom.

I found that if I paused for a minute and tried to get my thought, they’re gone. So I felt a lot of pressure to keep talking all the time. And I found that I’d be talking when

I had nothing to say but I didn't want to stop talking. I don't know. But I also didn't have a lot to say. So it really didn't work out that well all the time. (Interview, Semester 3)

Lily's position as an elementary generalist didn't help matters. Far from her home disciplines of French and Marketing, she felt overwhelmed by her ignorance of disciplines such as history, geography, or science. She explained in an interview, "That was really intimidating for me at first . . . when I looked at the outline for the year and I said, okay, the wetlands. I don't even know where I'd find a wetland. Gotta read about wetlands. Electricity. Oh no. I turn on the light switch, my light goes on. I don't know why!" However, she decided that "you just need to take a deep breath, and you start. And it's all there for you. I mean . . . you just go and you get it."

And that's exactly what Lily did. Planning and preparing to teach became a content learning exercise.

So when I go home, and I teach all of that to myself and I learn all of that, I can come back, and I have different ways to explain it. And I take more initiative now I think, than I ever have in my own learning...to go on my own and find math books, and find all of that stuff. (Interview, Semester 2)

*Knowing as Someone Else's Certainties.*

By the end of her first year, Lily felt some despair. She admitted in an interview that she had learned "so much more . . . in this one year than I probably did in the 5 years of university prior to this." She expressed the feeling that she didn't want to teach unless she was going to be good at it. On the one hand, she had a strong sense that knowledge had let her down. She explained,

It's easy to know all this stuff from textbooks, but to understand how it works for you and how you will work with it, that's the difficulty. I've begun to realize that just because I'm really good at learning the stuff about education doesn't mean I'm going to be a good educator. Maybe that's been my turning point. (Interview, Semester 2)

On the other hand, she reached the realization that she had not really

been learning all along. Rather she had been consuming other people's certainties, with a view to a grade.

When I came to school here I did very well. But that was all; it wasn't me. It was me learning what Dr. B. had to say in his book. So I know what Dr. B . . . thinks about all these things. And I know what Dr. A. thinks about all of these things, and I know what this person thinks about that. But I didn't really know what I thought about it. And I never really had to. Because I could still get an A. And no one ever really brought it up. (Interview, Semester 2)

Not only did Lily realize the importance of thinking for herself; she also understood that in embracing a self-directed approach to her learning to teach, that she would be "stepping on some pretty important big toes." However, she resented the myth, perpetuated by the course-based structure of her previous university program, that all she needed to know could be acquired in a three months "and then that's all I need to know about it." She explained that she didn't know many students "who have taken a course, gotten an A in it and felt like they needed to go out and learn more about it." In other words, courses, perceived often by students as providing complete "packages" of knowledge, do not induce further inquiry.

By the end of her first year, Lily was beginning to perceive herself, her peers, and her students not merely as consumers of information but rather as creators of meaning. One strand of the teacher-education program was case-based. Teacher candidates worked collaboratively through a series of cases related to issues such as power and authority in the classroom. Each group was responsible for presenting a perspective on the case and contributing to a class discussion on the case. In this context, Lily witnessed multiple readings of each case and she began to appreciate the interpretive and perspectival nature of classroom practice.

I think the diversity of ideas and opinions and beliefs in a case [tutorial] group is somewhat reflective of the diversity of students in your classroom. Just when I look at the person beside me and how they approach a case. . . . We each had the same piece of paper with the same instructions. And yet . . . that's so important to realize, that when I give a lesson or an assignment or something in my class, or even reading a story, that some kids are going to think the story means that. And it doesn't mean that I was wrong or that I was right but that there's just so much to learn about that story.

I think that's something I'm coming to understand more and more. (Interview, Semester 2)

Lily had arrived at some important realizations about knowledge: that it involves the perspective and interpretation of a reader or a listener and that meaning is multifaceted and contextual. She later wrote in a class assignment: "How can one theory ever be generalized enough to satisfy every child's needs, society's demands, and the economic and social realities we currently face?" It was the challenge of particular children that shaped Lily's second year in her journey to teach.

*Knowing in Particular: Jerrod*

During her third-semester field placement in a grade-3 classroom, Lily turned to books to gain some control over her relationships with children: "Stephen and I don't . . . we're working on our communication skills. We're not clicking. . . . I think . . . he's very, very troubled. . . . I have an idea that it comes from some issues at home. We've talked that he might even be depressed. So I've been reading some books about childhood depression." However, despite her best effort to understand him through texts, Stephen continued to "sabotage things," to walk over others' floor work and squish it with his feet, to "go into people's space" during gym class and "push them around." As Lily's frustration with Stephen rose, and she became conscious that she was getting "sucked into the negative part." She explained to me, "I don't want to be like that. Like I don't want him to think every time he sees me coming, I'm coming to ruin his life."

In Stephen, Lily encountered the "monstrous" child, the adverse to her best intentions (Jardine & Field, 1992). Stephen, in all his particularity, insisted that Lily emphasize a different form of attention; he evoked a set of questions that required a different kind of response. It was her partner teacher's response to children like Stephen that led to Lily's "most significant learning" that semester. It came in the guise of another child, Jerrod.

The most significant thing that I've learned . . . was when Jerrod first came to our class. . . . I would watch him and I would be "Oh, no, what am I going to do with

him? He was defensive, he was rude, he didn't listen well, he wasn't respectful of the spaces of the other people, he was confrontational and just all over the place. So I thought to myself, how are we going to have a whole year in this classroom with him like that? He's all over the place. And every single day, Laurie [classroom teacher] came in and she . . . showed him respect. Every day. She was so patient with him. . . . [W]ithin those two months, he's like a completely different person now. . . . That to me is so important. That you just never give up on somebody. And what can happen when you show somebody else that kind of respect. Every decision she made about him, she involved him in the process. She talked about everything with him . . . she was never discouraged. (Interview, Semester 3)

She was learning about how "difference" manifests itself in a classroom and how concepts of "fairness," "equality," and "modification" get played out in the case of a particular child. Fundamentally, however, she began to recognize how relationships teach. She continued,

He has some modified lessons or something to go with his IPP. . . . On days when I thought that I would like to bang his head on the wall or my head on the wall. Or we could bang heads together. And she never did that. Whether she felt like that, he didn't know. And I was just; I'm totally amazed. Like he's in a group for social studies now; she put him in this group with some pretty high achievers, and he's right in there. He's pulling his load; he's doing a lot of work. . . . Oh, it's amazing, amazing. (Interview, Semester 3)

Laurie's impressive response to Jerrod, her effort to attune to a particular child, despite the inherent challenges, presented to Lily a different image of teacher. She began to understand that the quiet persistence and constancy of care that she witnessed in Laurie's classroom were part of a teacher's responsibility.

I didn't understand the responsibility of being a teacher. That's a big difference. Now my problem is I don't know if I can live up to that responsibility. (Field Journal, Semester 3)

#### The Necessities of Practical Wisdom: Reflections on Inquiry-based Teacher Education

In the face of great uncertainty about how to act, teacher candidates may, like Lily, take recourse to abstract knowledge, be it in the form of subject

matter content or educational theory. This is not unreasonable, given many years of schooling wherein knowledge is the main route to success on examinations, good grades, and a sense of mastery. A delight in reading and a passion for knowledge gave Lily a special dignity, a sense of agency in the world. Despite the joy of encountering such a student in a context largely preoccupied with "the real world," it is evident that abstract knowledge had prevented Lily from being open to her classroom experience. If experience is central to developing the capacity for discernment or practical wisdom, then student teachers like Lily face tremendous difficulty in learning to teach. The question with which teacher educators have to grapple is whether there is another way of being agentic for prospective teachers, a way that is more hospitable to life in classrooms (Nussbaum, 1990). By way of an initial response to this question, Lily's case invites consideration of how inquiry-based education can promote an understanding of the fragility of knowledge, the epistemological value of feeling, and the priority of the particular, in teaching and learning to teach.

Teacher candidates must learn to recognize that generalizable knowledge is fragile in the face of practice. As Lily expressed it, "The principles are the easy part!" The role of field experience throughout the life of a program is crucial in this regard. The children invited Lily to return to the sensual and the particular as a way of knowing: they were the ones who sent her back to her books but also the ones who would not comply with her textbook readings of them! It is children perhaps who can best teach prospective teachers that surprise and difference are fundamental to teaching. With this insight, attunement can begin to replace application as the primary relationship between theory and practice. This replacement occurs over time and is fraught with tension as prospective teachers are confronted by the limitations imposed by inexperience.

Teacher educators must allow, nay invite, prospective teachers to experience such a sense of their own limitation. Lily was overwhelmed by what she experienced in classrooms. When upset and frightened by Julian's refusal to go to the park, she confronted his assertiveness with some of her own. She called Julian's bluff. "Well I'm going to the park myself. I like to play outside." Her response could not be seriously

considered in terms of pedagogical principle, but should it be dismissed as the effort of a neophyte teacher? What might be the epistemological value of feeling? Should Lily's response to Julian, and later to Stephen or Jerrod, be "reflective" — that is, "a condition that is detached from powerful feeling and from particular situational immersion? Should [Lily] exclude [her] bewilderment and her hesitation from the deliberative process? Should [she] automatically mistrust the information given [her] by . . . fear, or grief, or love?" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 173).

That prospective teachers experience heightened anxiety during field experience is important. Lily helps teacher educators to recognize what it might mean for prospective teachers "to respond vigorously with senses and emotions before the new . . . and to be bewildered — to wait and float and be actively passive" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 184). Any effort on the part of a partner teacher or faculty advisor to contain emotional distress may hamper students' growing perception of what it means to teach well. To experience strong emotions is to undergo something, to have an experience of something. Making experience less painful may merely offer prospective teachers the possibility of recognition. Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely (Dewey, 1934). Wisely, Laurie did not rush to manage Lily's experience of learning to teach, to alleviate the suffering.

Such apparent passivity on the parts of the partner teacher and the faculty advisor may appear unsympathetic. Not so to Lily. She told me that ". . . I knew I had people to go to . . . to talk to if it wasn't working out for me." Their careful silence may have provided Lily with the time to experience emotion and understand the significance of her experience. To experience emotion requires incubation — time-out from conscious reflection on experience (Phelan, 2002). "Incubation goes on until what is conceived is brought forth and is rendered perceptible as part of the common world" (Dewey, 1934, p. 56). Perception, then, is the endowment of meaning with personal significance, rather than the application of some predetermined, intellectual meaning. The significance of experience has to be felt by the prospective teachers and worked out over time (Phelan, 2002).

Finally, Lily's case suggests that teacher candidates may benefit by



understanding that teaching involves the mediation of the universal and the particular; that is, a back-and-forth movement between the specifics of a situation and more general understandings of learning and teaching. "That you never give up on somebody," Lily concluded after reflecting in conversation on her observation of Laurie with Jerrod. If prospective teachers are to read the particularities of practice in this manner, then they require learning experiences that prioritize the particular. Child studies, assessment profiles, or one-on-one tutoring are just some examples. Case-based learning invites such movement, and so, too, program structures that include both field and campus experiences weekly. In a given week, for example, Lily had to make sense of her experience of leading Julian back to school and seminar readings about teacher authority.

It is the perception of the concrete particulars that at once overwhelms teachers and yet enables them to judge appropriately and act ethically. Assignments that stray toward more general concerns (e.g., expository pieces on whole language or progressive education) to the neglect of the particular wrench the issues that teachers face from their more particular narratives. An obvious difficulty that may ensue is the subsuming of differences that typically exist at the level of the particular, within larger monolithic educational theories, ideologies, or strategies. Teacher candidates may never learn to recognize that the whole of relevant reality is more complex than any set of theories (e.g., cognitive or neo-Marxist theory) suggest or imply. Without such understanding, their ability to perceive a situation and to respond to its specifics may be significantly reduced (Phelan, 2002).

#### IN CLOSING

Learning to be practically wise begins with desire, a yearning to be something other than who one is (Garrison, 1997). Pursuing that desire may involve letting go, losing one's balance, and losing certainty (even someone else's). Accepting the fragility of knowledge. Feeling overwhelmed. Engaging in a play of thought. It is in the midst of such experiences that prospective teachers like Lily emerge as selves from moment to moment, allowing and disallowing certain possibilities for

who they will become. “[She] is a child learning to “toddle’ (II, 48), eyes wide open, vulnerable, wondering at each new thing” (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 180).

When it was time to go again, Julian decided he wasn’t going back to school — so he sat down on the bench. Anxiety level rising very quickly trying to be calm but sensing panic because the class is going [I ask]: “Is something bothering you, Julian?”

Julian: “I’m not going.”

Me, full panic: “Why?”

Julian . . . very calm!: “Don’t want to.”

Thinking to myself: “Ok — he’s 5, you’re 24, there has to be a way to get him to move.”

Me, full panic: “Well Julian, I’ll tell you what — I’ll give you a choice, you can go by yourself in front of me *or* you can be my partner.”

Julian: “No.”

Now I’m totally freaked out so I become completely delirious and start rambling really fast and I can hear my own voice getting really high.

“Well when we get back to class it’ll be time for centres. Centres are awesome. I like centres. There’s computers, and science centre and block centre. . . .”

I was just about to break into the different learning theories and give Julian my speech about behaviourism when he interrupted me and said: “Miss J., if you shut up I’ll go with you to school.” Very relieved I say: “Sure, Julian.”

We started walking back to the rest of the group. When we caught up, Julian took my hand and said, “You talk a lot Ms. J.”

Just very thankful that he came back I replied, “Yeah, Julian, I do that sometimes!” (Lily’s Field Journal)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This case study is part of a larger collective case study of ten student teachers in a two-year, inquiry-based, teacher-education program.

<sup>2</sup> All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

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