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James C. Field
*University of Calgary*, jfield@ucalgary.ca

Margaret A. Macintyre Latta
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, Margaret.Macintyre.Latta@ubc.ca

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# What constitutes becoming experienced in teaching and learning?*

James C. Field
*Division of Teacher Preparation, University of Calgary, 11th Floor, Education Tower, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alta, Canada T2N 1N4*
*Tel.: +1-403-220-7455; fax: +1-403-282-8479*
*E-mail address:* jfield@ucalgary.ca
Corresponding author.

Margaret Macintyre Latta
*Center for Curriculum & Instruction, University of Nebraska—Lincoln, 118 Henzlik Hall, P.O. Box 880355, Lincoln, NE 68588-0355, USA*
*E-mail address:* mlatta2@unl.edu

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**Abstract**
In this paper, we attempt to address one of the central questions for teachers and teaching: how is it that teachers are able to see and act appropriately in concrete circumstances? To do so, we examine the ontological meaning of experience in teacher education. The discussion is anchored in the concrete particulars of a grade 5 art lesson. Our intent is to show the dynamic processes involved in becoming experienced as a teacher and to draw connections between experience and practical wisdom (phronesis). Thus, we argue that phronesis is not so much a form of knowledge as it is dynamic experience. We argue for the development of what John Dewey called educational experience in teacher education, and in particular its dynamic edge: the making of wise and practical judgments. We assert that such action is made possible, not so much by translating (unsituated) theory into practice through the deployment of specialized technique, or by inducing general, abstract propositions from concrete particulars, but primarily from being *mindfully embodied*.

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The primary task for teacher education then becomes to help prospective teachers be in touch, intimately related with the processes of actual experience, such that they learn to be open to their experience, to be radically undogmatic—in touch with self, others, and the character of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

*Keywords*: School experiences; Learning to teach; Student teachers; Practical wisdom

> Every experience worthy of the name thwarts a previous expectation (Gadamer, 1996, p. 364)

Few educators would argue with the assertion that the primary purpose of student teaching is to have students become experienced as teachers. What could be more obvious? However, when it is time to decide what "becoming experienced" means, both practically and philosophically, we find it to be the source of considerable difficulty and disagreement, with our colleagues, our students, and the practitioners with whom we work in the field. So what counts as experience? Mastering subject matter? Building a repertoire of teaching strategies? Developing the concrete skills of teaching like planning lessons, managing classrooms and deploying elaborate, "objective" assessment schemes? If you asked many of our colleagues, our students and the teachers we work with, the answer would probably be yes to all of the above questions, and this is the source of our concern. It would seem, that of the three kinds of knowledge identified by Aristotle (1925)—*techne*, *episteme*, and *phronesis*—the first two, technical knowledge and theoretical knowledge, predominate in these notions of experience, with theory running a distant second and phronesis or practical wisdom neglected or negated all together. But why should we find this troubling? Does it matter that the education of our students is driven by a model of applied science? What if, as Britzman (1991) notes, we treat student teaching primarily as an opportunity for students to "gain command of the necessary tools of

their profession; control of the technique of class instruction and management; skill and proficiency in the work of teaching" (p. 9)? Is this not what learning to teach is all about? The trouble is that the answer to this question is, in part, yes. We do not wish to deny the importance of tool use or skill acquisition in teaching, nor do we want to dismiss methods and techniques. It is not that techne is an invalid or inappropriate form of knowledge for teaching: who can argue with the need for craft in teaching? But an exclusive focus on techne squeezes out the self in teaching—the "who" is sidelined and silenced by the "what". One no longer has a language available to talk about making good judgments, developing character or the meaning of experience. And the fragmentation and isolated specialization that is the earmark of technical rationality produces a form of incoherent hyper-activity that is all too familiar in Faculties of Education and schools.

Thus we agree with Dewey (1904) that too strong and too early an emphasis on skill and technique can be detrimental to the development of a teacher, sacrificing later growth (of mind and spirit) for the quick blush of technical competence.

It might be argued that few teacher education programs would adhere strictly to teaching technique; most at least make a cursory attempt to impart abstract knowledge to their students. But focusing on theory does not allow us to escape the prison of language we get lured into with technique either. Kessels and Korthagen (1996) point out that abstract teaching theories:

> lack flesh and blood in a very literal sense; they do not have a face, nor a repertoire of actions. They have no temperament, no personal characteristics, no history, no vices, and no virtues. They cannot be seen in action, nor talked to, nor criticized nor admired. In short, they have no perceptual reality; they are just concepts, abstractions. Therefore, they cannot be identified with. (p. 21)

At least within the frame of conventional science, episteme and techne both are essentially "worldless"—time, place, events, human actions, relationships and experience have been stripped from these forms of knowledge—they are disembodied epiphenomenon.





This is why we think that the notion of phronesis, practical wisdom, addresses this need and is a more compelling way to think about what counts as experience in teacher education. Through tracing out the contours of experience, revealing its complicacy with phronesis, we find that phronesis is not really a form of knowledge, but what Dewey calls *educational experience*. We believe, as Dewey (1938) and Gadamer (1996) claim, that knowledge should be conceived of in terms of experience and process rather than as a "thing" that accumulates, or simply as a means to a higher end. We also hope to show how theory and practice can be intertwined through and by experience, thoughtfully responsive to concrete circumstances, assuming a fundamental ontological relationship between self and other.

To do this we will ground this inquiry in a grade 5 art lesson taught by one of our second-year student teachers, a young woman we will call Christine. We selected this particular instance from a set of interviews we did with 4 education students following completion of the first year of a two-year post-degree teacher preparation program. All of the students had been taught by one of the researchers in the previous year. They volunteered for the study to talk about what had precipitated out of their experience in terms of important learning, and what had both helped and hindered their preparation to teach. They were not all wildly successful in our program—one has since dropped out, and two others came close to choosing other career paths—but all were thoughtful, insightful and candid. We thought that they could help us better understand our "good intentions", and they were looking to better understand their own experience. The instance chosen was not selected to illustrate how *inexperienced* our student teachers are, or how, through expert and benevolent guidance, things might have been otherwise. Rather, we will argue that the possibility of becoming more experienced arises only when something happens to us beyond what we anticipate. Thus, we do not view any part of the lesson described below as a mistake that somehow should have been avoided. Instead, we think of it as a compelling example of how we all might deepen our understanding of pedagogy.

What follows occurred near the beginning of Christine's third-term practicum. Her intent was to introduce a unit of study regarding the Renaissance. She wanted students to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between historical contexts and art making. She hoped that her introductory lesson would engage students in a thought-provoking discussion of lifestyles, artists, and artworks of the Renaissance. According to the instructors' field notes (16/12/99), Christine's journal entries, our reconstructive conversation with her, and subsequent drafting and re-drafting of this account, her lesson, told from the researcher's perspective, proceeded as follows:

> As students enter the art room Christine asks them to leave all books and materials at the tables and to gather their chairs tightly around her at the front of the room. The students respond quickly, and when they have settled Christine opens the discussion with the question: Has anyone heard the term. Renaissance? Many students respond affirmatively, by volunteering individual interpretations, and Christine embellishes these by recounting the central concerns of this time period: rebirth, the onset of modern times, a particular regard for anatomical and life-like artworks. She then asks students to walk imaginatively back through time to the Renaissance. To help them do this, she asks them to name appropriate discoveries, typical dress, key events, and common pastimes of the different eras. When they reach the 1600s, Christine has student volunteers read aloud from prepared scripts, describing what a day in Renaissance life might be like for a working class boy, a working class girl, a wealthy boy, a wealthy girl, a patron, and a young art student. As the students do this, Christine displays pictures depicting Renaissance times. She then asks them to brainstorm further ideas around clothing, work, transportation and technology. Following this, Christine poses the question, how it is that we know some of this information, and suggests that the many great works of art created at the time tell us about life during the Renaissance. Christine shows a few pictures of the works of Donatello, Michelangelo, Raphael, and da Vinci and provides interesting facts about each artist. For example, she conveys





> how a rich banker requested that da Vinci paint a picture of his wife, Mona Lisa, but upon completion refused to pay because he did not like the outcome, da Vinci, on the other hand, was very fond of the painting, carried it around with him and died with it close at hand. The students appear spellbound by Christine's account and join in the discussion, commenting on the mood of the painting of Mona Lisa, her dress, and lifestyle. Excitement and energy blossoms quickly in the class, discussion ranges from re-creating of Renaissance times to wondering about the life, times, and works of Leonardo da Vinci. Amidst this rich, alive discussion Christine abruptly asks students to return to their tables and copy prepared notes from the overhead projector into their sketchbooks for the remaining class time. Students return to their tables reasonably quickly, however they seem reluctant to begin copying the notes. Christine reiterates her directive several times as she walks between the tables monitoring student activity closely. As the class comes to an end not everyone has finished taking notes. The bell rings and students make their way out of the classroom.

A standard evaluation of Christine's lesson, employing a check list of "knowledge, skills and attributes" would reveal that she had clearly stated objectives, an engaging introduction, good pacing, a tidy conclusion and excellent timing. In addition, she used a variety of teaching strategies, monitored student activity, established a climate of mutual respect, used her voice and mannerisms effectively, and incorporated visual aids into the lesson to increase motivation. Such evaluations are commonplace in teacher education. They tell us what to look for when we observe, form the bases for our feedback to students, and serve as descriptors of learning to teach. Using such a checklist enables us to say that Christine has acquired many of the concrete skills of teaching, that her conduct is smooth and efficient—quite a set of accomplishments for a beginning teacher.

But we are also keenly aware that such a checklist draws our attention away from what happened to Christine during the lesson, that is, it flattens out and glosses over the eventful character other experience. And so we ask, as Barone (1998) has: 'To what extent has

the ability to see subtle and important nuances in teaching episodes been blunted by a habit of merely recognizing that which is pointed to by standardized evaluation checklists?" (p. 1120). Christine's conversation with us following her lesson offers a glimpse of the intellectual life that surges beneath the smooth surface of our checklists and scientific instruments.

**1. Re-tracing the lived contours of experience**

For Christine, lesson preparation involves recovering the living landscape that she is corporeally or sensorially embedded in, playing with the concrete particulars other situation *as possibilities*, in order to understand, not in the usual sense of the word, meaning to grasp mentally or deduce from information received, but rather in a bodily sense of making sound judgments. Note Christine's words:

> As I rehearsed the lesson in my mind in advance I discovered that reading the story was going to feel way too long. I knew I needed to find ways to get the students more deliberately involved. I needed to find ways to get them to shift from listening to role-playing, to looking, to guessing, and so on. I made these changes before I actually taught the lesson.

Through her rehearsal, Christine begins to develop a *feel for* and a *sense of* how her lesson might go: a carnal, embodied understanding of how the different collective patterns of action play themselves out in her specific situation. We might say that Christine is playing imaginatively with concrete particulars. By imagination we do not mean some mental faculty, or the ability to engage in the free play of ideas in one's mind, but rather as something that is integral to action in the first place, that is, "the way the senses throw themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other sides of things that we do not sense directly, the hidden or invisible aspects of the sensible" (Abrams, 1996, p. 58). Such imaginative play allows Christine to develop a "sense of immediacy, of vivid, sensuous experience that we associate with the world we fling ourselves toward" (Grumet, 1991, p. 85). Engaged in this *mindfully embodied* way, she is able to make discoveries, to learn from these, and begin the vital, living process of sensitive adjustment that we think is so essential to genuine teaching experience.





In this next instance, where Christine meets the concrete realities of the classroom, we can see the continuation of the dynamic interplay she began in her preparation. She recalls:

> This was the fourth time I had done this lesson ... I was a lot more relaxed ... letting things go a bit and not focusing on wrapping each part up so tightly ... I started to give students more power to talk about things relevant and obviously important to them. I felt more comfortable letting the discussion be longer and fuller as I repeated the lesson ... I was really surprised and excited about how much understanding the children already had about art in general and painters; some quite well thought through. Had I really understood this I would have built on this more. I would have encouraged them to tell me the story behind the paintings.

For us, three things are of note here. First, as Christine begins to submit to what is happening in the lesson, she is surprised by what unfolds. *Something new happens* in the lesson, something that was not simply there in the lesson plan, the subject matter or the materials she had assembled beforehand. This we feel is an important clue to understanding what constitutes genuine experience: it necessarily entails novelty. Second, Christine has the distinct sense of having undergone something. As Heidegger (1971) notes "When we talk of undergoing an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not exactly of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens" (p. 57). Third, "having an experience means that we change our minds, *reorient* and *reconcile* ourselves to a new situation" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 203). Experience has a physical dimension, it involves re-turning and re-lating to ones circumstances differently. Experience is not simply an episode of life that one remembers through an act of recall, or a serial chain of episodes that slowly accumulate like years. What makes an experience stand out from the flux of life is that something

in particular happens that surprises us and through this, if we take what happens seriously, *transforms us*. In other words experience *remembers* us, requires us to be a different person in a different place. This is why genuine experience connotes a sense of adventure, "an adventure which interrupts the customary courses of events and is related to the context it interrupts" (Risser, 1997, p. 84–85). One *ventures forth* to undergo something, and through this undergoing is transformed, that is, one *returns from* experience as a different person. Such transformation is not simply a change in individual consciousness, but rather represents a change in collective action (a rupture of the status quo, of routine procedure) with all participants experiencing transformation.

It is not that Christine's lesson is unstructured, like the unpatterned wheeling and spinning of chaotic, mindless activity that people often associate with images of flux and change in classrooms. There is structure to what she does, but it is not simply there, as an external feature, like the hard shell of a crab or a metal frame. Rather, it exists more like the structure of a conversation, unfolding from the process of engagement, a process of structuring and restructuring the events of the lesson with her students. Structure here is more like a verb than it is a noun—it emerges within the development of the learning experience itself. The purpose for and content of learning grows and takes shape through the interactions between students, Christine, and subject matter. That is, the lesson is alive and vital. It is this vitality that excites Christine and catches her up in the unfolding narrative of collective action.

Another element of experience that we wish to articulate, hinted at in the previous instances, has to do with its negative dimension, the *disappointment that one feels* in what Gadamer (1996) calls "having previous expectations thwarted"(p. 364). Having an experience is not simply confirming and celebrating what one already knows and understands, nor is it the Disney-esque or romantic, "Grand Tourist" version of adventure or being there. Rather, it involves an element of suffering, of "shattering an accustomed way of life" (Risser, 1997, p. 90). Again, we return to Christine's lesson, to her decision to do what was expected of her, i.e., to "bring closure to her lesson". The decision





to assign the note-taking task is one that is preconceived: a call back to routine and measurable order. Christine explains:

> I planned to have them do the notes at the end of the class. Notes were something that they always did. I felt it was something they were used to, familiar with, and that the teacher thought it was appropriate. It seemed to make sense, because that was what was supposed to happen. I didn't think about anything other than that. The kids just groaned. You could just see the physical change. The dynamics of the classroom changed ... but I didn't fully understand the difference ... it was not as clear until you questioned me on it. And then it seemed dead obvious. I had them in the palm of my hand and I dropped them. We had this good rapport going and then I had to walk around insisting everyone note take. Teaching changed to just managing them. I don't know what I was teaching them ... just to be quiet and be on task ... I did feel a pressure, responsibility, to follow patterns in place. I did not question it. I also panicked a little as I felt like so much had opened up asking me to reconsider over and over again. Suddenly, I guess I felt uncomfortable.

We want to assert that the disappointment she feels, the negativity that emerges is part of the process of becoming experienced. Experience is better thought of as that which works against knowledge; a process of *undercutting* it, of *questioning* what was previously taken for granted. But the destructive force of experience is paradoxically a positive phenomenon. It does not result in despair or disarray, but rather in new understanding that yields insight. As Christine recalls:

> Several weeks later (when I was teaching 100%) during a grade 8 lesson, I realized halfway through that it was not working. I felt comfortable to abandon [the lesson] and move on. It was not note taking, but something along that line and I thought to myself—it is not important. The reaction from the class caused me to make that decision. Something just clicked as I was teaching ... I thought they've got it, I do not need to go further with this particular activity—it is not going to make a difference. In part

> this comfort came from the fact that I was by myself at that particular moment. I felt confident. But, also, since the Mona Lisa lesson I question myself on an ongoing basis more. I ask myself, is it necessary?

In this instance, Christine's disappointment has led to hope—expressed in her buoyant confidence to adjust her teaching to the learning that unfolds during her lessons. We might say here that her hope triumphs over her experience, just as her experience has led her to disappointment. One follows the other in a never-ending cycle, and it is this process that Gadamer (1996) claims gives experience its fundamental character. Thus experience (and a good lesson) does not end in closure, but rather in openness:

> A person who is called experienced has become so not only *through* experience, but is also open *to* new experience. The consummation of his [sic] experience ... does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he [sic] has had ... is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them ... experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself. (Gadamer, 1996, p. 355)

Being open to experience does not mean being unbounded. It is not so much being radically relative as it is being humble, not so much an act of submission, as an act of recognition, always tied to the particular. Christine signals her openness specifically, in her phrase "I question myself on an ongoing basis". Her questions have a sense of direction. They are oriented towards some things and away from other things; they are bounded by what she finds in the particular situation, her intentions, and by what happens in the flow of specific events—the result of paying careful attention to her circumstances. Her openness does not mean that she just *makes things up* as she goes along, but rather that she senses, through asking questions, the openings or possibilities that present themselves in the concrete cir-





cumstances of her lessons. Asking good questions, we feel, does not arise from using taxonomies to promote "higher order thinking", but from feeling one's way into the openness of experience, by seeing the actual as one possibility among many and asking, as Christine has done, "Is this worthwhile?"

Specific demands are made of Christine throughout these moments as she perceives, selects, and responds, organizing and re-organizing the encounter. Ellsworth (1997) describes such interaction as being in a place where the teacher "is never in full possession of herself, of the students, or of the texts and meanings that she works with" (p. 163). Christine can choose to enter such a space, but choosing to practice from this "in-between" position is risky business, fraught with the pushes and pulls of conflicting responsibilities. Staying close to life in the classroom, not "taking the fast way out the back door of the flux" (Caputo, 1988, p. 1), is difficult and at times impossible to do. Note Christine's sense of being uncomfortable and her panic in the account above. Remember that her obligations to "the patterns in place" had the particular effect of ending the fluid transaction between her and the students. Memory, particularly in the form of perceived responsibility, can bind individuals to a fixed past and a frozen future. That is, it can thwart genuine experience.

We might say that in order to remember (differently), to be remembered, Christine has to engage in what Nietzsche (1980) would call "active forgetting". It seems to us that the problem for Christine is not one of denying what has been previously established, but of learning to forget certain aspects of it, to clear a space to become something other than her partner teacher. And it is not just Christine that needs to forget, for if the students do not forget as well they will respond as "habituated selves" and drag Christine back to the established way of doing things. It is new territory that needs to be opened up, not just a change in individual perception or consciousness that needs to happen. As Risser (1997) says, "In forgetfulness we make room for new things"(p. 98). Educational experience then is not simply a private psychological affair or an individual accomplishment, but a collective undertaking, what Arendt (1958) would call action—that which reveals our possibilities. So paradoxically, active forgetting creates a space for us to re-member what is possible for our stu-

dents and ourselves. Without this function there would not be a way for student teachers to break out of the routines they inherit when they step into someone else's classroom, no way to "bring into being a higher freedom in which people realize and reveal themselves as distinct and unique persons" (Dunne, 1993, p. 89). We do not wish to suggest here that student teachers simply disregard the established social order of someone else's classroom, but we do find that, all too often, procedurally entrenched routine, even in the form of "innovative practice", forecloses on the possibility that something new might happen, that a new self might emerge.

The living contours of experience as collective action—venturing forth and returning from, undergoing and unfolding, being hopeful and disappointed, accepting and questioning, being tentative and confident, forgetting and remembering, and realizing a new self—mark it as an embodied process of conjoint responsive adjustment. The *plurality* and *natality* (Adrent, 1958) of experience make it uncertain and unpredictable. Becoming experienced cannot be conflated with knowing how (procedural knowledge or techne) or knowing that (conceptual knowledge or episteme), but is rather about understanding "how to deal with the unexpected—indeed expecting it" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 204). Christine discovers uncertainty to be productive, indeed essential to the life of her lesson. For Christine, becoming experienced transcends technical skill and conceptual coding. It has to do with becoming perceptive and discerning, with making appropriate decisions about what, or how much, when and in what manner. Looking back, it is easy to see that the contours of experience we have been describing are permeated with the practice of making good judgments.

## 2. Centering experience: being mindfully embodied

As Kant (1952) pointed out over two hundred years ago, and as every student teacher quickly finds out, there are no rules for the application of the rules. This is why technique is insufficient in teaching, at least in *good teaching,* because we are simultaneously confronted with the demand, not simply to know how, but to know when, and





how much and with whom. *Teaching necessarily involves choosing,* and, as Weinsheimer (1985) asserts, "The choice that is right cannot be determined in advance or apart from the particular situation, for the situation itself partly determines what is right" (p. 190). Technical knowledge and practical judgment share the central moment of teaching—application. Both are practical in this way, and involve action. However, contrary to what is portrayed in the myriad of *methods*, texts and courses available in teacher education, application is not a simple matter of following a procedure, like a recipe, or of implementing scientifically derived principles, but rather is a matter of attunement, that is, "perceiving what is at stake in a situation" (Risser, 1997, p. 107). Technical knowledge does not change in any fundamental way when it is acquired. Nor does it transform the person. The skills of teaching, represented in the checklists which we commonly use to observe our students are taken to be universal. One gains proficiency in them largely through repetition—they are untransformed by time and place, and they leave the self untouched. Thus, it is possible to become skilled, but not experienced, to gain competence but not wisdom. One can learn to make a classroom run like a Swiss watch, to get children to willingly produce all kinds of work, even to generate high scores on standardized exams, and still not become experienced in Dewey's terms.

Technical knowledge in education is apt to be about making things or products, thus managing children through the efficient application of method, from pre-selected objectives through to fixed outcomes. Practical (ethical) judgment, or phronesis, however:

> is an experiential phenomenon in which the means of acting and the "product" [i.e., ethical being] occur simultaneously within the situation itself. Hence, in contrast with techne, where the means [the form and the materials of production] and the ends [the finished work] are patently separate and distinguishable, the means and ends of phronesis are both subsumed in experience. (Coltman, 1998, p. 22)

Put another way, human lives are not made in the same way that widgets are, students are not simply inanimate objects to be shaped

into competent technologies that produce and perform, that is, they are not simply "standing reserve" (Heidegger, 1977) for our consumption or validation. As Britzman (1991) points out, "students are persons who bring their own deep investments to education" (p. 211) as do teachers. Ignoring, suppressing or abandoning subjectivity, that is, how we are "corporeally embedded in a living landscape" (Abrams, 1996, p. 65), will neither produce experience nor lead to lessons that are alive and vital. Being attuned to a common field of collective action then, brings with it the ethical responsibility of engaging with students in "a joint project in which all take responsibility for learning" (Wiltshire, 1986, p. 24). Joint projects are dependent upon gaining insights into what matters to the participants. But insight by itself will not do. One must have the freedom and authority to act upon what one sees and feels is important. Without this, as we have noted all too often with our students, a kind of weary frustration sets in. Christine, in this instance, was able to avoid this kind of futility, the futility of simply being someone's apprentice, because she was given the opportunity to act in concert with her perceptions in her practicum setting. She was not hauled back to an externally derived checklist of *knowledge*, *skills* and *attitudes* by her mentors, but encouraged to play with ways to make deeper forays, with her students, into a living landscape of subject matter. Her authority was carefully fostered by a partner teacher and a practicum advisor working together *primarily* to help Christine relive and reinterpret her experience, and not simply to help her time her lessons and manage her students. Engaging Christine in a conversation *oriented towards* her experience is different than having an instrumental exchange with Christine aimed at bettering her performance in the most economical and efficient manner possible. Wisdom can be a frame for taking up issues of technique, but the reverse is not true.

We wonder how many student teachers are encouraged to be mindfully embodied in this way. We fear that all too often they are pulled away from attending to the situation by the demands to perform, manage, and execute smooth and unruffled lessons. If this is the case, if one's attention is focused on moving students efficiently through lessons to predetermined ends, then one can hardly be expected to be corporeally embedded in the dynamic flow of unfolding,





collective action. Techniques and strategies, if they are deployed for purposes of performance can "fix" what needs to be lived through, can as Caputo (1985) alluded to earlier provide a back door out of the flux. Technically skilled teachers may produce well orchestrated behavior, exquisitely timed transitions, neatly completed tasks, and sparkling test scores but, at the same time, cut both student and teacher off from a deep sense of engagement and being invested in something worthwhile. We think this is why Dewey (1938) reminds us that "a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut; the effect is to narrow the field of further experience" (p. 26). In his earlier writing, Dewey (1904) is clear about what he means by "landing in a groove or rut", that is, "undue premature stress laid in early practice work upon securing immediate capability in teaching" (p. 16).

Dewey proposes a teacher education program that we see as centered on phronesis—the making of practical (moral) judgments. His proposal places value on observation that draws student teachers' attention towards initiating and sustaining learning involvement in classrooms:

> The student should not be observing to find out how the good teacher does it, in order to accumulate a store of methods by which he also may teach successfully. He should rather observe with reference to seeing the interaction of mind, to see how teacher and pupil react to each other, how mind answers to mind. (Dewey, 1904, p. 19)

He wants student teachers to be alert to the complexity implicit in teaching and learning, to acknowledge both their own experience and the particular character of the situation. His argument rests on changing the meaning of what constitutes experience and becoming experienced. He asks us to place ourselves at risk, to be courageous, to ask the question that Christine posed earlier: "Is what we are engaged in worthwhile"? Given the crunch of practicum and the frenetic pace of many classrooms, do we have the time, the place and the intent to cultivate wisdom, or are we, in the name of ease and efficiency, investing solely in *poesis*—performance-oriented instrumental action?

The ability to ground one's teaching in experience seems dependent on developing the capacity to perceive and respond sensitively to what is happening, to be aware of our circumstances; a knowing *informed by place.* Britzman (1991) distinguishes between mere circumstance and the character of experience taken up throughout this paper. Her thoughts allude in our minds to a cautionary note that must be heeded if teaching and learning is indeed to be grounded in experience. Britzman points out that one's capacity to participate in the shaping of experience is limited if an awareness of potential and given meanings is not cultivated along with a capacity to extend experience through interpretation and risk (p. 34). It is this active engagement with circumstance that is critical towards a knowing in and through experience. Such is the nature of phronesis, derived from the act of participation itself. Thus, Christine's account and Britzman's words caution that this knowledge ought not to be held in separate pieces labeling it teacher thinking (e.g. Clark & Peterson, 1986; Shulman, 1986), reflective practice (e.g. Schon, 1987), cognitive and moral aspects of teacher development (e.g. Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Ginsburg & Clift, 1990; Zeichner & Gore, 1990), or relations between the personal and teaching practice (Clark & Lampert, 1986; Cole, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Elbaz, 1988; Schwab, 1983). If knowledge is individually held as a set of beliefs, values, images, pre-understandings, or propositions about the way things work or ought to work, knowledge is more apt to stand apart from the situation as some *thing* that can be tested, listed, or known solely in conscious awareness, is it not? Also, if knowledge is individually held, do not the individuals themselves become abstracted forms—transformed into pure spectators of their own lives (Scott & Usher, 1996)? We fully acknowledge the last two decades of such educational research evidencing a scholarship particular to teacher education that significantly contributes to a wider sense of what knowledge might be for students and teachers. We are grateful to those writers for opening the discussion towards considerations for teaching/learning experiences. However, we feel this research does not go beyond recognizing that knowledge grows from personal experience. How teachers might actually recognize, develop, and sustain teaching/learning experiences tends to be neglected or reduced to descriptions of what is known and believed. As





Boisvert (1998) reiterates, discussing Dewey's (1938) notion of experience:

> Knowledge is not an affair of coming directly into the presence of the *really real* once and for all. Knowing is temporally conditioned. It grows with the varying circumstances as we become more sensitive to the possibilities that can be realized in the varying circumstances in which we and whatever it is we are trying to understand are placed, (p. 25)

In other words an ontological understanding of experience assumes a reciprocity between self and other. We feel that it is the conditions that support the potential inherent in this relationship that need to be addressed. The task for teacher education then becomes one of creating spaces where the primary imperative is not to master technique, plan lessons, or manage students through activities to achieve "closure", but to be open to experience, to be "radically undogmatic" (Gadamer, 1996) so that being mindfully in touch with self, others and the concrete particulars—the *subjects* that matter in our lives—becomes a real possibility. Only then do we feel that the practice of making good judgments will become what Dewey (1938) calls a "habit"—that of being attentive to the emergence and development of an experienced self.

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